

Seminary offers online 'biblical self-defense' for besieged liberals: Standing up for the UCC

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A seminary is conducting an online self-defense course for United Church of Christ members besieged by conservative reactions to their denomination's liberal social positions on gay rights and other issues.

A six-week course offered by Chicago Theological Seminary, a UCC-affiliated institution, helps those accosted for "not believing in the Bible," said a UCC statement promoting the class. The course—"Biblical and Theological Self-Defense for the United Church of Christ"—began March 27 and is being taught by Susan Thistlethwaite, president of the seminary.

In attending numerous denominational meetings and conferences throughout the country, Thistlethwaite said she hears UCC members "saying that they feel as if they are under attack and they feel ill-equipped when someone says, 'Why do you go to that gay church?' or claims that the UCC's social and theological positions are 'against the Bible.'"

"We need to help our people come to their own defense," she said. "There are many who feel like they don't know how to respond when attacked from a place of biblical literalism."

The 1.3-million-member UCC was the first mainline American Protestant church body to ordain openly gay clergy, and in 2005 it formally endorsed same-sex marriage, a position that drew criticism from some religious conservatives.

The CTS class addresses subjects like theology, Christology and ethics in addition to more practical concerns—such as how UCC members can muster the "courage to stand up for themselves and their church," the UCC said in its announcement. –

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