

UCC head responds to attacks on Obama's church: Chicago congregation is UCC's largest

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Efforts to portray the Chicago church of which Senator Barack Obama is a member as racist and anti-American are "absurd, mean-spirited and politically motivated," said John Thomas, head of the United Church of Christ.

Thomas, the denomination's general minister and president, said that since Obama won the Iowa caucuses on January 3, "countless e-mails . . . meant to undermine the integrity of Trinity UCC" have flooded the UCC's national offices in Cleveland.

Obama, a leading Democratic candidate for president, joined Trinity 20 years ago. He has praised the church's commitment to God and the black community and its commitment to the black work ethic.

Trinity and its senior pastor, Jeremiah A. Wright, have been criticized by conservatives who disparage their commitment to Africa and to black empowerment. The church's motto is "Unashamedly Black, Unapologetically Christian."

Pastor Otis Moss III says the innuendos and smears, including claims that Obama is a secret Muslim, have overwhelmed the congregation's e-mail box and phone lines.

One circulating e-mail suggests that Trinity UCC does not accept nonblack members, a claim the church says is demonstrably false. "Not only does Trinity not exclude anyone from membership or attendance based on ethnicity but . . . the conference minister of the Illinois Conference of the UCC (Jane Fisler Hoffman) and her husband (both white) are members of Trinity," a statement from Trinity said.

Thomas said the Chicago congregation is the UCC's largest, with 8,000 members, and it is also the largest donor to the church's national and international missions. "Contrary to the claims made in these hateful e-mails, UCC members know Trinity to

be one of the most welcoming, hospitable and generous congregations in our denomination," Thomas said. -*Religion News Service*