

The LIGHT

One Nation, Many Faiths

Summer 2006

TIA Activists, Religious Leaders Advise Congress: We Will Define Marriage for Ourselves

By **Preetmohan Singh**, Senior Policy Analyst
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Thanks to thousands of The Interfaith Alliance (TIA) members like you, religious liberty was once again preserved when the U.S. Senate rejected the Federal Marriage Amendment on June 7; a measure that would have imposed one narrow religious definition of marriage on all Americans. For the second time in two years, the radical Religious Right's attempt to write discrimination into the U.S. Constitution was rebuffed, as the Senate fell well short of the two-thirds majority needed to pass the divisive legislation.

The proposed amendment, misleadingly coined the "Marriage Protection Amendment" by the Religious Right, would have disenfranchised committed gay and lesbian couples by restricting the definition of marriage to a union between a man and a



Rabbi Craig Axler of The Interfaith Alliance of Southeast Pennsylvania (left) asks Senators to preserve religious liberty by opposing the FMA. He spoke at a Capitol Hill press conference with other members of the Clergy for Fairness coalition (top right), which garnered national media attention. TIA activists from Arizona, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania debrief after meeting with their members of Congress (bottom right).

woman. For the first time in American history, a constitutional amendment would restrict the rights of a specific group or class of people. As a federal matter, it would supersede any state-level judicial rulings or legislative actions regarding marital law.

The message to protect religious liberty and respect pluralism was delivered loud and clear during a May 22 grassroots activist "fly-in" to Washington, D.C. TIA leaders from several Local Alliances including Arkansas, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania, joined more than 30 religious leaders representing the ad-hoc coalition *Clergy for Fairness*. The activists held lobby visits with Senators' offices and engaged

"Our grassroots activists helped stop this amendment. More than 5,000 members of The Interfaith Alliance contacted their Senators by e-mail, phone call, fax, or letter telling them to stay out of houses of worship for the sake of religion and the institution of marriage."

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy
 President of TIA

Continued page 7

Contents

From the President's Desk	2
Field Report: TIA Long Island	3
Interfaith Leader in Action: Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon	4
Policy Alert: TIA Helps Block FMA	4
2006 Election Year Program	5
A Message from the Summer Interns	6
Save the Date: 2006 Cronkite Faith & Freedom Award Gala	7

The *Real* War on Christians Tell Your Denomination: Beware of the IRD

Dear Friends of The Interfaith Alliance,

Religious Right leaders often call on their troops to defend their faith against a “war on Christians,” which they portray as a secularist conspiracy to remove religion from the public square. In our marvelously diverse and multi-faith nation, some unfortunately assert that only *their* faith counts. They claim to be persecuted by “anti-Christians” who don’t support their aggressive political and social agenda. Among their targets are judges, educators, reporters, scientists, voters, elected officials, retailers, and especially other religious leaders and organizations, including major Christian denominations. Bottom line: their idea of religious freedom protects their religion but not yours.

In fact, there is a real war being waged against Christianity. Flying under the radar, partisan, political organizations and well-funded think tanks—in league with those same Religious Right leaders—are attempting a hostile takeover of mainline Christianity. In some cases, they use CIA-style tactics to undermine, destabilize, and overthrow denominations.

On the May 21 *State of Belief*, our weekly program on Air America Radio, I interviewed a panel of religious leaders who have been chronicling this covert campaign. United Methodist Pastor Dr. Andrew Weaver has traced the crusade against mainline Protestantism

largely to the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), an ultra-conservative think tank. Weaver said the IRD and so-called religious “renewal” groups are funneling money in “a systematic effort to undermine mainline churches that still

have democratic, transparent processes.” The problem in countering these efforts, he said, is that mainline churches “have niceness at the core; while we’ve been thinking it’s touch football, they’ve been playing tackle.”

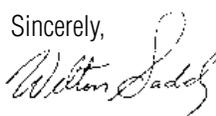
Although the IRD board and staff are mostly from other denominations, they specifically monitor and target the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Episcopal Church. Similar attacks are being waged against other denominations in many of the world’s religions by fundamentalist and literalist interpreters of scriptures. Their strategy is to keep mainline religious groups in turmoil over wedge issues such as gay marriage, said Dr. Bruce Prescott, who, like me, is a veteran of the purges that marked the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention.

“What the politically motivated achieve is the silence of the religious-conscience voice that has historically led this country,” said Dr. John Dorhauer of the United Church of Christ. “If you take out the 45 million people that are represented by the National Council of Churches, you are going to hollow out one of the cores of our nation’s democracy.”

