

## **Correspondence between Discovery Institute and United Methodist Church (UMC) about Discovery Institute's Application to be an Exhibitor at UMC General Conference 2016**

### *Summary*

- After applying to become an exhibitor at the United Methodist Church's General Conference in May 2016, Discovery Institute was informed by phone by UMC official Bobby Smith that its application was being rejected because of a resolution passed by the UMC in 2008 "opposing the introduction of any faith-based theories such as Creationism or Intelligent Design into the science curriculum of our public schools."
- Discovery Institute sought reconsideration of the decision to reject its application to be an exhibitor. The Institute pointed out that it did not advocate pushing intelligent design into public school science classes. Furthermore, the theory of intelligent design as articulated by scholars affiliated with Discovery Institute was not "faith-based," although it had positive implications for faith.
- Mr. Smith eventually replied that an unidentified group of officials had "unanimously agreed" to uphold the rejection of Discovery Institute as an exhibitor, but he provided no explanation of their rationale for doing so.
- Discovery Institute asked Mr. Smith for the rationale for continuing to reject Discovery Institute as an exhibitor, a list of exhibitors accepted for the 2016 General Conference, and the name and contact information for Mr. Smith's superior (so Discovery Institute could appeal the rejection). Mr. Smith declined to provide any further information.
- On January 6, Discovery Institute appealed Mr. Smith's decision to Mr. Moses Kumar, General Secretary and Treasurer, General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), United Methodist Church, and to Bishop Michael Coyner and Bishop Michael McKee, both of whom serve on the board of the General Council on Finance and Administration. The GCFA is the branch of the UMC for which Bobby Smith works.
- On January 12, Mr. Kumar informed Discovery Institute that the decision to ban the Institute from having an information had been made by "the leadership of the Commission on the General Conference", and Discovery Institute would receive an answer from the Chair of that entity by January 15. Discovery Institute then asked for a list of the membership of the Commission on the General Conference, but that information was not provided.
- On January 14, Ms. Judi Kenaston, Chair of the Commission on the General Conference responded to Discovery Institute reaffirming the decision to reject the Institute's application to sponsor an information

table. Similar to Mr. Smith, she claimed that Discovery Institute's application had been found to be in conflict with the "Social Principles" of the UMC. However, she did not provide any evidence to substantiate this claim; nor did she respond to the evidence previously provided by Discovery Institute showing that the claim is in error. Ms. Kenaston did raise an entirely new objection, suggesting that Discovery Institute was rejected for violating a policy that conference exhibits "are not to provide a platform to survey or test ideas; rather, to provide products / services / resources which are credible and proven" to help church ministries.

- Discovery Institute's John West responded to Ms. Kenaston by noting: "We were not planning to survey or test ideas. We are involved in producing books, videos, and educational materials, many of which have been used in churches and Christian schools around the nation and in other countries. Over the past decade, we have sponsored science and faith conferences in many parts of the country that have drawn Christians from a variety of backgrounds, including Methodist. Our information table was going to provide information about these resources. It seems to me that you are applying your vetting standard simply to exclude an idea you apparently dislike, not to fairly apply the standards you espouse." Dr. West further reiterated his request to Ms. Kenaston that the UMC disclose the list of approved exhibitors at the General Conference and the list of members of the "Commission on the General Conference" that made the decision to ban Discovery Institute.

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**From:** Janine Dixon  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 02, 2015 4:48 PM  
**To:** Bobby Smith  
**Subject:** Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016

Dear Bobby,

Thank you for getting back to me regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference of 2016. I am sending this email confirming my understanding that the sole reason we are being denied access to the conference is your interpretation of the 2008 United Methodist Book of Resolutions:

# 5052. Evolution and Intelligent Design

WHEREAS, The United Methodist Church has for many years supported the separation of church and State (¶ 164C, Book of Discipline, 2004, p. 119);

Therefore, be it resolved, that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church go on record as opposing the introduction of any faith-based theories such as Creationism or Intelligent Design into the science curriculum of our public schools.

I want to make clear that our organization does not advocate introducing intelligent design in public school science curricula (please see our Science Education Policy), and is therefore in accordance with this resolution. In fact, we are on record as having opposed the Dover, Pennsylvania school district policy on intelligent design that gave rise to litigation. Furthermore, intelligent design as Discovery Institute's scholars articulate it is not a faith-based theory (please see our FAQs). Instead, it is based on a wide ensemble of well-substantiated data from physics, cosmology, mathematics, and biology.

