The Monthly Update

March 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Once again, thank you for your response to our appeals for support. We are on the road to resolving our financial situation and are optimistic that it will be remedied in the near future.

It is helpful to look at problem situations with a sense of humor when times get a bit tough. When finances get a bit on the "lean" side, we say to each other, "Maybe the Lord is telling us we need to go to the beach for a vacation." Of if we receive excessively harsh opposition from the hierarchy, we try to look it with a humorous twist.

Speaking of tough times, something that helps us put things in perspective is a reading from a Bible study "The Daily Walk" (published by the Navigators in Colorado). Some years ago, the daily reading was on the book of Jeremiah, chapters 34-39. The lesson read, "Switch places with Jeremiah for a few moments….You are standing in darkness, knee deep in the chilling mire of an abandoned cistern. You have been beaten without cause, falsely accused of capital crimes, kept under house arrest, and now this. No one is listening; seemingly, no one cares. Being God's prophet has landed you – literally – 'in the pits.' What thoughts are going through your mind? Are you discouraged? Do you feel a sense of desperation? Are you considering a change of 'employers'?"

It goes on to read, "Periodic discouragement is part of living. But the Christian knows that God is bigger than any trouble – be it false accusations, personal rejection, restricted freedom, or even physical abuse." And, quite honestly, at times those of us in Concerned Methodists feel challenged by the environment in which we work, and it seems as if the average "person in the pew" doesn't listen. But we know the God we serve is in charge and we will continue to be faithful to Him. Indeed, we are reminded of what Paul told us in 1 Corinthians 15:58b, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." This gives immense reassurance.

As to what is happening across Methodism, I ask that you would continue to pray that the delegates in the upcoming annual conferences see the seriousness of the issues facing our denomination and that they would have a clearness of mind – and make the decisions that will ensure a viable future for our United Methodist Church. As stated in the previous letter, "I firmly believe that between now and the end of the annual conference sessions this summer may very well be a 'window of decision' which will determine the future of our United Methodist Church."

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

March 2009 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

I don't know why some people change churches; what difference does it make which one you stay home from?

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The Good Stuff ***Be Slow To Judge***

We are often guilty of judging others without having ever walked in their shoes. And we hurt others by our remarks or the tone of our voice. This hurt may linger as you go on your way not realizing the harm that was done. It is better to think about what you are about to say before you say it. Often people say things in front of us to get laughs from the majority, but they hurt us in the process. Example:

"Some people!" snorted a man; standing behind me in the long line at the grocery store. "You would think the manager would pay attention and open another line," said a woman. I looked to the front of the line to see what the hold up was and saw a well dressed, young woman, trying to get the machine to accept her credit card. No matter how many times she swiped it, the machine kept rejecting it.

"It's one of them welfare card things. Stupid, lazy people need to get a job like everyone else," said the man standing behind me. The young woman turned around to see who had made the comment. "It was me," he said, pointing to himself. The young lady's face began to change expression. Almost in tears, she dropped the welfare card onto the counter and quickly walked out of the store. Everyone in the checkout line watched as she began running to her car. Never looking back, she got in and drove away.

After developing cancer in 1977 and having had to use food stamps; I had learned never to judge anyone, without knowing the circumstances of their life. This turned out to be the case today.

Several minutes later a young man walked into the store. He went up to the cashier and asked if she had seen the woman.

After describing her, the cashier told him that she had run out of the store, got into her car, and drove away. "Why would she do that?" asked the man.

Everyone in the line looked around at the fellow who had made the statement. "I made a stupid comment about the welfare card she was using. Something I shouldn't have said. I'm sorry," said the man.

"Well, that's bad, real bad, in fact. Her brother was killed in Afghanistan two years ago. He had three young children and she has taken on that responsibility. She's twenty years old, single, and now has three children to support," he said in a very firm voice.

"I'm really truly sorry. I didn't know," he replied, shaking both his hands about.

The young man asked, "Are these paid for?" pointing to the shopping cart full of groceries.

"It wouldn't take her card," the clerk told him.

"Do you know where she lives?" asked the man who had made the comment.

"Yes, she goes to our church."