While TIA often works to protect minority faith traditions, in this case we’re calling on you—our members and all who believe in religious liberty—to become aware of these dubious attempts to undermine denominations within America’s majority religion. Ideological corruption of a house of worship anywhere is a threat to the integrity of houses of worship everywhere.

If you haven’t listened to the May 21 *State of Belief*, you can hear it at www.stateofbelief.org. Also, please use the enclosed envelope or visit www.interfaithalliance.org to join TIA or support our work. Together we will protect the sanctity of religion from political exploitation and protect our democracy from sectarian manipulation.

Sincerely,



Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy
President



Ask
Shayla

By **Shayla Ellison**, Member Services Associate
tiamemberservices@interfaithalliance.org

Get informed... Get active... And make your voice heard! We value your dedication, passion, and contributions as TIA supporters. And as your Member Services Associate, I hope the following Q&A will resolve any issues or concerns you may have about your membership.

I haven’t heard from TIA on certain “hot topics” in the media. Why?

Many recent activities are posted online at www.interfaithalliance.org or are sent to members in our weekly e-mail alerts. If you’re not online, you can hear Welton discuss them on *State of Belief*, our new weekly Air America Radio show. For recent legislative actions, exciting projects like our Vote 2006 Election Year Program, information on the new First Freedom First campaign, and our LEADD summer youth camp, visit our website or call me today.

Is there a Local Alliance or activist group in Chicago?

Yes, there is. And there are 46 other Local Alliances—75 TIA activist groups in all, across the United States. If you are interested in joining or starting a local group, please contact Shantá Gray via field@interfaithalliance.org or (800)510-0969 x119 for more information.

You deduct \$10 per month from my checking account/credit card for Torchbearers. How do I suspend or cancel my monthly giving or update my account information?

For all Torchbearer inquiries, call me on the Torchbearer Hotline at (800)856-0277. I will make any necessary changes to your account. (Please note: the deadline for adjustments is the 13th of each month.)

My *One Nation, Many Faiths* bumper sticker was destroyed in the car wash/vandalized. Can you send me a new one?

Yes, we’d be happy to. You can call, write, or e-mail me and we will mail you a new bumper sticker in 2–4 weeks.

Raising Interfaith Voices: Putting Faith into Action with TIA Long Island



In His Words

I remember being 10 years old at a protest with my parents in the very early days of Vietnam. We

waved American flags as people cursed and screamed at us. As I grew up, religious people—Catholics and Protestants, Jews, Humanists, and Unitarians—were the people who stood up for the outcast and the stranger, the ones who came home from the freedom rides with stories of the civil rights movement. Interfaith work came naturally to me, as someone who was raised in a very religiously diverse community by deeply committed Christian parents who saw their faith as a way to advance justice and peace.

And so, I understood the Religious Right not only as a threat to democracy, but as an outrage to my faith. I was horrified that the message of Jesus Christ and the gospels, the faith of Dr. King and of my parents, could be twisted into a weapon of hate and cultural domination.

I met the people from TIA Long Island shortly after moving here in 1998, and I was inspired by their commitment to an America that is free and respectful of all people. I especially admired their willingness to put themselves on the line to protect it. This is the defining struggle, I believe, of my life as a Christian and an American—and the really great thing about great struggles are the extraordinary people standing beside you.

—Rev. Mark J. Lukens, O.C.C.

By **Jenny Davis**, Deputy Field Director
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In a large social hall in Manhasset, more than 30 activists gathered for a meeting of The Interfaith Alliance Long Island Chapter (TIA Long Island). The group weighed in on the most pressing issues facing their community. What followed was exemplary of how to engage a local community on issues of religious liberty and pluralism.

From fighting the Federal Marriage Amendment to opposing “Intelligent Design” and state-mandated prayer in public schools, all voices were heard and all positions were discussed. Plans for action around some of the issues were put into place.

Some members of the group were asked to call their state representatives; others were tasked with writing letters to the editor for the local newspaper. The group mobilized volunteers to attend a rally for peace, and is currently planning a *Faith & Freedom* event that will focus on issues of religious liberty in the 2006 elections. An activist workshop later this summer will train new members on political strategy as well as messaging for TIA Long Island.

Asked why he became involved, activist Will Baker said, “I don’t want to have concerns and not do anything about them, so that’s why I’m staying involved.” Perhaps this is why TIA Long Island continues to prosper, now 10 years strong. Under the leadership of the Rev. Mark J. Lukens,

O.C.C., the group has protected religious freedom, cared for the needy, fought for quality education for all children, and countered the manipulation of religion in political campaigns.

