

# Response to IRD UMAction June 2002

This is the second round for the Institute for Religion and Democracy. We had their first round right after our event. After that the IRD report became the source document for the Good News and Confessing Movement reports. Now the part of IRD that is focused on their agenda for United Methodism (UMAction) repeats the same accusations their parent organization began months ago.

When you read all of these negatives and see how cloned they are it gives a feel for a finely tuned organization working to control The United Methodist Church. This is the public face of classic conspiracy technique.

## Accusation

### Two UM Bishops Undermine the Christian Faith They Are Pledged to Defend

An event called "Kairos CoMotion " attracted over 300 people, mostly United Methodists, to Madison, Wisconsin, in February 2002. Its stated objective was to combat "a growing exclusiveness in The United Methodist Church." Its special focus was to attack United Methodism's stand for Christian sexual morality and against homosexual practice.

Featured speakers included United Methodist Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader of Wisconsin, retired UM Bishop Judy Craig, and retired Episcopal Bishop Jack Spong. Other presenters included Larry Pickens, a member of the UM Judicial Council (the church's highest court); Susan Laurie, a self-identified lesbian and staff member of the "Reconciling Ministries Network;" and Greg Dell, a Chicago UM pastor and prominent pro-homosexuality advocate.

*The Book of Discipline* requires all United Methodist Bishops "to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church" and "to guard, transmit, teach, and proclaim, corporately and individually, the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and tradition, and, as they are led and endowed by the Spirit, to interpret that faith evangelically and prophetically." UM doctrine includes the Articles of Religion, which strongly affirm the traditional Christian faith. *The Book of Discipline* affirms the sanctity of the marriage covenant, requires "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" for all UM clergy, declares that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," and prohibits "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" from serving as UM clergy. See *The Book of Discipline*, pars.45,

## Affirmation

Kairos CoMotion is based on the need to celebrate the expansive love of God. This "special focus" did lead us to note many different ways in which that expansive love has been constrained, only one of which is the church's split personality on matters of human sexuality. "Christian sexual morality" is more than, "Just say no." We affirm God's good gift of sexuality and individual responsibility with that gift. We deny attempts at class-action morality such as all "homosexual practice is..." or all "heterosexual practice is..."

These same 6 names (out of 18 presenters) keep being focused on. The 3 bishops had major presentations. Larry Pickens was 1 of 4 panel members. Susan Laurie and Greg Dell co-led 1 of 9 workshops. Other workshops included issues of leadership, economic justice, ecumenical and interfaith connections, Biblical interpretation, and more. The interlock of religious right organizations appear to be far more focused on "homosexuality" than is Kairos CoMotion.

*The Book of Discipline* does what all legal structures do. It proscribes behavior and sets limits. What it does not do so well is provide for the known spectrum of lived experience and ways to be in community in the midst of significant and traditional differences.

To get at the other side of *The Book of Discipline* it requires going beyond the proof-texting of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" references. We need to generally read *The Book of Discipline* in light of its beginning Episcopal Greetings: "[The Discipline] makes clear that the United Methodist Church is an inclusive society without regard to ethnic origin, economic condition, gender age, or the disabilities of its constituents." We do not find that UMAction appreciates this vision because of its preoccupation

103, 161C, 161G, 304, 404, and 414.

However, Bishop Rader urged the audience to assert their own identities against all authorities, secular and religious. She complained, "We've been warned not to challenge our government or its unjust economy or its military policies....We've been warned not to talk openly about sexuality. We've been warned not to say that we believe The Book of Discipline is sometimes incompatible with Christian teaching. We've been warned not to say that we are gay or lesbian."

She states forthrightly the tactics of the religious right who object whenever someone raises the nature of our inclusive community that is at many different levels of spiritual maturity and she rejects simplistic solutions to complex human reality.

We continue to marvel at this continuing attempt to link Bishop Rader with the phrase "New Age." Condemning by association is one of the oldest propaganda tricks, but once recognized it does throw the rest of the accusations into question.