Finally, the purpose of our proposed informational display is not to address public school science education policy. It is to provide resources for churches about intelligent design and about the relationship between science and faith. In particular, we want to equip people to counter wrong-headed claims that modern science somehow conflicts with faith in God.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would pass this additional information on to your legal analysts for further review, as the link to our Education Policy above demonstrates our alignment with the council rule. This information is necessary for your analysts to see in order to make a fully informed decision. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Janine Dixon  
Educational Outreach Coordinator  
Discovery Institute, Center for Science & Culture

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**From:** Bobby Smith  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 02, 2015 2:51 PM  
**To:** Janine Dixon  
**Subject:** RE: Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016

Thanks Janine,

I will pass this on to our vetting team. As soon as I receive a response, I will call you back.

Blessings,  
Bobby

**Bobby Lee Smith**  
*Manager of Corporate Sponsorships & Philanthropic Initiatives*  
General Council on Finance and Administration  
The United Methodist Church

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<http://www.2016gcsponsorship.org/>

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**From:** Janine Dixon  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 03, 2015 1:28 PM  
**To:** Bobby Smith  
**Subject:** RE: Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016

Thank you! I really appreciate it.

Janine Dixon  
Educational Outreach Coordinator  
Discovery Institute, CSC

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**From:** Bobby Smith  
**Sent:** Tuesday, December 08, 2015 2:29 PM  
**To:** Janine Dixon  
**Subject:** RE: Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016  
**Importance:** High

Hi Janine,

We have taken into consideration the additional information you have provided us below and have unanimously agreed that we will not be able to invite Discovery Institute to the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church as a sponsor or exhibitor. Again, we thank you for your interest.

Blessings,  
Bobby

**Bobby Lee Smith**  
*Manager of Corporate Sponsorships & Philanthropic Initiatives*

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**From:** Janine Dixon

**Sent:** Tuesday, December 8, 2015 3:44 PM

**To:** Bobby Smith

**Subject:** RE: Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016

Hi Bobby,

I really appreciate you getting back to me. You might guess that I am disappointed in the answer. I have some thoughts and questions.

1. You say you have taken into consideration the additional information we sent you, but you provide no explanation as to the basis for your decision. Can you actually explain the vetting team's rationale to me? We have a number of United Methodist supporters, one of which in fact suggested that we consider doing an exhibit at your upcoming meeting, which is why we contacted you. I would like to be able to accurately describe the reason for your rejection when we inform our United Methodist supporters. I must admit that your decision seems quite perplexing to me given the UMC's stated commitment to "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors." This decision seems to reflect a view of "Closed Hearts, Closed Minds, and Closed Doors."
2. Can you please provide me with a list of exhibitors currently approved to be at your meeting?
3. Can you also provide me with the name of your superior and his or her contact information?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Janine Dixon  
Educational Outreach Coordinator  
Discovery Institute, CSC

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**From:** Janine Dixon

**Sent:** Wednesday, December 23, 2015 1:16 PM

**To:** Bobby Smith

**Subject:** FW: Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016

Hi Bobby,

I'm forwarding my previous comments/inquiries below. Does your lack of response mean that you do not intend to reply?

Thank you,  
Janine Dixon  
Educational Outreach Coordinator  
Discovery Institute, CSC

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**From:** Bobby Smith  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 5, 2016 2:07 PM  
**To:** Janine Dixon  
**Subject:** RE: Regarding our request to exhibit at the UMC General Conference 2016  
**Importance:** High

Greetings Janine and Happy New Year,

I am sorry that you feel that I did not plan to respond to your reply. I did not respond to any emails or calls from Dec. 22 through today. I was on vacation during this time. However, before I left for vacation, I did forward your additional thoughts and questions to our key leadership team. They met and concluded that Discovery Institute will not be a sponsor or an exhibitor at the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. I am considering this matter closed and wish you and Discovery Institute the best.

