

# METHODIST LAITY REFORM MOVEMENT

Iowa United Methodists Working for Christian Faithfulness  
and Reform Within The United Methodist Church

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## Issues 2010 Report

5-27-10

Iowa Annual Conference (IAC), June 5-8, 2010

**To: Our Members and Iowa Annual Conference Members**

**From: METHODIST LAITY REFORM MOVEMENT**

We are sharing with you some concerns and recommendations on issues facing our 2010 Iowa Annual Conference.

**If you are an Annual Conference Member (lay or clergy),** we invite you to review this report and bring it with you.

Please visit our **MLRM information table in HyVee Hall B.** Get more information on **Marriage Protection** and on **Immigration**, including the full text of the new Arizona law.

You are invited to attend our **brief information meetings on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday nights,** immediately when the IAC adjourns, in **HyVee Hall, lower floor, Room 4.**

To **all others** receiving this report: We invite you to review it and **express your own opinions** to your Annual Conference Members (lay and clergy) from your Local Church, before they go to Des Moines for the IAC session that begins Saturday, June 5. We encourage you to **ask them**, after the Annual Conference, what happened on issues that concern you.

We support Bishop Trimble's FIT Challenge. We seek to help our Iowa Annual Conference to focus on its Mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" and to support and strengthen our Local Churches in meeting people's spiritual and physical needs in Jesus' name.

This report mentions only a few issues. There are many other important items in the Pre-Conference Manual. Please study the entire Manual, ask questions, and make your own decisions.

We offer this report in the hope that it will be helpful to you and will aid thoughtful, prayerful decision-making. We respect everyone's right to make his or her own decisions. THANK YOU for your consideration of our concerns and recommendations.

**Please register now for our Renewal Dinner with Jim Heidinger, Sunday, June 6, 5:00 PM. Invitation enclosed.**

**Marriage Protection in Iowa.** *Methodist Laity Reform Movement* will ask the Iowa Annual Conference to support action in compliance with our Church's stand: "We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman." (*Book of Discipline, Par. 161B.*)

This issue is urgent. An Iowa Constitutional Amendment is the only law that can restore the meaning of marriage in Iowa. It won't happen unless Iowans this November elect a Legislature that will propose this Amendment.

Our **Marriage Protection statement** is enclosed. If you haven't yet signed and sent it, please do. See pp. 5 & 6 of this report.

**Immigration.** This issue is likely to be raised during this IAC session. *MLRM* has not taken a stand on immigration laws. We don't support or oppose the new Arizona law.

We offer these suggestions:

Read Alan Wisdom's thoughtful Christian analysis on next 2 pages.

Remember that Christians are called to love, and to seek justice for, all immigrants (legal and illegal) and all persons affected by immigration. Nearly all of us are immigrants or descendants of immigrants.

Recognize that the Bible and Jesus Christ's teachings do not specify what kind of immigration law and enforcement we should have, and this is an issue on which honest Christians can disagree.

Avoid accusations of racism and assumptions about people's motives.

Describe the Arizona law correctly and fairly. Read it before speaking on it. [You can get the full text, and more information, at our \*MLRM\* information booth in HyVee Hall B.](#)

### **Issues in Pre-Conference Manual:**

**2011 Budget, page ix.** The \$1 million apportionment for pension liability is partly offset by spending carryover dollars in 2011; see the Action Item budgets throughout the Pre-Conference Manual. **Questions:** What is the total carryover amount budgeted for 2011 spending? Will this one-time spending leave us with a big budget hole in 2012?

**#108, p. 4, & #203, p. 17: Board of Church and Society.** **Questions:** Are these 4 areas (Environmental Justice, Immigration Reform,

Restorative Justice, and Peace with Justice) the correct top priorities? What does "Environmental Justice" mean? Why is Marriage Protection omitted?

### **#112, p. 6: No Legislative Committees?**

This Rules of Order change would omit Legislative Committees for the 2011 Annual Conference. Will this help make IAC actions more careful and thoughtful, or less? *MLRM* does not take a position. We suggest careful consideration.

