

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

by Rev. Kathryn Johnson

The Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church refuses to reconsider its decision to allow a pastor to discriminate against gay and lesbian persons, even to the point of denying membership in the church. Iraq descends into chaos, fueled by the continuing U.S. military presence and President Bush talks about the war lasting into the next Presidential term. The Congress of the United States considers draconian legislation that would make it a felony not only for undocumented immigrants to remain in the country, but for anyone who aids these persons such as churches and social service agencies.

Enough is enough. The unthinkable is happening all around us and it's time to stand up and be counted.

It's time to take back the church. It's time to take back our country. It's time to let our legislators know that they govern on our behalf.

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Rev. Christy Swenson joins hundreds of clergy wearing symbolic handcuffs to show solidarity with immigrants and to support comprehensive immigration reform.

Judicial Council Slams Door Shut

UP TO THE PEOPLE TO REVERSE THE DECISION

The five-member conservative majority of the Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church has once again signaled that it intends to move the denomination in a direction far from the Wesleyan understanding of grace, and tradition of openness, that the vast majority of United Methodists cherish.

In denying reconsideration of their ruling (#1032) that a pastor in Virginia was rightly exercising his "discretion" in denying church membership to a gay man, the Judicial Council majority ignored the pleas of thousands of United Methodists from across the country.

Countless emails and letters had been sent to Judicial Council members protesting Decision #1032 including a statement, Here We Stand, signed by over 2,500 United Methodists.



Messages calling for an open and inclusive church cover a door held by those witnessing at Judicial Council Meeting.

To read the original decision, #1032, online go to www.umc.org and click on "About Our Church" and then "Judicial Council Decisions," 1001 to 1041.

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The Declaration of Peace

A COMMITMENT TO TAKE ACTION TO:

END THE US WAR IN IRAQ, BRING THE TROOPS HOME NOW, ESTABLISH A COMPREHENSIVE, CONCRETE WITHDRAWAL PLAN, OPPOSE FUTURE US MILITARY INVASIONS

Now is the Time

The US war in Iraq is an endless fire consuming lives, resources, and the fragile possibilities of peace. Instead of quenching this fire, the US occupation intensifies it. **The Declaration of Peace** is a call to end this war – and a commitment to take action to translate this call into a concrete plan for peace.

The Methodist Federation for Social Action has endorsed the **Declaration of Peace** and invites you to sign the **Peace Pledge** found on page four. See page seven for a full list of groups endorsing the **Declaration**.

With nearly seventy percent of the people of the United States opposing this war, there is a growing call to bring the troops home now and to establish a comprehensive, concrete and rapid withdrawal plan. This comprehensive plan must include withdrawal of US troops; the closure of US bases in Iraq; support for a peace process in the post-occupation transition; reconstruction and reparations in Iraq; and a shift from hundreds of billions of dollars spent for war to meeting human needs at home and abroad.

The Declaration of Peace is a commitment people are making across the United States

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JUDICIAL COUNCIL

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Four Judicial Council members, Susan Henry-Crowe, Shamwange Kyungu, Jon Gray and Beth Capen, wrote strong dissents from the majority decision, eloquently making the case for why Decision #1032 is deeply flawed and must be reversed.

Among the theological reasons they give are:

- that through the Sacrament of Baptism, the gift that is offered is *full participation* in the life of the Church;
- it is not the vocation of the pastor to determine who is eligible for life in the church; and
- it is Christ, not the pastor, who invites us to the Table.

They write: "The vocation of ministry is a gift given by Christ and entrusted by the Church. This vocation cannot be a vocation of denial but rather a vocation of extending God's love and looking for evidences of the work of the Holy Spirit."

Among the legal reasons for reversal they articulate are:

- in Decision #1032 the Judicial Council has created *new law*—the *Discipline* is silent on the issue of "responsible pastoral judgment," and
- the Judicial Council majority has assumed and usurped powers specifically reserved to the General Conference.

They state unequivocally that Decision #1032 "is a blatant and unprecedented usurpation of legislative authority...(that) needs to be resolved by the General Conference at its next session."

The five members who voted to deny appeals to reconsider Decision #1032 are participating in the worst kind of judicial activism and must be stopped. Fortunately, members of the Judicial Council are not elected for life. They are elected for eight-year terms, however, and can serve for two terms (16 years) before they must take a hiatus.