Thank you,

Bobby

**Bobby Lee Smith**  
*Manager of Corporate Sponsorships & Philanthropic Initiatives*  
General Council on Finance and Administration

**REGISTER AS A SPONSOR OR EXHIBITOR FOR THE 2016 GENERAL CONFERENCE.**  
<http://www.2016gcsponsorship.org/>

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**From:** John West  
**Subject:** Urgent Appeal of Your Decision to Ban Discovery Institute from General Conference  
**Date:** January 6, 2016 at 3:04:12 PM PST  
**To:**

January 6, 2016

Mr. Moses Kumar  
General Secretary and Treasurer  
General Council on Finance and Administration  
United Methodist Church

Bishop Michael Coyner  
Bishop Michael McKee  
General Council on Finance and Administration  
United Methodist Church

Dear Mr. Kumar and Bishops Coyner and McKee:

I am writing to appeal the rejection of Discovery Institute as an exhibitor at the 2016 UMC General Conference by Mr. Bobby Smith, the Manager of Corporate Sponsorships & Philanthropic Initiatives, General Council on Finance and Administration.

Discovery Institute is a non-profit educational and research organization headquartered in Seattle, Washington. Our Center for Science & Culture supports scientists and other scholars who believe that life and the universe reflect evidence of intelligent design. Last fall, we applied to sponsor an exhibitor's table at the UMC General Conference so we could make available information and resources relating to science and faith and how they are compatible. However, we were eventually informed by Mr. Smith that our application had been rejected. The sole reason he cited for the rejection was a 2008 UMC resolution "opposing the introduction of any faith-based theories such as Creationism or Intelligent Design into the science curriculum of our public schools." Mr. Smith apparently believed that Discovery Institute advocates policies that contradict this resolution.

In fact, Discovery Institute does not advocate the teaching of creationism, and as we informed Mr. Smith, neither do we advocate inserting intelligent design into public school science classes. Moreover, the version of intelligent design supported by our scholars (many of whom are science professors at colleges and universities) is not "faith-based." Instead, it draws on a wide ensemble of well-substantiated mainstream data from physics, cosmology, mathematics, and biology. After we asked for reconsideration of the decision to ban us from having an exhibitor table, Mr. Smith eventually sent us an email stating that an unidentified group of officials had "unanimously agreed" to uphold the rejection of Discovery Institute as an exhibitor. However, Mr. Smith provided no explanation of this unidentified group's rationale for its decision given the new information we had provided. When we asked for an explanation, Mr. Smith refused to provide one. He also refused to provide the name of his superior to whom we could appeal his decision. That is why I am now writing to you.

The United Methodist Church's motto on its website is "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." This is an admirable motto. But it seems to me that banning Discovery Institute from having an exhibitor table at the General Conference is blatantly inconsistent with your motto. Regardless of your particular beliefs about whether nature shows evidence of purposeful design, intelligent design is a concept widely held by many Christians (including many United Methodists), and it continues to be the subject of serious discussion by many philosophers, scientists, and theologians. Banning Discovery Institute from having an information table at your General Conference would seem to be

promoting closed minds and closed doors, not encouraging a thoughtful exchange of ideas.

**I appeal to you to overrule Mr. Smith's decision and to allow us to have an exhibitor table at your upcoming General Conference. Because the official deadline for registering as an exhibitor has now passed, this matter requires urgent attention. Therefore, I respectfully ask you to respond to my request by no later than Monday, January 11.** If I do not hear back from you by then, I will assume (regretfully) that you have rejected our appeal, and we will need to determine what other actions we may need to take, including appeals to other parts of the United Methodist Church.

Sincerely,

John G. West, Ph.D.  
Vice President  
Discovery Institute

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**From:** Moses Kumar  
**Date:** January 6, 2016 at 3:13:04 PM PST  
**To:** John West, Bishop Coyner, Bishop McKee  
**Cc:** Steven Lambert

**Subject: RE: Urgent Appeal of Your Decision to Ban Discovery Institute from General Conference**

Dear Mr. West

I will review your letter and give you the response by next Wednesday. I will look into it.

Thank you  
Appadurai Moses Rathan Kumar  
General Secretary and Treasurer  
General Council On Finance and Administration  
1 Music Circle North  
Nashville, TN 37203

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**From:** John West  
**Date:** January 6, 2016 at 3:44:43 PM PST  
**To:** Moses Kumar  
**Cc:** Bishop Coyner; Bishop McKee; Steven Lambert



**Subject: Re: Urgent Appeal of Your Decision to Ban Discovery Institute  
from General Conference**

Dear Mr. Kumar,

Thank you for your prompt response. I look forward to your reply. In case it would be helpful, I attach a document containing our previous email communications with Mr. Bobby Smith on this issue.

