

U.S. SUPREME COURT ABORTION RULING

While the U.S. Supreme Court in its ruling July 3 did not overturn the landmark 1973 decisions giving women the legal right to an abortion, United Methodists on both sides of the issue voiced strong sentiments on what the ruling means for women and the United Methodist church.

The Supreme Court turned the clock back 20 years on a woman's right to choose, said the Rev. Thom White Wolf Fassett, general secretary of the denomination's Board of Church and Society. He denounced the court's ruling on Webster v. Reproductive Services, calling key provisions a weakening of Roe v. Wade and "intentional efforts to control women and their reproductive rights."

The burden of these provisions, he said, will fall most heavily on poor minority women who often rely on public hospitals as the primary source of health care and abortions. "The rulings are highly discriminatory," he added.

One of the key rulings in the Webster case prohibits public hospitals' performing abortions not necessary to save life, even if no public funds are used.

Public employees, including doctors, nurses and other health-care providers, are banned from performing or assisting an abortion not necessary to save a woman's life. The high court also said medical tests must be performed on any fetus thought to be 20 weeks old to determine viability.

According to Ellen Kirby, assistant general secretary of the Secretary of Christian Social Relations of women's Division of the denomination's board of Global Ministries, allowing states to regulate their own abortion laws "provokes a patchwork quilt of expense and hardship of travel in search of health care."

She said the division will step up educational and action strategies

within states and with conference leaders "to support the availability of safe and legal medical care for all women."

Overturing Roe v. Wade would have been a "simplistic move," by the Supreme Court, said J. Robert Nelson, director of the Institute of Religion, Texas Medical Center, Houston, and a United Methodist layman. Following the decision, Mr. Nelson, an ecumenist and theologian, expressed surprise at the court's decision to shift "so much power to the states."

"It will no doubt be a confusing situation for the state legislatures because it puts the responsibility of making moral decisions in their hand," he said, referring to the new responsibility states will have in defining a fetus a human being at the moment of conception. The question of when life begins is a matter that even the religious community has yet to interpret.

Mr. Fassett said he blames the Supreme Court for "sidestepping its moral responsibility" by leaving the decision of limiting abortions up to the state. Determining when life begins "is out of the domain of state legislators," he added.

Their doing so, he said, is to pit one "communion, religious community or religious philosophy over the other."

But according to James Heidinger, executive director of Good News, an evangelical caucus, the high court's decision to allow states to regulate abortion is consistent with the church's Social Principles, which denounce abortion on demand.

But while the United Methodist Church is sending out the right signal on abortion, he said, "it has not made any attempts to reinforce its position." Mr. Heidinger hailed the court's decision as "a clearly positive one for anti-abortion advocates."

Whether or not the Supreme Court

overturned or affirmed Roe v. Wade mattered little to United Methodist layman Steven Wissler, Ephrata, Pa., director of the Task Force of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality. He said the mission of the two-year-old task force continues to be "awakening

United Methodists...helping the church deal with its inability to minister to the people in our pro-abortion society."

The Webster decision, Mr. Wissler said, "will put more pressure on the United Methodist Church to do what it should have been doing all along—ministering to and supporting women, so they do not have to choose the abortion option...a death option."

The Methodist Church, he said, has been wrapped up in the political side of the abortion issue. "That debate has smothered any attempts to address abortion as a real life spiritual issue."

The denomination's official statement on abortion supports "the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures" if "justif(ied) by the tragic conflicts of life." Abortion as a form of birth control is condemned.

Mr. Fassett called that statement weak because it "assumes that those making a decision on abortion are Christian or are guided spiritually. The world can read us as condoning abortion," he added.

Justice Harry A. Blackmun, a United Methodist layman and author of the Roe v. Wade opinion, in an impassioned dissent said the court "implicitly invites every state legislature to enact more restrictive abortion regulations...to provoke more and more test cases, in hope that sometime...the court will return the law of procreative freedom to the severe limitations that generally prevailed in this country before Jan. 22, 1973." The Roe v. Wade was issued.