The three officers of the Judicial Council who have provided leadership in taking the council in this dangerous direction, James Holsinger, Jr., Mary Daffin, and Keith Boyette are completing their first eight-year term. Likewise Rudolpho Beltran, who voted with the majority in



Students from Illiff and St. Paul's Schools of Theology join those witnessing at the Judicial Council meeting

this case, is finishing 8 years on the council.

It is essential that these persons who have participated in such blatant disregard for United Methodist law and tradition be removed from the Judicial Council in 2008. Even if General Conference reverses the decision, which it most certainly will, it is dangerous to leave judicial power in the hands of these persons. The other member voting in the majority, Dennis Blackwell, will be up for reelection in 2012.

TAKE ACTION:

1. Support Annual Conference Legislation

Legislation has been introduced in many annual conferences this year calling for the Disciplinary language to be changed so that there can be no doubt that a pastor does not have "discretion" to deny membership to those who have indicated a readiness and willingness to take the vows of membership. Organize and make sure that this legislation is passed in your Annual Conference.

Email mfsa@mfsaweb.org to receive sample legislation.

Additionally, legislation has been introduced in many annual conferences calling for all discriminatory language to be removed from the *Discipline*. It is not a coincidence that the first time the question of a pastor's discretion in denying membership has become an issue, it is in the case of a gay man. The groundwork for this decision has slowly and surely been put in place over the last several decades. The ruling of the Judicial Council provides an

opportunity to illustrate to people what happens when we begin to draw lines within the church about who is in and who is out, who is "compatible" and who isn't. Use this opportunity to work with others to get strong support for removing all discriminatory language from the *Discipline*.

2. Continue organizing for elections of delegates to GC 2008.

MFSa has written materials and a CD Power Point presentation about organizing to elect progressive delegates to General Conference 2008.

Email mfsa@mfsaweb.org to ask for written materials and/or a copy of the CD and it will be sent immediately. Don't wait until 2007. Organize now!

3. Write to the members of your conference delegation to General Conference 2004

Although General Conference is not in session, these persons remain your delegates to General Conference until elections for 2008 are held. Were a special session of General Conference to be held, these are the persons who would attend. Many of these persons may be reelected in 2008. Also consider writing to reserve delegates and Jurisdictional delegates, many of whom attend, and at times find themselves voting at, General Conference.

In your letter:

- Express your dismay at the ruling of the Judicial Council
- Ask them what they are doing to see that this decision is reversed
- Ask them to support any and all legislation that will counter the actions of these judicial activists and their supporters in the Good News and Confessing Movements.
- Ask for their support at the Annual Conference level in accomplishing the passage of legislation (as outlined above).
- Ask those who intend to run as GC delegates at their 2007 Annual Conferences to carefully consider who they will be electing to the Judicial Council in 2008.

4. Take Action in your local church. *It is essential that members of your local church understand what is at stake in Decision #1032.*

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Provide opportunities for education and discussion. Provide them with information about the background, substance and implications of the decision. Make available to them the text of the original decision, the response to the appeal, and the concurring and dissenting opinions on all of these. Go to the [Here We Stand](http://www.herewestandumc.org) (link to www.herewestandumc.org) website and access the many documents posted there. Download and print the excellent piece written by Rex Mathews.

MFSA can and will provide leadership in this effort.

Contact your local chapter leadership and/or the national office for resources. If you are unable to lead discussions in your church for some reason, ask MFSA for a speaker to come and meet with your congregation. The lay people of the church must be fully informed about what is happening. They must be given opportunities to express themselves and weigh in on the future shape of the denomination. Point them to the comments of Here We Stand signer, many of whom are lay persons www.herewestandumc.org. Hopefully they will take strength and comfort from realizing the depth and breadth of outrage about Decision #1032.

5. Pray for those who have been harmed.

The first rule of John Wesley's General Rules is to "do no harm." This rule has been horribly violated by Judicial Council Decision #1032 and in the council's refusal to reconsider. We must continue to hold in our prayers those most deeply wounded by the decision.

All are made vulnerable by this ruling, which leaves to the discretion of the pastor whether or not a person may become a member of the church. Clearly, however, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons have once again been singled out and told they are not welcome in the church unless they deny their very being. This is not acceptable. Judicial Council Decision #1032 must not stand.

