



## Faith United: Disparate Faith Groups Come Together Against Big Tobacco

In 2005, the [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#) and leaders from many different religious denominations launched a national campaign—[Faith United Against Tobacco](#)—to mobilize the faith community across the country to support proven solutions to reduce smoking. Since that time, Faith United has spearheaded letter-writing, coalition-building and other advocacy efforts in favor of a broad range of tobacco-control issues, including Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation of tobacco products, increased state funding for tobacco prevention and cessation and increases in the number of smoke-free workplace laws.

Faith groups involved in Faith United include, among others, United Methodist, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, National Council of Churches, Seventh Day Adventists, American Muslim Foundation, Southern Baptist Convention, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, Church Women United, Church of the Brethren and Islamic Society of North America.

### **Personal and Community Commitment to Tobacco Control**

Jim Winkler is the general secretary of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society and a leader in the Faith United coalition. For Jim, coalescing the faith community to reduce smoking is a natural—both for himself and his community.

Winkler grew up in the Methodist Church. Although he is a layperson, he is the son, nephew and brother of preachers. For a short period in his youth, he was a missionary. But Winkler also spent some time on Wall Street—just a year. He was a commodities broker and quickly knew it was not the life for him.

"My faith, growing up in church and my love for the church drove my desire to work for the church, and ultimately become the general secretary," said Winkler. Confronting social challenges, especially those that disproportionately affect youth and vulnerable populations, is nothing new to religious leaders like Jim or to the faith communities they lead.

"We were involved in Prohibition and against pornography and gambling as predatory enterprises. Fighting tobacco use also fits well with Christian and other faith groups' teaching in general that the body is a holy temple. Theologically, tobacco use is not an

issue that we come at from many different stances. We all see lots of issues uniquely—but on smoking, there is no controversy. So many pastors are ministering to families that have suffered the effects of smoking—it is a personal and very real issue. Its detrimental impact on congregations and communities is undeniable."

In January 2008, Faith United sent letters to the governors of all 50 states urging them to increase funding for tobacco cessation and prevention programs to levels recommended by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Our clergy spend too much time burying mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers who die untimely and grueling deaths because they became addicted to tobacco when they were young. We know all too well how the tobacco companies have spent, and continue to spend, billions of dollars to addict young and old to this deadly product," the faith leaders' letter states.

### **Advocating for Legislation to Help Turn the Tide Against Big Tobacco**

In Alabama, Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, faith leaders came together through Faith United to support a variety of legislation, including FDA regulation of tobacco products.

"Working toward increases in cigarette taxes in places like Virginia, Indiana, Ohio and Washington has been a very important accomplishment," said Winkler. "It showed people that grassroots organizing works. Smoke-free laws in Washington, D.C., and Ohio were also real accomplishments. They will improve health and save lives. Now we are involved in the fight for FDA regulation. The tide has turned against big tobacco. People are frustrated that more control has not occurred. Faith groups said we need to move this to next level."

Beyond FDA regulation, Faith United hopes to work toward better labeling of cigarette products—requiring tobacco companies to list their ingredients. They also want the United States to endorse the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control, an international tobacco-control treaty.

### **Moving Beyond Differences With Help From the Campaign**

In Faith United, Winkler and other faith leaders have an opportunity to confront the social challenge of tobacco use in partnership, moving beyond religious differences that may divide them.

"The Campaign supports and facilitates Faith United," said Winkler. "Many churches have seen their staffs dwindle. Still, we have done what we can. But even pulling together meetings is difficult. To have access to a group that is high quality and focused, and [that] understands what we are trying to do is very valuable. We have the networks, but the

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Campaign has the expertise, infrastructure and funding. For this, we are deeply appreciative."