"Excuse me," he said as he made his way to the front of the line. He pulled out his wallet, took out his credit card and told the cashier, "Please use my card." The clerk took his credit card and began to ring up the young woman's groceries. "Hold on," said the gentleman. He walked back to his shopping cart and began loading his own groceries onto the belt to be included. "Come on people. We got three kids to help raise!" he told everyone in line. Everyone began to place their groceries onto the fast moving belt. A few customers began bagging the food and placing it into separate carts.

"Go back and get two big turkeys," yelled a heavyset woman, as she looked at the man.

"NO," yelled the man. Everyone stopped dead in their tracks. The entire store became quiet for several seconds. "Four turkeys," yelled the man. Everyone began laughing and went back to work. When all was said and done, the man paid a total of $1,646.57 for the groceries. He then walked over to the side, pulled out his check book, and began writing a check using the bags of dog food piled near the front of the store for a writing surface. He turned around and handed the check to the young man.

"She will need a freezer and a few other things as well," he told the man.

The young man looked at the check and said, "This is really very generous of you."

"No," said the man. "Her brother was the generous one." Everyone in the store had been observing the odd commotion and began to clap. And I drove home that day feeling very American.

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A great example of why we should be kind and patient. Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear. It will open a lot of eyes, hopefully hearts, and keep some mouths shut.

– Received by e-mail from W.P. 12/25/8

Of Interest

+ *Why We Left the Episcopal Church*

[Note: This is of interest since it reflects what has happened in that once-great denomination over the homosexual issue. We should take note – since this will come to our United Methodist Church if we make wrong choices in this area.]

When even President Gerald Ford's funeral at Washington National Cathedral is not exempt from comment about the crisis in the Episcopal Church, we believe it is time to set the record straight as to why our church and so many others around the country have severed ties with the Episcopal Church. Fundamental to a liberal view of freedom is the right of a person or group to define themselves, to speak for themselves and to not be dehumanized by the definitions and distortions of others. This right we request even of those who differ from us.

The core issue in why we left is not women's leadership. It is not "Episcopalians against equality," as the headline on a recent Post op-ed by Harold Meyerson put it. It is not a "leftward" drift in the church. It is not even primarily ethical -- though the ordination of a practicing homosexual as bishop was the flash point that showed how far the repudiation of Christian orthodoxy had gone.

The core issue for us is theological: the intellectual integrity of faith in the modern world. It is thus a matter of faithfulness to the lordship of Jesus, whom we worship and follow. The American Episcopal Church no longer believes the historic, orthodox Christian faith common to all believers. Some leaders expressly deny the central articles of the faith -- saying that traditional theism is "dead," the incarnation is "nonsense," the resurrection of Jesus is a fiction, the understanding of the cross is "a barbarous idea," the Bible is "pure propaganda" and so on. Others simply say the creed as poetry or with their fingers crossed.

It would be easy to parody the "Alice in Wonderland" surrealism of Episcopal leaders openly denying what their faith once believed, celebrating what Christians have gone to the stake to resist -- and still staying on as leaders. But this is a serious matter.

First, Episcopal revisionism abandons the fidelity of faith. The Hebrew scriptures link matters of truth to a relationship with God. They speak of apostasy as adultery -- a form of betrayal as treacherous as a husband cheating on his wife.

Second, Episcopal revisionism negates the authority of faith. The "sola scriptura" ("by the scriptures alone") doctrine of the Reformation church has been abandoned for the "sola cultura" (by the culture alone) way of the modern church. No longer under authority, the Episcopal Church today is either its own authority or finds its authority in the shifting winds of intellectual and social fashion -- which is to say it has no authority.

Third, Episcopal revisionism severs the continuity of faith. Cutting itself off from the universal faith that spans the centuries and the continents, it becomes culturally captive to one culture and one time. While professing tolerance and inclusiveness, certain Episcopal attitudes toward fellow believers around the world, who make up a majority of the Anglican family, have been arrogant and even racist.

Fourth, Episcopal revisionism destroys the credibility of faith. There is so little that is distinctively Christian left in the theology of some Episcopal leaders, such as the former bishop of Newark, that a skeptic can say, as Oscar Wilde said to a cleric of his time, "I not only follow you, I precede you." It is no accident that orthodox churches are growing and that almost all the great converts to the Christian faith in the past century, such as G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis, have been attracted to full-blooded orthodoxy, not to revisionism. The prospect for the Episcopal Church, already evident in many dioceses, is inevitable withering and decline.