Kemp Announces \$89.2 Million In Grants For Transitional Housing For The Homeless

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Jack Kemp today announced that HUD is awarding a total of \$89.2 million in grants for the Transitional Housing Demonstration Program. The grants will enable private non-profit and governmental sponsors to develop 131 projects nationwide for homeless people capable of making the transition to independent living.

Secretary Kemp said: "President Bush and I want to help end the tragedy of homelessness, and pave the way to housing, job training, education and opportunity for the future. The Transitional Housing Program, which is part of the McKinney Act, will help achieve this goal. President Bush and I have called for full funding of this and other McKinney Act programs in the fiscal 1990 budget."

The \$89.2 million in funding, the fourth round of funding for the Transitional Housing program since the McKinney Act was signed, includes \$35.6 million in grants for 57 projects for homeless families with children, \$25.2 million for 30 projects for the mentally handicapped, and \$28.4 million for 44 projects for other homeless. HUD received a total of 399 applications for this round, with grant requests totaling \$290 million; 131 of the 201 projects deemed approvable are being funded.

Secretary Kemp Stops Flawed Land Development Program

Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Jack Kemp announced today his intention to terminate the Title X Land Development Mortgage Insurance Program, a program which authorized HUD to insure mortgages and finance development of building sites, but is riddled with abuse. About 50 percent of all approved loans under the program have defaulted, at a cost of \$90 million to the government.

Upon thorough review of Title X, Secretary Kemp has chosen to publish a proposed rule to terminate the program due to the enormity of the losses incurred, high patterns of abuse, and the failure of the program to benefit the needy. Of the 58 loans insured under the Title X program since 1977—valued at approximately \$500 million—25 have defaulted. The Department estimates losses on defaults to date to be approximately \$90 million.

Secretary Kemp directed an examination of the program and issued a directive to reform the program in April, 1989. As a result of initial findings, he requested that the Office of Inspector General audit the entire program; investigate related consultant activity; and examine the circumstances surrounding the processing of a loan for one of the recently approved developments, McNair Farms.

"I promised to root out every occurrence of inefficiency, misuse of government monies, and fraud in the Department of Housing and Urban Development," Kemp said. "This is another step in meeting the reform agenda that President Bush and I have proposed for HUD."

Secretary Kemp also announced that all Title X projects now under consideration, but which have not received a legally binding commitment, will be frozen and all application fees returned. Further, all projects that have received firm commitments and initial endorsements will be examined to determine whether fraud or misrepresentation warrant the denial of government insurance.

Publication Helps Address Racism On Campus

Racial incidents are on the rise on the nation's campuses but a new book, How to Sponsor a Minority Cultural Retreat offers a unique approach in getting White and Minority students talking to each other.

Ethnic courses, anti-racist policies are traditional strategies used by campus administrators to broaden student awareness but according to author, Dr. Charles Taylor, "these approaches while needed usually end up talking at students or dictating behavior from the topdown with limited student input."

