

# **METHODIST LAITY REFORM MOVEMENT**

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

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February 21, 2004

Dear Iowa Legislator:

Our Board voted today to send this letter to all Iowa Legislators. We are loyal lay members of The United Methodist Church (UMC). We work within the Iowa Annual Conference (IAC) of the UMC, but we do not speak for it or any of its agencies. Many Iowa UMC members share our concerns.

We write to provide information and full disclosure. We are **not** a lobbying organization. We are **not** asking you to vote for or against any legislation.

The Iowa Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church employs a full-time paid lobbyist with the title of Advocate. The current lobbyist is Lana Ross. We believe the lobbyist, and those who set policies for her lobbying, often do not accurately represent our Church. We believe they are totally sincere in all they do, and they think the positions they take are right and just.

*Methodist Laity Reform Movement* believes our Church should **not** have a paid lobbyist and should never allow any political faction — left-wing, right-wing, Republican, Democrat, Socialist, or any other — to promote its agenda through the Church. We oppose the paid lobbyist position, not the person.

**The lobbyist speaks for one political viewpoint on many issues.** We defend everyone's right to advocate his or her own political beliefs, but not in the Church's name. ***Methodist Laity Reform Movement* would equally oppose having a Church lobbyist for a conservative agenda.**

The Iowa Annual Conference meets in June each year. It has adopted many resolutions on political issues. They are printed in a *Book of Resolutions*.

The paid lobbyist has registered as a lobbyist for our Church on **many bills dealing with issues on which the Iowa Annual Conference has not adopted any position**. These are **six of many** examples:

- AGAINST HF 2188 and SF 216, bills to allow couples to choose a "covenant marriage" setting a higher standard for their marriage.
- AGAINST SF 217, a bill to reduce the marriage license fee for couples who have had premarital education.
- AGAINST SF 411, a bill to repeal no-fault divorce but allow 5 grounds for dissolution of marriage, including adultery, physical or sexual abuse, etc.
- AGAINST SF 372, a bill to license money transmission services.
- FOR SF 311, a bill to restore automatically the right to vote of all convicted felons, when released from prison or discharged from probation or parole.
- FOR HF 312, a bill to allow voter registration (and voting) at polling places on Election Day.

**Five more examples:** in 2001-2002, our Iowa Church's paid lobbyist registered:

- AGAINST a bill to limit the increase of city and county property taxes.
- AGAINST a bill to allow veterans' organizations to provide honor guards at public schools.
- AGAINST a bill to allow an Iowa state income tax credit for teachers who pay for supplies they use in teaching at Iowa schools.
- AGAINST a bill to increase the speed limit on interstate highways.
- FOR a bill to reduce criminal penalties for burglary and forgery.

We have carefully reviewed the current *Book of Resolutions*. It **does not state any position on any of these 11 issues**. We believe most of these are issues on which there is no clear Christian position, honest Christians can and do disagree, and the Church should not take sides.

We have heard attempts to justify lobbying on issues on which the IAC has taken no position, by quoting general language in the (national) *Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*. But the Iowa Annual Conference has **not** voted on the many resolutions in that huge book — 863 pages, full of vague language that could be interpreted to support almost any position.

**Another problem: Even when the Iowa Annual Conference has adopted an official stand on an issue, it may or may not reflect the views of most Iowa United Methodists:**

- Most Iowa United Methodists have never seen the Iowa *Book of Resolutions*.
- The resolutions process is mostly top-down, with little input from members and Local Churches. Most resolutions are written by the Board of Church and Society, a small group dominated by one political faction; this is confirmed by persons who have served on it.
- Big batches of resolutions are adopted hastily by the IAC with no debate. The 2003 IAC adopted **36 resolutions in one nondebatable motion** — more than 2 hours after the scheduled adjournment time, and after many IAC voting members had gone home.
- Many of these 36 resolutions were controversial. Some members stayed late, waiting to debate and offer amendments. **No debate, discussion, or amendment was allowed.**
- The Iowa Annual Conference operates under Church rules but does not fairly represent its people. Clergy get half the votes; laity get half. Yet our Iowa Church has 199,493 laity and 1,106 clergy. One clergy outvotes more than 180 laity. Also, the Local Church nomination process often selects an IAC Lay Member who echoes the Pastor.

Our discussions with many Church members lead us to believe most of them support the Iowa Annual Conference's stands against gambling and for racial equality. On many other issues, we don't know whether most Iowa United Methodists would support the official stance.

**When you are lobbied in the name of the Iowa United Methodist Church, we respectfully suggest:**

1. **Ask the lobbyist to show you the Iowa Annual Conference resolution on this issue.**
2. **Remember: even if the Iowa Annual Conference has officially adopted a position, it may or may not represent the beliefs of a majority of Iowa United Methodists.**
3. **The best test is to talk with United Methodist Church members in your own district and ask whether they agree with the lobbyist's position.**

Thank you for considering this information.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
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