Bishop Craig implored the audience to live "a faith appropriate to our time," setting aside the ancient creeds. "Contending with heresy is what helps keep orthodoxy alive," she asserted.. "We are saying of the tradition and orthodoxy that it is the heresy." Denying the Christian belief that God is permanent and unchanging, she said she prefers to live in "a tradition that is new every day."

Bishop Craig explained her personal creed: "I do believe Scripture reveals essential knowledge of the God of the universe, and I do believe the work of Jesus is critical to the work of my life. Now let 's see, what particular words have I left out? Salvation, propitiation, atonement. I 'm working on those words maybe someday. I didn't talk about final authority." Attacking the authority of the traditional Christian faith was a common theme throughout Kairos CoMotion. During a workshop on homosexuality, retired United Methodist pastor John Kruse alluded to the irony that many leaders of this conference were on church payrolls: "The church is one of the only institutions that pays people to subvert it."

Although Kairos CoMotion was advertised as a non-denominational Christian event, much of the worship and some of the program material appeared to be a mixture of religions. The conference manual quoted widely from Eastern spirituality and offered blessings

with homosexuality and controlling legislation.

We do not experience Bishop Rader as a complainer.

Imploring her hearers to defy these warnings, Bishop Rader quoted Jose Hobday, a New Age mystic and one-time teacher at the University of Creation Spirituality, to the effect that everyone must "take a step into yourself " and "take a step into mystery."

We continue to marvel at this continuing attempt to link Bishop Rader with the phrase "New Age." Condemning by association is one of the oldest propaganda tricks, but once recognized it does throw the rest of the accusations into question.

These negative reports continue to use pejorative descriptive language. In the last three paragraphs we hear about "urged," "imploring," and "implored."

Our experience of Bishops Rader and Craig is that they simply say what is on their hearts and leave it for their hearers to respond as they will. We find it is the religious right that has a specific constraining agenda that needs to urge and implore people to a particular outcome.

This is a remarkably audacious piece of writing. The accusation is made that the following is seen as "attacking the authority of the traditional Christian faith."

"I do believe Scripture reveals essential knowledge of the God of the universe, and I do believe the work of Jesus is critical to the work of my life."

Celebrating the expansive love of GOD goes beyond one opinion or one way of thinking to more basic issues of hearts and love. That appears to be out-of-bounds for UMAAction's agenda to narrowly define salvation and the rest. "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?" [John Wesley, Catholic Spirit]

"Manual" makes it sound like Kairos CoMotion is a training event instead of the celebration it is. There was a binder of material with a map of the facility, welcome, schedule of events, biographies, bibliography and two-pages of widely spaced quotes

for food from the Zen, Chinook, and Christian traditions.

Action: Remind Bishop Sharon Rader, politely and graciously, that she pledged to uphold our church's Discipline and doctrine, including the historic Christian faith and the authority of Scripture.  
Address: 750 Windsor Street, Suite #303, Sun Prairie, WI 53590. 608-837-0281. E-mail: szrader@aol.com. (If you contact Bishop Rader, please send a copy of your comments to UM Action as well at cregner@ird-renew.org. or fax 202-969-8429. Thank you! Before writing her or other United Methodist officials, please pray for guidance to communicate Christ 's love for His church, and your love for our church, in a winsome and loving manner that will be faithful, effective, and persuasive.

from St. Paul, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, Robert Morris, Margaret Mead, and John Wesley, plus the three food blessings mentioned. That's it. There is no more "widely" to be quoted.

A question - have the negative press by the religious right measured up to their own encouragement to be "polite," "gracious," "winsome," and "loving?" Or, have they used all manner of traditional propagandistic techniques to be "effective" and "persuasive?"

We have not found the misrepresentations and misuse of our celebration for the ends of such organizations as Good News, IRD, and Confessing Movement to have been polite or gracious. At no point was a benefit of the doubt given to us that God's love is shed abroad in our hearts (Wesley's definition of a "Methodist"). We are again warned not to celebrate God's expansive love without the prior approval of the leadership and language limits of the religious right.