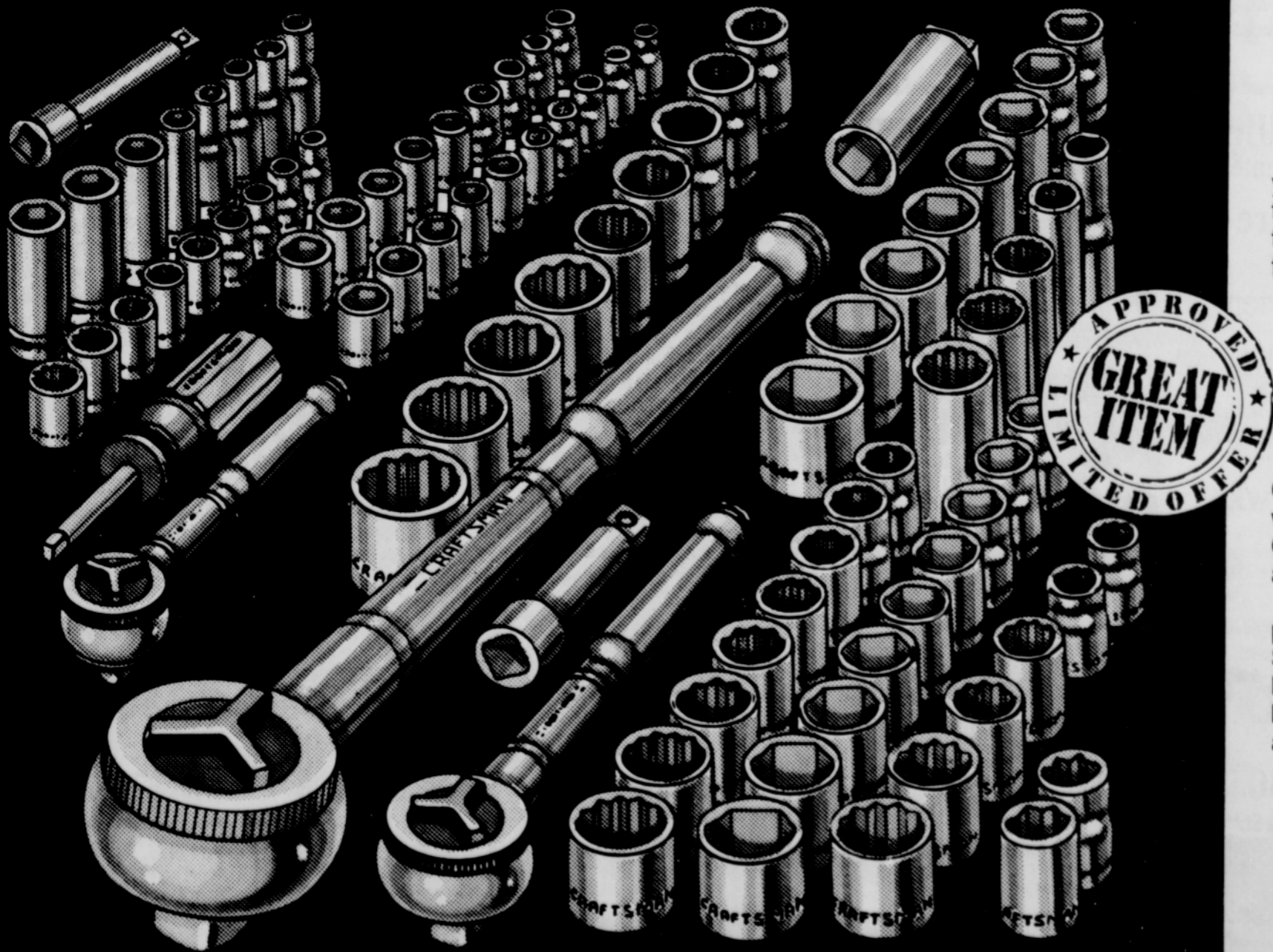
"What's missing," says Taylor "is personal interaction". A Minority cultural retreat provides this personal contact by creating an environment for Minority and White students to communicate about cultural and racial issues in a secluded setting that is free of major distractions. Students are able to discuss, debate, and contribute in ways that may help them discover, share and broaden their awareness of themselves and understand the importance of opposing racism.

Through structured activities, speakers and small discussion groups, students focus on objectives which challenge their beliefs and allows them to actually experience Minority culture. Comments like "I Had no idea..." are common during the retreat. Even "free time" serves an important purpose because participants are required to spend half of it with someone of a different race.

When students return to campus they usually end up more energized and willing to work against racism throughout the year. That's why many people hail the Minority cultural retreat as the human relations activity for the 90's.

This new updated publication How to Sponsor a Minority Cultural Retreat allows campuses to duplicate a successful retreat. The book features an actual agenda, human relation type activities that get people communicating and a resource chapter that includes films, videos, ethnic food, cultural test—nearly everything needed to plan your retreat.

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