**#113, pp. 7-8: Election of Delegates to General Conference.** These rules would **prohibit** "promotional material" on nominees (except for the official 250-words sketch) and "strongly discourage" all distribution of information by supporters of nominees. This violates freedom of speech and shuts out many persons who would be good delegates but are not prominently visible. In the 2008 General Conference, **half (8 of 16)** of Iowa's delegates were **Conference staff** (good people, but extreme over-representation). **Recommendations:** Delete paragraphs C.2 and C.3 on page 8. In par. B.2 on p. 7, which now reads "Members of Conference are encouraged to continue a tradition of concern for inclusiveness in its elected delegation," **add this: "including fair representation of persons who are not Conference staff."**

**#303, p. 42: Commission on Christian Unity.** "The Commission will make available information about homosexuality."

**Recommendation:** Add: All this information shall be fully consistent with the *Book of Discipline*.

**#703 & 704, pp. 103-114: Pensions and Health Insurance.** We suggest careful study of all this, plus more information that has been promised to be given to IAC members and placed on the IAC Website. Are we doing all that is needed to make our 3 pension plans and health insurance plans financially sound and dependable?

**#805, section 7, p. 131: Apportionment formula.** Is this formula fair? Should we be seeking a better way?

**#805, section 11, p. 132: Council on Finance & Administration, process to limit spending to offset shortfall in apportionment receipts.** Please study carefully. We believe this process is essential to prevent deficit spending.

**By Alan F.H. Wisdom**

**Vice President, Institute on Religion & Democracy**

Immigration is a complex subject. There are no biblical passages laying out the details of a just immigration policy for the United States today. A modern nation like ours is not analogous to ancient Israel, nor are biblical figures easily comparable to contemporary illegal immigrants.

Devising an immigration policy is an exercise in trying to strike a prudent balance among competing values, all of which place legitimate moral claims upon us. Such values include: kindness toward the stranger, concern for the poor at home and abroad, upholding the rule of law, providing asylum for the persecuted, sustaining the culture that makes democracy possible, keeping families together when possible, securing the borders against external threats, and environmental and fiscal responsibility. It is not possible to admit everyone who might wish to reside in the United States; hard choices must be made. Even the most carefully conceived immigration policy may have unintended effects.

The church has no particular expertise in many of these questions. How carefully have Bishops studied the impact of large-scale immigration on the wages of unskilled labor? How many Pastors can explain the technical capabilities and limitations of various border security measures? Church members are deeply divided on the volatile immigration issue. Church leaders would be wise to show caution and modesty. They ought to beware anyone who offers easy answers. There are no easy answers on immigration.

Here are some of the considerations that thoughtful U.S. Christians should bear in mind:

1. The oft-quoted command in Leviticus 19:33-34 that “you shall not oppress the alien” should shape our attitude toward citizens of other countries. But the passage does not say how many aliens should be admitted to the United States today. It does not indicate whether 1 million “green cards” granted every year is too few, too many, or just the right number. Compassion for the foreigner does not necessarily mean opening our borders and admitting all comers.
2. The “sojourners” in ancient Israel were not illegal immigrants. They were temporary residents who agreed to comply with Israel’s laws and respect its customs. In most cases, they had no opportunity to become Israelites. They could expect to receive basic justice, but not the full privileges of an Israelite.
3. Mary and Joseph were not illegal immigrants when they fled to Egypt to protect the baby Jesus. They were refugees seeking asylum from political persecution—a right that is recognized under today’s international law. There is no evidence that they broke any Egyptian laws.
4. Alongside the biblical teachings about hospitality to strangers also stand the teachings about the importance of the rule of law. Passages such as Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-17 stress a duty of conscience to obey properly constituted human authorities, when their demands do not violate conscience. Such authorities are established by God to protect law-abiding citizens against enemies, foreign and domestic, who would upset the lawful order.
5. U.S. authorities are well within their proper powers when they attempt to regulate the flow of immigration into this country. A basic attribute of any sovereign state is the ability to control its borders, to determine who may enter the country and who may not. Any nation that loses control of its borders will not be able to fulfill its basic God-given responsibility to protect its citizens.
6. It is important to distinguish the callings of church and state. The church is called by God to welcome all with the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. It does not make distinctions according to nationality or immigration status; it serves all. But the state is called by God to enforce justice. It properly makes distinctions between those who obey and those who break the laws.
7. The state properly places first the welfare of its own citizens for whom it is responsible. It admits immigrants that it believes will advance the well-being of the nation. It does not have to admit immigrants that it believes will detract from national well-being.
8. There is no place for racism in the immigration debate. Persons should not be admitted to the United States, or excluded from the United States, based on their ethnicity. Our nation is not defined by the racial identity of its inhabitants. It is defined instead by a democratic experiment that we all agree to undertake

together. America seeks immigrants of all nations who are ready, willing, and able to take part in that experiment. We do not wish immigrants who lack that demonstrated commitment. It is not racist to favor some limits on the number and kinds of immigrants who enter this country.

