

**PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT**  
***“Distribution of Obsession DVD”***  
**September 25, 2008**

My name is Bishop Bruce R. Ough. I am the episcopal leader of the West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church. As bishop of this area, I oversee and represent nearly 1,200 United Methodist congregations in 58 Ohio counties.

United Methodists in Ohio, like United Methodists around the world, embrace a core set of values and spiritual practices handed down to us from John Wesley, the founder of our evangelical, spiritual and social holiness movement. These core values are:

- Do no harm,
- Do good, and
- Stay in love with God.

This way of living is the foundation for our prophetic witness and our acts of compassion, love and mercy.

This way of living – doing no harm, doing good and staying in love with God – is incompatible with the deplorable DVD entitled “Obsession:Radical Islam’s War Against the West” and its disingenuous distribution in the midst of a national political campaign.

There are times when a prophetic response is called for. There are times when all United Methodists need to draw upon our faith tradition and experience to name the harm that is being done to our neighbors and to call our community, nation and the world to be about doing all the good we can. I believe now is such a time.

The “Obsession” DVD arrived in our community as a supplement with the September 14, 2008 Sunday morning *Columbus Dispatch*. Twenty-eight million free copies have been distributed in swing states through other newspapers around the country and through direct mail. Thankfully, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* refused to distribute the DVD. The film links Islamic radicalism with pictures of Hitler and mass rallies of his Nazi followers.

The film begins with the simple statement; “It is important to remember that most Muslims are peaceful and do not support terror.” The film ends with a similar statement. However, in between these two statements the film stokes the fear of Islam, asserting, among other things, that 10% to 15% of Muslims are “radicals” or supports of terror, and providing frightening clips of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, and men, women and children killed and wounded by other terrorist attacks. The effect, clearly intended by its producers and distributors, is to promote fear of Muslims and dark suspicions about Islam.

This is a time when persons of faith and other persons of conscience need to oppose, with clarion voice, stereotyping and demonizing of people. This is a time to ask purveyors of prejudice, “Have you no shame?” This is a time to call our community to do no further harm to our neighbors, near and far.

Our United Methodist position is clear and unequivocal. Our Social Principles state: “We condemn all overt and covert forms of religious intolerance, being especially sensitive to their expression in media stereotyping. We assert the right of all religions and their adherents to freedom from legal, economic and social discrimination.” (Paragraph 162.b, pages 105-106, The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2004)

Of course, people are afraid. Of course, we fear those we think will do us harm, particularly people we don’t know and people with different cultural traditions. Of course, we need to have compassion for all who live in fear. “Obsession” is not simply a matter of “free speech,” as its producers and distributors quickly claim. “Obsession” is also a vehicle of hate speech. This is dangerous, inciting speech in a world where we want to lay blame for our fear at the door of people who are different from us.

At the core of Christianity and the other major religions of the world, including Islam, is the often difficult, even costly, love of neighbor. This incorporates compassion for all, including the fearful, the stranger and those whom we may call “enemy.” As someone once said, “It is that simple; it is that important; it is that difficult.”

I call upon all United Methodists, all persons of faith and all citizens of Columbus and Ohio to the costly, but life-giving, love of standing against the spread of hate, prejudice and fear and with our Muslim brothers and sisters. Now is the time to do no harm, to do good and to stay in love with God and neighbor.

**Bishop Bruce R. Ough**  
**West Ohio Conference**  
**The United Methodist Church**