TIA Long Island inspires its activists to protect the freedoms that grow a healthy, pluralistic democracy. If you would like to make a difference in your community, please contact the national field office via field@interfaithalliance.org.

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Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon Unites through Faith

By **Jon Niven**, Media Relations Associate
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Jane Holmes Dixon goes by many names. Friend, mother, daughter, and wife are just a few of them. Here at The Interfaith Alliance, we fondly know her as Bishop.

The Right Reverend recently assumed a new title as Senior Advisor for Inter-Religious Affairs at TIA's national office. Dixon's extensive experience and leadership within her own faith tradition greatly enhances TIA's expertise, credibility, and influence in the national interfaith movement.

Dixon was ordained priest in the Episcopal Church in 1982 and began her service in congregations across Virginia. In 1986, Dixon became the second female



bishop ever elected in the Episcopal Church, serving the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C.

"I have been blessed to work with so many wonderful people and organizations over the years," said Dixon. "The landscape of religion is very different now than it was when I first joined the ministry. We need to find a way to bring the world's religions to the table for the common good of peace and happiness."

While many people go through life without the opportunity to meet one of their heroes, Dixon had her chance when President Bush invited her to lead an interfaith prayer service following the September 11 terrorist attacks. There, at the National Cathedral, she met the influential Rev. Billy Graham. Dixon told him how his preaching had touched her life and how he had made an amazing impression on her from the time she

attended one of his 1950s revivals in Memphis, Tennessee.

"When the service was over and people had left, I went up to him and asked if I could hug him," said Dixon. "Rev. Graham said 'yes' and I gave him a big hug. After that, he told me he had never been hugged by a bishop before, but he could tell I was *his* kind of bishop. That was one of the nicest compliments I've ever received."

Another source of inspiration for Dixon comes from old-fashioned rock-and-roll. She proudly claims the title "Best Dancer in the Mississippi Delta" and says one of her favorite songs is "Can't Help Myself" by the Four Tops.

Dixon has served as chair of TIA's Board of Directors and was named "Washingtonian of the Year" in 2001 by *Washingtonian Magazine* for her work promoting healing, interfaith dialogue, and unity after 9/11.

Send Bishop Dixon a message welcoming her to TIA at jholmesdixon@interfaithalliance.org.

POLICY ALERT

TIA Helps Block FMA Passage

Federal Marriage Amendment Fails in Senate; House Vote Expected Before Election Day

By **Anne Sclater**, Policy and Voter Ed. Associate
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Efforts by The Interfaith Alliance and its coalition partners to block the Senate passage of the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) showed great success as the measure failed 49–48 in a June 7 procedural vote.

But the FMA is still alive in the House, although no further legislative action is expected until late summer—"coincidentally" timed to motivate conservative voters just before the November 7 midterm elections. Though the FMA will not draw enough support to pass this year, its proponents will

continue to use the proposed amendment as a rallying point that conjures a frenzy of political action among religious conservatives.

With congressional elections just a few months away, it's more important than ever for people of faith and good will to maintain opposition to the FMA. We must tell our elected officials that people of faith differ greatly on this issue, and that not all religious Americans support this legislation.

Because our members come from a broad cross-section of faith traditions (and some from no faith tradition at all), The Interfaith Alliance does not take a position either for or against same-sex marriage.

At the same time, however, TIA strongly opposes any attempts to amend the U.S. Constitution to define marriage on a federal level. While TIA members have varying opinions on the topic of same-sex marriage, we find common ground in the idea that it is wrong to turn a meaningful religious ritual into a well-timed political football.

The FMA would also impose one religion's definition of marriage on all other religious bodies in the nation. Rather than allowing individual houses of worship to set their own criteria for this important

Continued page 5

TIA'S 2006 ELECTION YEAR PROGRAM

Guidance from people who value the power of politics and integrity of religion

Religion plays a vital role in our communities and inspires political action and patriotism. Although religious beliefs can and should impact American politics, religion's influence on politics and politics' influence on religion warrant close scrutiny. More and more, religion is being employed as a tool to influence policy and advance political strategy. And increasingly, one strident voice is drowning out all others.

Americans' shared values are being compromised in order to promote an agenda that only advances particular sectarian interests. Religion's powerful healing force is being severely diminished by those who

manipulate faith to win elections and pass divisive legislation.

America's vast diversity strengthens our democracy. And religion has the potential to elicit respect and facilitate understanding across faith traditions and belief systems. Real solutions for the problems addressing our nation will only come when people who represent and appreciate that diversity are included and respected in the public dialogue.