John

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**From:** Moses Kumar

**Date:** January 12, 2016 at 10:23:46 AM PST

**To:** John West; Bishop Coyner; Bishop McKee; Judi Kenaston

**Subject: RE: Urgent Appeal of Your Decision to Ban Discovery Institute  
from General Conference**

Greetings Dr. West,

Thank you for your email.

I am responding to your communication to me dated January 6, 2016. The ultimate decision to reject your application to be an exhibitor / sponsor at the 2016 General Conference was not made by Mr. Smith, but rather by the leadership of the Commission on the General Conference, which is the group duly authorized to deal at its total discretion with such matters. It is my understanding that you will receive by the end of this week a communication from the Chair of that Commission, Judi Kenaston. Any on-going communications on this matter should be directed to her.

Yours in Christ –

Appadurai Moses Rathan Kumar  
General Secretary and Treasurer  
General Council On Finance and Administration

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**From:** John West  
**Date:** January 12, 2016 at 3:25:16 PM PST  
**To:** Moses Kumar  
**Cc:** Bishop Coyner; Bishop McKee; Judi Kenaston

**Subject: Re: Urgent Appeal of Your Decision to Ban Discovery Institute from General Conference**

Dear Mr. Kumar,

Thank you for your further response. I look forward to hearing from Judi Kenaston.

Is it possible to get a list of those on the Commission on the General Conference? I cannot find the names anywhere on the United Methodist website.

Sincerely,

John West

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**From:** Judi Kenaston  
**Date:** January 14, 2016 at 1:39:08 PM PST  
**To:** John West  
**Cc:** Bishop Coyner; Bishop McKee  
**Subject: Discovery Institute Appeal**

Dear Dr. West,

I am responding to your communication to Moses Kumar, General Secretary of GCFA, which was dated January 6, 2016. The Commission on the General Conference has a number of responsibilities, including the determination of policies and procedures for exhibitors and sponsors at the 2016 General Conference. We have a vetting process that makes sure exhibitors conform with our Discipline and Social Principles. However, the Commission reserves to itself the ultimate decision on who can be exhibitors and sponsors and the Commission has the authority to make such a decision in its discretion. As you know, your application to be an exhibitor has been denied because it was determined that it conflicted with our Social Principles. That decision is final.

The purpose of the exhibitor program is to acquaint the Church constituency attending the event with business and ministry resources that we

feel will benefit their ministries. Even if your organization's views and past actions were in conformance with our Book of Discipline and Social Principles, which arguably they are not, your presence as an exhibitor is not consistent with the purpose of our exhibitor program. As we state in our written "Policies and Procedures," exhibits "are not to provide a platform to survey or test ideas; rather, to provide products / services / resources which are credible and proven" to help local church ministries.

While I recognize that you disagree with our action, the decision has been made.

In Christ's service,

Judi Kenaston, Chair  
Commission on the General Conference

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**From:** John West  
**Date:** January 14, 2016 at 1:52:31 PM PST  
**To:** Judi Kenaston  
**Cc:** Moses Kumar; Bishop McKee; Bishop Coyner

**Subject: Re: Discovery Institute Appeal**

Dear Ms. Kenaston,

Thank you for your reply. Three points:

1. We previously asked Mr. Smith for a list of the organizations that you have approved as exhibitors, to no avail. Is this a secret list? If not, could you send it to me? We have a number of supporters who are United Methodists who are interested in the fairness of the vetting process and whether you applied your standards equally across applicants. Before telling them that you are refusing to disclose the list, I wanted to make certain that you are actually refusing to disclose it.
2. I previously asked for a list of members of the Commission on the General Conference, to no avail. Is this a secret list? If not, could you send it to me? Again, our United Methodist supporters are interested in knowing who actually made the decision, and I want to make sure I am accurate when I inform them that this information is secret as well.
3. Regarding your new, additional reason for rejecting our application, namely that we were planning to "survey or test ideas." I'm not sure where you got this idea. We were not planning to survey or test ideas. We are involved in producing

books, videos, and educational materials, many of which have been used in churches and Christian schools around the nation and in other countries. Over the past decade, we have sponsored science and faith conferences in many parts of the country that have drawn Christians from a variety of backgrounds, including Methodist. Our information table was going to provide information about these resources. It seems to me that you are applying your vetting standard simply to exclude an idea you apparently dislike, not to fairly apply the standards you espouse.

Sincerely,

John West  
Discovery Institute