The Judicial Council has slammed the door shut. It is up to the Church, you and me and everyone who believes in a wide and grace-filled welcome, to open the doors wide again. ❖

"See How They Love" Reflections from the Field

By Rev. Amy Stapleton, Field Organizer

This article could have been subtitled, "Reflections from the Plane." It's been a full spring. It has been my privilege to journey from coast to coast being in solidarity with members of the MFSA network and others working for justice and peace in their local churches and communities.

At a time when some folks see little hope in the church and world, I see a glimpse of the faithful making a difference daily. These people do not forget to be church, even when the church forgets to be the church.

One of my most recent trips was to Anaheim, CA to take part in the United Methodist Women's Assembly. At thirty-one, I expected to be one of the youngest people attending. Yet, what I found was a dynamic group of people, young and old, of many races and social locations. Worship to workshops were led by different voices and perspectives, spoken in many languages—a foretaste of Pentecost. A highlight was actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, who wowed the audience with dramatic presentations from interviews she's done with people from Kenya to those affected by Katrina. Smith told the audience of growing up in the UMC and having her grandfather tell her "if you say something long enough, it will become you."

This experience got me to thinking about ***what we are saying as a church and as the Methodist Federation for Social Action at this point in history.*** The phrase that can define us is "see how they love."

It was love in action that I saw as over one hundred people gathered in Overland Park Kansas to be a witness for God's inclusive love at the recent Judicial Council meeting. Students and faculty from St. Paul and Iliff Schools of Theology and laity and clergy from CA to TX stood for the church of which they hoped to be a part. On the last day of the council meeting, it became apparent that one member of the Judicial Council, Shamwange P. Kyungu from the Congo, who had traveled far

through great adversity to be at the meeting, would be in Overland Park for another three days because of the complexity of his travel schedule. The council had made no provision for translators or hospitality, just housing at the hotel. Immediately and without questions, not caring about votes but rather caring like the church, folks organized to make sure this brother in Christ was welcomed and fed. My friends, that's not about a Judicial Council decision in that moment but a decision to be in the church. *See how they love.*

That was also the feeling I had standing with more than 500,000 people who came to DC for the recent immigration rally on the national mall. As we walked together, I saw old and young, entire families, waving flags, carrying signs that said "I am America too." *See how they love.*

Many of the 38 MFSA chapters around the country will use annual conference time as an opportunity to organize for justice in the church and society. *See how they love.*

The East Ohio Chapter, with the leadership of Bishop Sally Dyck, will focus on ***Jesus' Yoke: An Interpretation of Scripture for Today***, exploring the words that have brought comfort to generations of Christians, and also illustrate new understandings of Jesus' ideas for holy living for his day (and ours). West Ohio MFSA Chapter will examine ***Healthcare in America***. In Virginia, the chapter annual conference speaker will be Bishop Peter Storey, former Bishop in South Africa during days of apartheid. The Baltimore-Washington Chapter will hear from Bishop Forest Stith on his work and vision for justice and peace in the Middle East. *See how they love.*

May it be said of us that in all our work for justice we do not settle for justice only for ourselves, but also seek justice and reconciliation for all God's people even those with whom we adamantly disagree. This work is not easy, but it is holy, and is the work to which we are called. *See how we love.* ❖

THE DECLARATION OF PEACE

continued from page one

to take bold, powerful and peaceful steps to help establish this comprehensive withdrawal plan. Together — policy-makers and citizens; Democrats, Republicans and Independents; people of faith and people of conscience — we have the power to douse this fire. Sign The Declaration of Peace — and take tangible, nonviolent action to end this war and to declare a new era of peace and justice.

The Declaration of Peace: A Commitment to Take Action

The Declaration of Peace is a pledge to take nonviolent steps for the immediate withdrawal of US troops — and to engage in peaceful protest if a comprehensive withdrawal plan is not established and begun by September 21, 2006, International Peace Day, just days before Congress adjourns for the fall elections. Between now and September we will:

- Call on the Bush administration and Congress to end the war. As part of this, we will call on and visit members of Congress and all candidates in the fall elections to “declare peace” by publicly pledging to support and vote for legislation that brings the troops home and cuts off funding for the war.
- Participate in activities leading up to September 21, including marches, vigils, and nationally coordinated phone-ins and email campaigns.
- Prepare for September by participating in public Declaration signings, organizing Declaration-inspired events, and attending nonviolence trainings that will be scheduled across the United States.