The Interfaith Alliance, as an effective and inclusive faith-based voice that America wants and needs, produces publications for political candidates, religious leaders, congregants, and the media in order to illustrate a healthy (and legal) relationship between religion and government.

Religion & Politics: Running for Office in a Multi-Faith Nation

This resource advises political candidates on...

- Using religion for personal strength;
- Respecting all religions publicly;
- Manipulating religion for partisan political purposes; and
- Misusing religion as a strategy for winning elections.

One Nation, Many Faiths.
V★TE 2006



Religion & Politics: A Campaign Season Guide for Houses of Worship

This resource helps clergy and spiritual leaders understand...

- The importance of encouraging their members to register and vote.
- Never tell congregants *whom* to vote for.
- A partnership between religion and government should preserve the autonomy of houses of worship and ensure that religious institutions are not held to the priorities and interests of federal, state, or local governments.
- Religion's power to heal our nation is severely compromised when Americans' shared values are replaced by partisan or sectarian interests.

To download these publications or to order copies, please visit www.interfaithalliance.org/elections.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY NEWS Delivered to Your Inbox Every Friday

TIA's *Media Roundup* is your one-stop source for the week's essential and urgent news stories at the intersection of religion and politics. TIA staff members search hundreds of publications—everything from national daily newspapers to local weekly papers to cable news outlets—so you can stay informed on how religion and politics are being talked about, written about, and reported on. Sign up today and view archived editions at www.interfaithalliance.org/mediaroundup.



FMA Fails in Senate

from page 4

ceremony, it would implement one faith's definition of marriage and family as civil law.

Not only would the FMA ignore the nation's great religious diversity, it would chip away at the bedrock of church/state separation on which this country was founded.

Many denominations and faith groups are currently holding serious and difficult internal conversations about the definitions of marriage and family. A constitutional amendment like the FMA would stifle those conversations, rendering moot the dialogue that faith traditions are now having to navigate their own systems of ritual, belief, and practice.

Efforts of TIA members to fight the passage of the FMA in the Senate were a success. Stay tuned for more information on how to oppose the measure when it resurfaces in the House later this year. Also, go to www.interfaithalliance.org/5ways for TIA President Welton Gaddy's suggestions on how to *really* protect marriage and religious freedom.

A Message from TIA's Summer Interns

Although we have come from all over the country with different religious backgrounds, our motive for being here is singular. We strongly believe that only through open dialogue will true religious freedom, acceptance, and equality be achieved. Through our work at TIA, we will put our faith and values into action by taking a stand against religious bigotry and discrimination in our internships this summer.

Drawn to TIA by its resonant call for active, informed civic participation, we know—as the next generation of leaders—the importance of emphasizing and exercising this in our daily lives. As summer interns, we've already had privileged access to several press conferences and lobby visits with members of Congress,



2006 summer interns (from left to right) Xavier Ringer, Marielisa Teran, Lora East, Shereen Zaid, Meghan Hoffman, and Raul Arce visit the White House.

and even joined with other staff at like-minded organizations to speak out against the "Marriage Protection Amendment."

Our internship experience has quickly proven to be of great value and reward

individually. It has been equally inspiring to learn and grow together with other young people who are also concerned about these issues. As interns we've quickly learned that protecting religious liberty affects not only people from minority faith traditions, but the entire nation. As such, we encourage everyone—especially the rising generation of leaders—to join us in the movement to promote religious understanding and protect religious freedom for all Americans.

Know an outstanding undergraduate or graduate student who would be perfect for a TIA internship? Get more information by e-mailing intern@interfaithalliance.org.

I Want My *State of Belief!*

The Interfaith Alliance *Foundation* has been producing *State of Belief*, a national weekly show on Air America Radio about issues at the intersection of religion and politics. TIA President Welton Gaddy has interviewed notable guests such as Walter Cronkite, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), and author of *American Theocracy* Kevin Phillips. We are proud of our work on the show, of the diverse voices we are celebrating, and of the religious liberty issues we are opening up for national



dialogue. And now, we have over 60,000 listeners each week! Want to listen for yourself? To hear it live, or to podcast and download past shows, simply visit www.StateofBelief.com. To listen to the June 11 *Best of State of Belief*, go to www.airamericaradio.com/download, or contact the national TIA office if you'd like your own copy on CD.



Mobilize Your Community to Protect Religious Liberty at Home and Nationwide!



Getting involved with a TIA Local Alliance, Meeting, or Partnership group is a wonderful way to organize other people of faith and good will in your community. Through educational forums, legislative advocacy, or face-to-face meetings with other concerned members of your community, you can make a difference!

