

Letter to the Editor:

We are moved to write in response to your printing, "Obama's Church Holds Controversial Views" by Margaret Talev of McClatchy Newspapers in this morning's, March 21, 2008, News and Observer. The article presents an incomplete and rather slanted view of our denomination, The United Church of Christ.

There is no denomination more American or mainstream than the United Church of Christ. Our forbearers came to this continent aboard the Mayflower and founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They founded institutions like Harvard, Yale, Howard University, to name a few. In this state they founded Elon University and Catawba College. They were English and Scottish settlers from the Atlantic coasts of Virginia and North Carolina and founded congregations across the Carolinas and beyond. They came to this continent aboard slave ships, and founded some of the first free African American Churches. They came to this continent as German immigrants, who in the 18th century came to Pennsylvania; some of them helped smuggle the Liberty Bell out of Philadelphia to keep it from falling into British hands. They were also 19th century immigrants who came to the Midwest, fleeing religious persecution in Europe. They produced ministers like Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich.

We have and always will be fierce defenders of American liberty, free speech and separation of church and state. We are a denomination that vests much of its authority in the local church. Each of our over 6,000 local congregations are autonomous, free to follow their own hearts and minds as they work out their relationship with God. Indeed, it is that autonomy that has led to the current debate concerning the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, who spoke to his church (not for his church or its members, Mr. Obama included.) Indeed like any member of a UCC church, Mr. Obama thinks for himself.

The United Church of Christ has a rich and diverse history and a vital presence in our communities today. Please do not accept the distortions of it that have been used to smear Trinity United Church of Christ, in a transparent attempt to discredit Senator Barack Obama's candidacy for President. Such false notions and innuendo have no place in telling the magnificent history of our distinctly American denomination, the United Church of Christ.

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