If the September 21 deadline is not met, Declaration signers will engage in peaceful action in Washington, DC and at Congressional offices and other sites throughout the nation from September 21-28. These activities will include marches, rallies, vigils, demonstrations and other creative expressions “declaring peace.” In the spirit of Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, some signers will be led by conscience to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience and risk arrest as a way to signify their principled opposition to the US war in Iraq. Nationally coordinated nonviolent activities will continue on a regular basis until the United States withdraws from Iraq.

The Goal of the Declaration of Peace: Establishing and Completing a Comprehensive, Concrete Withdrawal Plan

The Declaration of Peace is a commitment to take nonviolent steps for a comprehensive, concrete and rapid end to the US war in Iraq, including:

- Withdrawal of US troops and all coalition forces
- Closure of US military bases
- Support for an Iraqi-led peace process, including a peace conference to shape a post-occupation transition and an international peacekeeping presence if mandated by this peace process
- Return of Iraqi control over its oil resources and the political and economic life of the nation
- Reparations and reconstruction to address the destruction caused by the US war and thirteen years of sanctions
- Establish a “peace dividend” for job creation, health care, education, housing, and other vital social needs
- Increased support for US veterans of the Iraq war, and
- No so-called “preventive” war against Iran or any other nation

This comprehensive and concrete withdrawal plan must be established and acti-

vated no later than September 21, 2006, and completed no later than March 19, 2007, ending four years of war and occupation in Iraq. We will take every nonviolent step possible to meet this goal *before* these deadlines.

Nonviolence Guidelines for Declaration of Peace Activities

- Our attitude will be one of nonviolence, openness and respect toward all we encounter.
- We will use no violence, verbal or physical, toward any person.
- We will not destroy or damage any property.
- When engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience, we will accept the consequences of our actions.
- We will not carry anything that could be construed as a weapon
- We will not bring or use alcohol or drugs (except for medical purposes).

These guidelines are designed to create actions for peace that are nonviolent, secure and unifying, and that invite the majority in this country to take steps to call for an end to the US war in Iraq. All individuals participating in nonviolent civil disobedience are strongly encouraged to take nonviolent action training. Please contact the Declaration of Peace for assistance.
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The Declaration of Peace Pledge

SIGN THE PLEDGE ON-LINE AT www.DeclarationOfPeace.org
or mail to MFSA, 212 East Capitol Street, NE, Washington, DC 20003

Yes! I join with the majority of US citizens, the people of Iraq, and people around the world in calling for a comprehensive end to the US war in Iraq. I solemnly pledge to:

- _____ Join the growing call for an immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq
- _____ Urge my Congressional representatives to adopt a “bring the troops home now” position, and to establish a concrete, comprehensive withdrawal plan no later than September 21, 2006, International Peace Day, just days before Congress adjourns
- _____ Participate in marches, rallies, demonstrations, and other peaceful strategies to establish this plan
- _____ Engage in nonviolent civil disobedience, as conscience leads me, if this plan for a comprehensive withdrawal is not established and activated no later than Sept. 21, 2006.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Affiliation _____

Save the date !!
Plan to attend !!!
Invite others to participate !!!

VOICES OF FAITH 2007

Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Methodist Federation for Social Action!



What: A Gathering of Justice-Seeking United Methodists

Why: Celebrate, Organize, Take Action and *Be The Church Together*

When: April 13-15, 2007

Where: Hyatt Regency Hotel in Crystal City, VA (just south of Washington, DC)

CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF JUSTICE ACTION!

MFSA was founded in 1907 in Washington, DC. We will recognize and honor the leaders of MFSA on whose shoulders we stand such as Harry Ward (drafter of the first UM Social Creed), Winifred Chappell, Jack Mc Michael and others!

SING, WORSHIP AND LISTEN TO GREAT PREACHING!

There's nothing like hundreds of energized United Methodists singing justice hymns together! They'll hear us all the way across the Potomac and into the Halls of Power. Listen to great preachers, such as **Rev. Traci West**, as they speak the truth of the Gospel to the current day.