Go to www.interfaithalliance.org/getinvolved to find out where your closest local group is located or how to start a group in your area. Or contact Shantá Gray at the national office via field@interfaithalliance.org or (800) 510-0969 x119.

We will provide you with the resources and support needed to get involved locally and nationally on the issues of religious liberty that matter most to you.

One Nation, Many Faiths.
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TIA's Election Year Program (EYP), *One Nation, Many Faiths: Vote 2006* analyzes and interprets the role that religion plays in election-year politics. By providing resources and guidance for clergy, candidates, and voters, the EYP strives to illustrate and guide a healthy relationship between religion and government; one that preserves the autonomy of houses of worship and ensures that religious institutions are not held accountable to the priorities and interests of politicians. We also remind Americans that their personal religious beliefs can and should find public expression through thoughtful involvement in the electoral process.

Join other TIA supporters from your area for a day-long conference promoting the positive and healing role of religion in public life. Sessions include:

- Facilitating community activism
- Challenging religious political extremism
- Encouraging informed civic participation

Defining Marriage

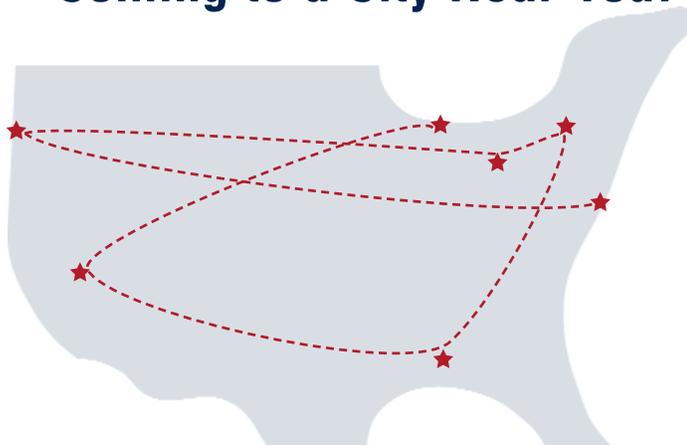
from page 1

the national news media in a press conference on Capitol Hill. Participants left the nation's capital with both the resources and renewed commitment to mobilize more people in their communities around this and other religious liberty issues.

As the Senate vote quickly approached, TIA organized another press conference of high-ranking religious leaders opposed to the amendment at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

TIA members were extremely effective, urging the Senate to defeat this unnecessary and divisive proposed amendment to the Constitution by generating well over 5,000 e-mails, calls, faxes, and letters. Diverse constituents came together to send a strong, unified message that political leaders should never use the Constitution to deny faith

TIA's EYP 2006 Road Show... Coming to a City Near You!



August 22
Portland, Oregon

August 23
Portland, Oregon

September 5
Cincinnati, Ohio
Columbus, Ohio

September 6
Cleveland, Ohio

September 7
Akron, Ohio

September 12
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

September 13
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

September 18
Birmingham, Alabama

September 19
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

October 3
Las Vegas, Nevada

October 5
Las Vegas, Nevada

October 17
Detroit, Michigan

Red—Election Year Program Blue—First Freedom First Campaign

traditions such as Unitarian Universalism, the United Church of Christ, and the Union for Reform Judaism (all of which view same-sex marriage to be in agreement with their religious doctrine) the self-determination to define marriage within their religious traditions. TIA believes that just as houses of worship should not be forced to preside over same-sex marriages, they should also not be barred from performing them.

A similar amendment will be introduced in the House of Representatives later this year. As always, we will be posting the latest legislative and activist updates on our website, www.interfaithalliance.org. Regardless of your opinion on gay marriage, we hope you will continue opposing passage of any legislation like the Federal Marriage Amendment out of a deep desire to preserve religious liberty and to oppose enshrining discrimination into the Constitution.

SAVE THE DATE



Come celebrate

Walter Cronkite's 90th Birthday

with some very special guests, including

George Clooney,

2006 Faith & Freedom Award Honoree.

The Interfaith Alliance Foundation's 9th Annual **Walter Cronkite Faith & Freedom Award Gala** will be held on November 1, 2006, in New York City.

For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit our website:

www.interfaithalliance.org

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One Nation, Many Faiths ★ www.interfaithalliance.org



Safeguarding separation
of church and state,
protecting religious liberty

Protect religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Go to www.firstfreedomfirst.org to sign the petition. Please encourage others to join you. Together we will send a powerful, resounding message—safeguard our first freedom!

Be a part of First Freedom First.

A joint project of The Interfaith Alliance Foundation and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. For more information, please contact Project Manager Eric Shutt via eshutt@interfaithalliance.org or (800) 510-0969 x105.