9. It is crucial to distinguish between different types of immigrants. Refugees fleeing war or persecution have a priority claim to asylum in the United States (or elsewhere). We also give preference in allowing spouses to live together, and also parents and children, in view of the moral and social importance of those relationships. The priority of other family relationships, such as adult brothers and sisters or aunts/uncles/nieces/nephews, is lower. There is no right to an indefinite “chain migration” by which entire extended families come into the country one by one.

10. Likewise, migration to better one’s financial and social standing is not a priority or a right. If it were, the vast majority of the Earth’s population could claim a U.S. visa in order to enjoy the higher wage scales here. But in many cases, these individuals and their countries of origin would be better served if they were able to apply their skills to bringing economic development to their homelands. Unlimited immigration into the United States is not the solution to global poverty.

11. Weighing the costs and benefits of immigration is a complicated calculation. Immigrants do often bring valuable skills that contribute to the U.S. economy. Their cultures can enrich our national life. However, large-scale immigration imposes burdens as well. State and local governments have to bear new expenses for education, social services, health care, law enforcement, and so forth. The environment is taxed by the demands of the additional population. Low-skill American workers find their wages depressed to some extent—economists differ as to the exact extent—because of competition from immigrant labor.

12. Almost everyone agrees that the current U.S. situation with regard to illegal immigration is not desirable. U.S. immigration law is widely flouted. As a result, there are perhaps ten million people living on the margins of the law. These illegal immigrants are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation of various sorts. Because they are not U.S. citizens or on a path to U.S. citizenship, they may have little commitment to this country, its laws, or its customs.

13. It seems wise and just to aim at reducing the number of persons here illegally. The options for doing so are three: Either they must be deported, or they must be persuaded voluntarily to return to their countries of origin, or they must be given a way to become legal U.S. residents or citizens. It is unlikely that any of these three options will be effective by itself. How to balance the three is the dilemma facing policymakers.

14. A nation may decide to show mercy to those who have broken its laws. It may conclude that strict enforcement of the law—e.g., trying to deport all illegal immigrants—would be impossible or counter-productive. (A significant number of illegal immigrants have voluntarily returned to their countries of origin when they have sensed the threat of deportation rising and the prospects for U.S. employment diminishing.)

15. We must also weigh the possible unintended consequences of granting amnesty to immigration law violators. Chief among these dangers is “moral hazard.” Whenever one subsidizes or rewards persons engaging in a destructive behavior—perhaps with the noble intention of relieving suffering caused by that behavior—one will likely see more of that destructive behavior and the consequent suffering. Applied to immigration, the “moral hazard” is: If we grant coveted U.S. residency status to those who entered the country illegally or overstayed their temporary visas, we will likely see more persons engaging in those kinds of lawbreaking. Persons who might otherwise have waited long years overseas to obtain a lawful entry will learn an unintended lesson: It is easier to sneak across the border and get a fast track to permanent U.S. residency. We have already seen this “moral hazard” demonstrated with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Its amnesty for most who had been in the country illegally led to a spike in new illegal entries. The problem of illegal immigration was not solved; it was amplified.

16. Opinion polls consistently show that attitudes about immigration are divided—and even somewhat contradictory—in the church as well as in the general U.S. population.

Citing poll results proves nothing about whether church members are right or wrong in their opinions. But together with all the uncertainties of biblical interpretation and social/economic analysis regarding immigration, these results suggest that wise church leaders ought to be cautious and modest in addressing this difficult and sensitive issue.

why

SEVEN SCIENTIFIC REASONS

Marriage

matters



Most Christians know from the Bible that marriage is part of God's original order. "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a help mate" [Genesis 2:18]. Jesus also affirmed that lasting, loving marriage is basic to God's plan for us. "But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife. . . What therefore God hath joined, let not man put asunder." [Mark 10: 6,7,9]

But did you know that a large body of social science research now affirms the importance of marriage for children, adults, and communities? Marriage matters because when fathers are committed to their children (and their children's mother!), children are most likely to thrive and women are spared the unfair burdens of parenting alone.

1

**Marriage reduces the risk of poverty for children and communities.** The majority of children whose parents don't get or stay married experience at least a year of poverty.