HAVE FUN!

Let the music of African American Women's a capella group, "**In Process**," and others singing songs of struggle and liberation, nurture your soul and give you strength for the journey.

RECALL OUR FAITH ROOTS!

New Testament scholar, professor and author, **Dr. Brian Blount**, of Princeton will ground us as he speaks of the soil of Biblical justice in which we are rooted.

LEARN AND RESPOND!

Workshops, speakers and resources will be available on a wide variety of **critical issues** of the day. Prophets such as **Bishop Minerva Carcaño** will call us forth to join in building a just society.

ORGANIZE!

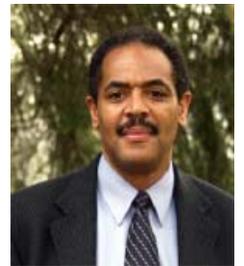
Marshall Ganz, former director of organizing for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers and currently lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, will help us understand how being people of faith and good organizers go hand in hand. Impressed with John Wesley's organizing skills, Prof. Ganz will help us hone our own skills as we prepare for **General Conference 2008** where we intend to be a mighty force!

WITNESS!

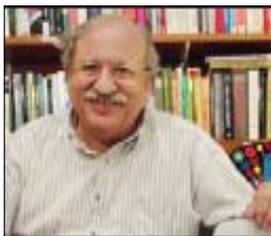
On Sunday afternoon we will travel to the **White House** and raise our voices in song, prayer and witness, bringing our message of peace, justice and liberation as we challenge the current administration to live up to the highest ideals of the Gospel and of our nation.



Rev. Dr. Traci West



Dr. Brian Blount



Professor Marshall Ganz



Bishop Minerva Carcaño

Watch the MFSA Web Site www.mfsaweb.org for updated information on the Voices of Faith 2007 Conference. By fall we will have on-line registration in place on the web. For now – save the date – tell all your friends – and stay tuned!

Western Jurisdiction Bishops Speak Out on Immigration

May 2006

Statement of Christ's resurrection love from the Bishops of the Western Jurisdiction.

When foreigners reside among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigners residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Lev. 19:33-34

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. John 13:34.

The Easter Season comes to us with the fervent gift of love and hospitality. Christ our resurrected Lord has welcomed us to his table, and loved us as his own without exception. Now Christ invites us to walk with him and with each other in the spirit of his love and hospitality.

Over the last few weeks we have seen millions of persons, young and old, walking across the United States in a spirit of love and hospitality for those who are undocumented immigrants among us. Through these expressions of love and hospitality we have been reminded that the great majority of us in this country come from immigrant roots. Some of us can point back to the time our ancestors came to this country in search of new life. Others of us have heard the stories of ancestors who were here when immigrants from other parts of the world began to arrive. Then there are those of us who to this day carry the burden of ancestors who were kidnapped from their native lands and brought to this country under cruel slavery. Immigration has been a constant reality in this country, yet we have not always known how to respond to the immigrant among us in just and caring ways. Our prayer and hope is that as people of Christian faith we may know how to respond with the very love and hospitality of Christ Jesus.

As United Methodists we believe that there are some fundamental ways to live in love and hospitality toward the immigrant among us. First, it is imperative that we declare publicly that we believe that the present immigration policy of the U.S. is "evil and unjust, and that the enforcement thereof results in immediate and insufferable human rights violations, dis-



Rev. Eunsang Lee speaks at Rally for Immigrants Rights.

crimination, and oppression." [i][i]

As United Methodists we have gone on public record to also declare that being an undocumented person is NOT a crime.[ii][ii] We must continue to allow our strong voice to be heard on this matter that affects so many.

Our present U.S. immigration policy affects our immigrant brother who works long and hard hours every day and only asks to be treated justly. It affects the mother who has faithfully served the needs of families in this country, but is separated from her own family who has not been able to immigrate to be with her. It has forever touched the life of the children whose father died in the southern desert of our country attempting only to provide bread for his little ones. It affects our immigrant congregations as they suffer fear and persecution because their faithful members are undocumented. Ultimately our present immigration policy affects all of us as it makes us callous, inhospitable, and unloving to those who live and work among us.

