

# Private: Petition # CC – 2 | Corporate Personhood

## **Sponsor/Spokesperson \***

Jonathan Tong

## **PNWUMC Organization being Represented (if applicable)**

PNW Board of Church and Society

## **This resolution is (select one) \***

- **A new resolution**
- A renewal of an existing resolution (no or minor revisions)
- A major revision of an existing resolution
- A replacement of an existing resolution (rewritten)

## **The Proposed Resolution or Action**

The Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church endorses Initiative 1329, which allows the people of Washington State to call for amending the U.S. Constitution to clarify that:

1. The rights of people protected by the Constitution of the United States are the rights of human beings only.
2. All citizens should have equal voice in the political process, and no person or artificial legal entity should gain undue influence over government as a result of financial resources. To meet this goal, federal, state, and local governments shall be fully empowered to regulate all political contributions and expenditures.
3. All political contributions and expenditures shall be publicly disclosed in a full and timely manner.

## **How will it be carried out? By Whom?**

The Annual Conference will endorse and publicize the endorsement to the larger community. Churches throughout the conference are encouraged to study the problem of how our elections and government policy making have been corrupted by the influence of money from corporations, special interest groups, and very wealthy individuals –on both ends of the political spectrum. Social justice committees are encouraged to obtain copies of petition sheets and make them available to members of their congregations who wish to support this initiative. If the initiative receives enough signatures to qualify for the November ballot, then churches in Washington State are encouraged to let their congregations know about the

measure and make information available for those who wish to learn more about it.

### **Does the resolution have a financial request or implication? \***

No

### **What will this action accomplish?**

This is a non-binding resolution that, if passed, would have no actual effect on the U.S. Constitution or any federal or state law. It would simply make Washington the seventeenth state to call for such a Constitutional amendment. The other sixteen states are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia.

One of the main objectives of I-1329 is to raise awareness of the problems posed by “corporate personhood”—the granting of human rights to non-human legal entities –and to build the grassroots support needed to take reasonable actions to fix these problems. Simply providing opportunities for meaningful dialogue about the problems is critical, even if people disagree with the proposed solution.

WAmend is a coalition of over sixty organizations — both secular and faith based — working to put I-1329 on the November 2014 ballot in Washington State. Volunteers are currently working to gather the 250,000 valid petition signatures needed to qualify for ballot. Deadline for submission of signatures is July 3, 2014.

If adopted, this resolution will enable the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church to join the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ in supporting I-1329. Adding the support of these two large mainline Christian denominations will do much to prevent this issue from being politicized and split along typical partisan lines. The problem of money corruption in our elections is not a political issue, nor is it a liberal/conservative Democrat/Republican issue. It is a moral issue about the character of our country that transcends the usual partisan divisions that prevent concerned citizens from working together for the common good. Endorsements from these two denominations will also encourage the conferences of other denominations to do follow our example.

### **Why is it important?**

According to the Bible, being created in the image and likeness of God carries with it a unique covenantal relationship with the Creator –the Source of all life and love. If humans are to love God then they must love each other, for the image and likeness of God is within all human persons.

Genesis 1:27: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and

female he created them. Matthew 22:36-40: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The granting of rights such as those cited in our U.S. Constitution can easily be seen as an extension of that imperative to love others as we do ourselves. But to extend those same human rights to non-human legal entities makes a mockery of these Biblical commandments. Corporations are not persons, nor do they have souls. They are not created in the image of God, nor are they called to embody the love of God. Moreover, the profit-making objectives of large corporations are frequently at odds with the best interests of ordinary citizens and communities.

According to the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, we are obligated to affirm the value of each person both as a child of God and as a citizen in our democratic society (underlining added for emphasis):

- “We hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to free and fair elections.... The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. (The Political Community, sections A and B)
- “We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened.” (The Social Community, introduction)
- The Supreme Court’s *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010) ruling overturned longstanding precedent giving Congress the authority to limit the amount of money spent by corporations, special interest groups, and wealthy individuals on political campaigns. Special interest groups — both liberal and conservative — spent more money in the 2012 elections than in the previous three elections combined. In allowing corporations and wealthy individuals to flood the airwaves with negative political ads, we have jeopardized the democracy we hold dear. How can the voices and concerns of ordinary citizens be heard if they do not have the money to compete with corporations and the wealthiest few?
- The Church is obligated to act as the conscience of the state. This means standing beside the least among us, and helping ensure that governments respond to the needs of ALL citizens, not just those individuals and special interest groups that contribute the most money to re-election campaigns.

## **Signatories to the Resolution**

- Jonathan Tong

- Ann Eachus, Bothell UMC
- Rev. Sharon Moe, Tacoma District Superintendent
- Rev. Emily McNeill, Parkland UMC
- Michael Collier
- Rev. Rich Lang, University Temple UMC
- Rev. Sandy Brown, Seattle First UMC
- Rev. Katie Klosterman, Orting UMC
- Rev. Monica Corsaro, Rainier Beach UMC
- Rev. Derek Nakano, Blaine Memorial UMC
- Rev. Lara Bolger, Blaine Memorial UMC
- Nathan Klosterman, Orting UMC
- Miriam Tong
- Dale Kaneko
- Sumiko Yoshioka
- Yoshiko Sakuragi
- Nadine Miyahara
- Jerry Lee
- Sam Mitsui
- Joey Ing
- Stephen Sumida, Blaine Memorial UMC
- Ronald Odama
- Marilyn Odama
- Marianne Tada
- Frank Tanagi
- Jerry Ikegami
- Pam Ikegami
- Bruce Yamamoto