2

**Fatherless households increase crime.** Boys whose parents divorced or never married, for example, are two to three times more likely to end up in jail as adults.

3

**Marriage protects children's physical and mental health.** Children whose parents get and stay married are healthier and also much less likely to suffer mental illness, including depression and teen suicide.

4

**Both men and women who marry live longer, healthier and happier lives.** On virtually every measure of health and well-being, married people are better-off than otherwise similar singles, on average.

5

**Just living together is not the same as marriage.** Married couples who cohabit first are thirty to fifty percent more likely to divorce. People who just live together do not get the same boost to health, welfare and happiness, on average, as spouses. Neither do their children. Children whose parents cohabit are at increased risk for domestic violence and child abuse and neglect. Children born to parents who were just living together are also three times more likely to experience their parents' breakup by age 5.

6

**Parents who don't get or stay married put children's education at risk.** Children whose parents divorced or never married have lower grade point averages, are more likely to be held back a grade, and to drop out of school. They are also less likely to end up college graduates.

7

**When marriages fail, ties between parents and children typically weaken too.** Adult children whose parents divorced are only half as likely to have warm, close ties to both their mothers and their fathers. For example, in one large national survey, 65 percent of adult children of divorce reported they were not close to their fathers (compared to 29 percent of adults from intact marriages). [Source; W. Bradford Wilcox et al. 2005. *Why Marriage Matters: 26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (NY: Institute for American Values) [www.americanvalues.org](http://www.americanvalues.org)]

# “Why not gay marriage?”

Spin a globe and pick virtually any place on earth at any previous time in human history; you will find that they do marriage one way — *between men and women*. There may be other differences, but marriage has *always required a husband and a wife*. Why? Marriage teaches that men and women need each other and that children need mothers and fathers. A loving and compassionate society comes to the aid of motherless and fatherless children, but no compassionate society *intentionally* deprives children of their own mom or dad. *But this is what every same-sex home does — and for no other reason but to satisfy adult desire.*

*The battle for marriage takes place at the water cooler, the kitchen table, and in the church pews. Here are answers to five questions that will help you defend the family.*

**“How will my same-sex marriage hurt your marriage?”** Same-sex marriage advocates want to force *everyone* to dramatically and permanently alter our definition of marriage and family. The great, historic, cross-cultural understanding of marriage as the union of husband and wife will be called bigotry in the public square. *The law* will teach your children and grandchildren that there is nothing special about mothers and fathers raising children together, and anyone who thinks otherwise is a bigot.

**“Is same-sex marriage like interracial marriage?”** Laws against interracial marriage were about keeping two races apart, so that one race could oppress the other, and that is *wrong*. Marriage is about bringing male and female together, so that children have mothers and fathers, and so that women aren't stuck with the enormous, unfair burdens of parenting alone--- and that is *good*.

**“Is polygamy next?”** Jonathan Yarbrough, part of the *first* couple to get a same-sex marriage in Provincetown, Mass, said, “I think it's possible to love more than one person and have more than one partner. . . . In our case, it is. We have an open marriage.” Once you rip a ship off its mooring who knows where it will drift next?

**“What will happen to our church organizations?”** After same-sex marriage is created, will the statement, “Children need a mother and a father” be deemed hate speech? In Massachusetts, the *Boston Globe* said so: “Governor Romney is denigrating gay families, practicing divisive, mean-spirited politics . . . by insisting that every child ‘has a right to a mother and a father.’” Right now, for example, the Catholic Church is being challenged in Canada because a local parish refused to rent out their church reception hall when they learned the reception was for a lesbian couple. Legal scholars warn that the tax exempt status and accreditation of church organizations could be at risk.

**“What will public school teach?”** Consider a recent National Public Radio story from Boston. An eighth-grade teacher there teaches about gay sex “thoroughly and explicitly.” When asked if parents complained about their children learning such explicit material, this teacher said, “Give me a break. It's legal now.” Heather and her two Mommies will become standard kindergarten fare. Our children need to hear a positive message about marriage.

*“...will the statement, ‘Children need a mother and a father’ be deemed hate speech?”*

*Gays and lesbians have a legal right to live as they choose, they don't have a right to redefine marriage for all of us. For more information on what you can do to protect marriage please contact the National Organization for Marriage at (609) 688-0450 or on the web at [www.nationformarriage.org](http://www.nationformarriage.org).*