We understand the need of every country to have immigration policies, but such policies must be humane and just. We support the need for secure borders, but security will not be found in oppressing the undocumented immigrant. We affirm the need to care for those who are legal residents and citizens, but not at the sacrifice of oth-

ers who have also contributed to the economy of this country. As bishops of The United Methodist Church charged with the responsibility to faithfully lead God's people, we would remind our congregations that we are called to extend the love of Christ Jesus to all, but particularly to those who suffer, are oppressed, and excluded from justice.

We challenge the President of the United States and our Congressional leaders to lead us in comprehensive immigration reform that will bring about justice for the undocumented immigrant among us. And we call upon the congregations under our episcopal and pastoral oversight to care for the undocumented immigrant among us with the very love and hospitality of Christ Jesus.

The College of Bishops of the Western Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church

*Bishop Beverly J. Shamana, President
Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., Secretary
Bishop Mary Ann Swenson
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Bishop William W. Dew
Bishop Jack M. Tuell*

[i][i] The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2004, page 340.

[ii][ii] Ibid ❖

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Guest Workers

by Harry Johnson, May Day 2006

I am the descendant of royalty;
kings and princes nestle in my family tree.
The blood of warriors courses through my veins –
perhaps.

Perhaps they were simply migrants, hunters and gathers
who moved their tents in search of new sources of food.
But I will never know for certain, for they
came here as undocumented persons, illegal immigrants –
“guest workers” in the land that I now call home –
workers whose only compensation
for their backbreaking labor were the meager fruits
that have ever been the lot of slaves.

Purchased like livestock from the
fertile valleys and regal mountains of the Dark Continent,
shipped below deck like cordwood to an alien land,
their women raped at the whim of their owners – their *masters* –
even their children were not their own: Offspring born of lust,
merchandise to be sold on the auction block.

On their lash-scarred backs a nation was built;
the only reparations for their unrequited labor: Deprivation, scorn,
and isolation for them and their children
and their children’s children for generations yet unborn.

Today, I who bear still the scars of their humiliation,
am being called to make common cause with “guest workers”
from other lands, to join them in *El Grand Paro Americano* –
The Great American Boycott.

Today, I am being asked to rest from my labors
in support of those “who do the work no Americans will do,”
even as once my ancestors did. Today,
I who am retired and have no labors from which to rest –
I who am uncertain what best to do – will embrace the cause
of yet another generation who labor unappreciated, invisible,
on behalf of the ancestors gathered in my family tree,
their plea for justice echoing in my heart.
I hear their ancient call, feel their anguished cries;
I have no choice but to respond. ❖



*Rev. Chester Jones,
General Secretary of
the United Method-
ist General Commis-
sion on Religion
and Race, partici-
pates in Immigra-
tion Rally at the U.S.
Capitol.*

DECLARATION OF PEACE

continued from page four

*tance in organizing a nonviolence training, or finding some-
one in your area who can facilitate one.*

Declaration of Peace Endorsers United for Peace and Justice;
Clergy and Laity Concerned About Iraq; Global Call Iraq; Peaceful
Tomorrows; The Shalom Center; The United Church of Christ;
Proyecto Guerrero Azteca por la Paz; War Resisters League; Bud-
dhist Peace Fellowship; Interfaith Communities United for Justice
and Peace; Peaceworkers; Pax Christi USA; Code Pink; Global Ex-
change; Episcopal Peace Fellowship; Methodist Federation for So-
cial Action; Network of Spiritual Progressives; Iraq Pledge of Resis-
tance/National Call for Nonviolent Resistance; Voices for Creative
Nonviolence; Courage to Resist; Brandywine Peace Community;
The MK Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence; School of the Americas
Watch; Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC; Pace e Bene Nonviolence
Service

For More Information:

Web Site: <http://www.DeclarationOfPeace.org>

Street Address: 2501 Harrison St., Oakland, CA 94612

E-mail: info@declarationofpeace.org

ARKANSAS' WORKING FAMILIES GET LONG-OVERDUE RAISE

by Rev. Stephen Copley

In Arkansas, we recently won a resounding victory for work-
ing families when a \$1.10 increase in the state minimum wage
was signed into law by the governor. I led the coalition of
faith, community and labor groups called **Give Arkansas a
Raise Now** which played a key role in persuading lawmakers
to enact the increase. The coalition is also an affiliate of "**Let
Justice Roll**" **Living Wage campaign**. The **National Council
of Churches** is a lead organization in **Let Justice Roll**.