Fifth, Episcopal revisionism obliterates the very identity of faith. When the great truths of the Bible and the creeds are abandoned and there is no limit to what can be believed in their place, then the point is reached when there is little identifiably Christian in Episcopal revisionism. Would that Episcopal leaders showed the same zeal for their faith that they do for their property. If the present decline continues, all that will remain of a once strong church will be empty buildings, kept going by the finances, though not the faith, of the fathers.

These are the outrages we protest. These are the infidelities that drive us to separate. These are the real issues to be debated. We remain Anglicans but leave the Episcopal Church because the Episcopal Church first left the historic faith. Like our spiritual forebears in the Reformation, "Here we stand. So help us God. We can do no other."

– The Rev. John Yates is rector and Os Guinness is a parishioner of The Falls Church, one of several Virginia churches that voted last month to sever ties with the Episcopal Church. E-mail from The Confessing Movement.

+ United Methodists join forces to 'turn worlds upside down'

JACKSONVILLE, Fla.—The four areas of focus adopted by the 2008 United Methodist General Conference, the denomination's top legislative body, were rolled out in earnest at the quadrennial training event for annual conference leaders Jan. 29-Feb. 1. More than 1,200 leaders gathered for the "Living the United Methodist Way: Turning Worlds Upside Down" event to learn how their respective places of ministry can connect with others to transform themselves and the world. The four areas – leadership development, church growth, ministry with the poor and global health – were introduced in plenary sessions, followed by workshops on each topic.

– United Methodist News Service (UMNS), February 6, 2009.

+ Six-time world middleweight karate champion and action film star Chuck Norris loves America. But he isn't afraid to face reality.

"America," Norris says, "seems to have lost its way. As a people, we seem more divided than ever before. Switch on the television and it's clear we've lost our moral compass. Our economy, once celebrated as a guarantor of freedom and prosperity, now seems corrupted by greed, materialism, and uncertainty. Other countries that used to envy us, now despise us. We seem to have lost not only our sense of ourselves but of our place in the world."

But Norris is far from giving up -- and that's why he wrote Black Belt Patriotism: How to Reawaken America.

Here is Chuck Norris' brightly written guide to how we can stop being what he calls "One Nation, Divided, and Without a Clue," and once again become a nation that acknowledges our Creator, values human life, and honors and cares for the family -- a nation with secure borders, free from nightmarish debt, and with liberty and justice for all.

Norris, in sum, envisions a nation of people who are aware of and true to the noble principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Ten Commandments (each of which he includes in an appendix).

– Received by e-mail.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues. ***Obama opens access to reproductive health services***

[Note: This is rosy language with talk about this action to "save lives" in that it will in fact increase abortions and take lives – the lives of unborn babies, the most innocent of God's children. We are complicit in advocating this.]

WASHINGTON— An executive with The United Methodist Church's social action agency said action by President Obama on two issues related to access to reproductive health service will reduce abortions, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and save lives. Obama repealed the "Global Gag Rule," also known as the "Mexico City Policy," on Jan. 23 and restored funding to the United Nations Population Fund. Linda Bales, executive with the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, said the result of those two actions means money and services will be available to assist people through the "full-range of reproductive health services."

– UMNS, February 5, 2009.

(UM) Bishops

+ Faith leaders call for humane immigration reform

[Note: We should support legal immigration, but the reality of "illegal" immigration is not mentioned here. This is the great omission in the message and presents a skewed view of the issue. If our borders are not controlled, we will degenerate into anarchy.]

WASHINGTON — People of faith must stand up for immigrants or "the moral fiber of this country will be torn beyond repair," said United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño at the launching of a national interfaith campaign for humane immigration reform. The bishop of the denomination's Desert Southwest Annual (regional) Conference joined two members of Congress and several religious leaders from diverse faiths in announcing the launch of "Prayer, Renewal and Action on Immigration" at a Feb. 11 press conference in the Capitol.

– UMNS, February 16, 2009.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society

+ Social advocacy agency hails action on Guantanamo

WASHINGTON — The United Methodist Board of Church and Society has issued a statement applauding President Barack Obama's executive orders banning torture, and starting the process to close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The Jan. 27 statement was issued by Jim Winkler, the agency's top executive, and Bill Mefford, director of its work area on civil and human rights. The statement emphasizes that the United Methodist Social Principles unequivocally condemn use of torture for any purpose.

