

Court rules Methodist agency in D.C. is not limited in advocacy

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Officials working in the United Methodist Building, located on Capitol Hill, are not limited to advocacy on temperance-related issues, a District of Columbia Superior Court judge has ruled.

Judge Rhonda Reid Winston said October 6 that she found "clear and convincing evidence" that donations to the predecessor agencies of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society "were not restricted solely" to issues of alcoholism and temperance.

At stake was about \$1 million in annual revenue from rental fees and endowment funds, Jim Winkler, the board's chief executive, told United Methodist News Service. Winkler said suspicion of "misuse" had hung over the agency for a decade. The judge said evidence showed that throughout many years the Methodist boards "were authorized to, and did, perform work on other 'public morals' issues."

A coalition of three conservative renewal groups—Good News, the Institute on Religion and Democracy and the Confessing Movement—had supported intervenors in the case, which went to trial in October 2008.

Rob Renfro, a Houston pastor who is publisher of *Good News* magazine, told the Methodist news service that the groups were undecided whether to appeal the ruling. Renfro said he found it difficult to believe that original donors for the purchase of the Methodist building would have thought their money would one day be used "to lobby for abortion rights or a particular health-care plan."