The increase came less than four months after **Give Arkan-
sas a Raise Now** announced a campaign to raise the state
minimum wage through an amendment to the Arkansas Con-
stitution. Arkansas became the 19th state and the District
of Columbia to have a higher minimum wage than the federal
minimum wage.

I am a member of the MFSA National Board and past co-
ordinator of the Arkansas chapter. I am very proud of
the heritage MFSA has in speaking for economic justice. This
is certainly in line with the prophets of the Old Testament and
of Jesus. It certainly is in our roots as Methodists, bringing
memories of John Wesley preaching and working with the coal
miners of England.

It has always been a concern of mine to connect my Christian
faith to the concern for workers and their rights. The cam-
paign to raise the minimum wage is an example of this. The
current federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is about
\$10,700 per year. This is not sufficient for anyone to live with
any quality of life. I am persuaded that Christ calls us to strive
to change this situation. I feel that we have made an impor-
tant first step in this direction. ❖

**To find out more about the Let Justice Roll Living Wage
Campaign go to www.letjusticeroll.org**

50th Anniversary of UM Opposition to the Death Penalty

The General Board of Church and Society Statement on the 50th Anniversary of the UMC's Opposition to the Death Penalty.

At the 1956 UMC General Conference, the church officially stated, "We stand for the application of the redemptive principle to the treatment of offenders against the law, to reform of penal and correctional methods, and to criminal court procedures. We deplore the use of capital punishment."

We celebrate this prophetic statement and the fact that The Methodist Church was one of the first denominations in the U.S. to formally come out against the death penalty. The UMC maintains a strong stand against capital punishment as exemplified in the **Book of Discipline**: *We believe the death*

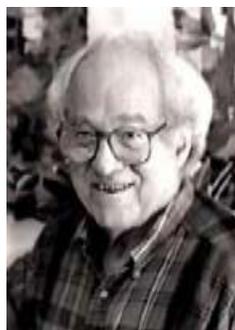
penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. The UMC is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the

death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

In Matthew 25:38-39, Jesus pointedly refutes revenge as a basis of justice and commands his followers to compassionately serve even their enemies. In John 8:1-11, Jesus exonerates and redeems the woman caught in adultery who was to be put to death. Jesus refuses to uphold the use of the death penalty and as his followers we are called to do the same.

Therefore, we urge all United Methodists in their churches to practice transformative love, to comfort the victims of crime, to humanize those convicted of crime, and to advocate for an end to the death penalty in our criminal justice system.

April 23, 2006



Rev. William Sloane Coffin

June 1, 1924 - April 12, 2006

We honor the memory of the Rev. William Sloane Coffin - his courage, his vision and the legacy he leaves.

It's wrong for preachers on every issue to stand as if at Armageddon battling for the Lord. I know that tolerance is a tricky business. Some people actually think that tolerance means being so broad-minded that your brains fall out. But I'm worried about growing intolerance in the church. I'm

worried that the virtue of moral indignation is becoming the vice of moralism. Moralism is historically one of America's great defects. Moralism is intolerant of ambiguity, perceiving reality in extreme terms of good and evil and regarding more sophisticated judgments as soft and unworthy. The temptation to become moralistic is strong, for it is emotionally satisfying to have enemies rather than problems. It is emotionally satisfying to seek out culprits rather than flaws in the system. God know it's emotionally satisfying to be righteous with the righteousness that nourishes itself in the blood of sinners. But God knows that what is emotionally satisfying can also be spiritually devastating. (From the book, **Credo** by William Sloane Coffin, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, page 151)

SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN

Methodist Federation for Social Action

212 E. Capitol St. NE, Washington, DC 20003

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

from page one

In response to the UM Judicial Council actions, thousands of United Methodists have emailed, called, written letters, demonstrated and otherwise expressed their outrage at the rulings. The Judicial Council has once again slammed the door shut and it's up to you and me to make it clear that we intend to open that door back up.

The war must end and it's up to the citizens of the United States to make it clear that we will no longer stand for the carnage that is taking place in our name.

As immigration continues to be debated in Congress we must be vigilant and stand firm in insisting on policies that represent the best of who we are as a country.

It's time to say "no" to injustice. It's time to stand up and be counted. ❖

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