

METHODIST LAITY REFORM MOVEMENT

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

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March 19, 2005

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.

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

- 1. Ask the lobbyist to show you the official United Methodist resolution on this issue.**
- 2. Church resolutions (Iowa or national) may or may not represent the beliefs of a majority of Iowa United Methodists.**
- 3. The best test is to talk with United Methodists in your own district and ask whether they agree with the lobbyist's position.**

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 the beliefs of most Iowa United Methodists. We believe they are sincere in all they do, and they are convinced the positions they take are correct 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 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 **5 of many** examples (as of March 19):

- FOR HF 130, a bill to require state universities and community colleges to give Iowa resident tuition status to some illegal aliens.

- FOR SSB 1171, a bill to allow foreign nationals, including illegal aliens, to obtain an Iowa driver's license even though the person has no social security number or taxpayer ID number.
- FOR HF 307, a bill to license and regulate title loan lenders.
- AGAINST SF 43 and HF 56, bills to allow a sales tax exemption for sales of precious metals and rare coins to dealers in those items.
- AGAINST HF 376, a bill to require that state family planning grant funds (including federal funds distributed by the state) shall not be used for abortion. (An IAC resolution says "we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures for all persons regardless of economic status; and we oppose abortion for convenience, as a means of birth control and as a means of gender selection." The resolution does not mention use of state or federal funds for abortion.)

The current *Book of Resolutions* **does not state any position on any of these 5 issues.** We believe most of these are issues on which there is no clear Christian position, honest Christians may disagree, and the Church should not take sides.

Are there more reasons why Church resolutions and the paid lobbyist may not reflect the views of most Iowa United Methodists? Yes.

- Most Iowa United Methodists have never seen the *Book of Resolutions*.
- The lobbyist sometimes relies on the (national) *Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*. That 970-page book has much vague language that can be interpreted in many ways. The Iowa Annual Conference has **not** voted on those resolutions. Most of them were hastily adopted by the UMC General Conference with no debate.
- The Iowa 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.
- 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 those 36 resolutions were controversial. **No debate, discussion, or amendment was allowed.** We support the IAC's current effort to make the resolutions process fairer; but more than half of all current resolutions were hastily, unfairly adopted.
- The Iowa Annual Conference complies with Church rules but does not fairly represent its people. Clergy get half the votes; laity get half. Yet our Iowa Church has 195,877 laity and 1,081 clergy (recent totals). One clergy can outvote 181 laity. Also, the Local Church nomination process often selects an IAC Lay Member who echoes the Pastor.

We don't question the legality of these Church actions. We question their wisdom and fairness.

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. **We encourage you to ask the opinions of United Methodists in your district.**

Thank you for considering this information.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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