[Note: It will be interesting to see how this plays out. There has already been one repercussion over an action taken at this location. Let us pray this will not jeopardize the future security of our country.]]

– UMNS, January 29, 2009.

+ Social action agency sets legislative priorities

[Note: This is important because it shows what our political lobby agency will be pushing for in government at the national level. This is political advocacy from a far-left perspective – financed by the offerings of the person in the pew.]

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society has set six legislative priorities for the 111th Congress.

The priorities address issues as sweeping as overcoming global poverty and as specific as increasing spending for international family planning. Systemic reform, however, stands out as the linchpin holding all of the priorities together. The priorities support actions taken by the 2008 General Conference, the denomination's highest policy-making body. Meeting every four years, General Conference approves the denomination's "Social Principles" and Book of Resolutions, setting forth United Methodist stances on many issues.

Jim Winkler, top executive of the Board of Church and Society, said the priorities represent areas where the faith community can bring a unique voice to the legislative process by focusing on justice and, increasingly, stewardship of creation.

The six legislative priorities for 2009 are reform of the U.S. health-care system; just, humane immigration reform; strengthening the social safety net; investing in a "green-energy" future; overcoming global poverty; and increasing levels of U.S. spending for international family planning.

Health Care

The health of people throughout the United States is jeopardized every day by limited or lack of access to health care, according to the Rev. Cynthia Abrams, director of the board's work area on alcohol, other addictions and health care. She said 45.7 million people are uninsured in the United States, and increasing numbers are underinsured or have expensive and inadequate health care.

"Major health reform efforts are under way in Congress and with the new administration," said Abrams. She added that it isn't clear yet what the legislative package will look like.

"Faith groups have worked together to develop a solid foundation of principles to guide legislative efforts," Abrams said, adding that the United Methodist position on health care has heavily influenced this process.

"A society where each person is afforded health, wholeness and human dignity expresses God's intention for abundant life," she explained. "An inclusive, accessible, affordable and accountable health-care system lives out God's intention."

Immigration reform

The board's civil and human rights work area has set "just, humane immigration reform" as its priority this year. "Common sense tells us that the immigration system is badly in need of reform," said Bill Mefford, director.

According to Mefford, effective reform must be comprehensive in nature and entail a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants, protection of the rights of workers and reunification of families.

Scripture calls us as people of faith to welcome the sojourner," he emphasized.

John Hill, director of the work area on economic and environmental justice, pointed to the uncertainty in the economy as a reason for strengthening the social safety net.

"As economic uncertainty grows," he explained, "we must protect those living on the economic margins, particularly children." For example, he said, Church and Society will work to strengthen and expand programs to ensure every child has access to proper nutrition.

Environmental Advocacy

Pushing for legislation that mandates investing in a "green-energy" future is a response to the call to be faithful stewards of God's creation, according to Hill.

The board "supports a transition to green, low-carbon energy alternatives," he said. "Adopting a new energy policy with a strong federal investment in clean alternative energy sources will reduce global warming pollution, generate jobs and lead us toward a sustainable future."

The agency supports legislation that helps to end global poverty, said Mark Harrison, director of the peace with justice work area. He said foreign aid reform, fair trade, debt cancellation and major reform of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, are instrumental ways the United States can lead to end poverty.

Family planning

[Note: When you see "family planning" know that a key component of this is abortion.]

Linda Bales, director of the Louise and Hugh Moore Population Project at Church and Society, has a 2009 priority of increasing funding for international family planning. She said the purpose is to ensure access to the full range of health services, including family planning.

Increased spending on international family planning should include support for the United Nations Population Fund, according to Bales. The fund estimates that one in three deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth could be avoided if all women had access to contraceptive services.

"That means some 175,000 women each year could be saved," Bales said, "and many more could avoid severe or long-lasting injuries."

In many countries, however, funding for family planning has been curtailed. The board "will work with various population/reproductive health groups to secure additional funding for family planning services around the globe," she said, "because the potential life-saving benefits are so immense."

She said greater access to family planning can reduce the spread of AIDS, allow couples to space their children, and reduce abortions and child and maternal mortality.

"As followers of Christ, we are called to bring health and wholeness to all God's people," Bales stated. "United Methodism's founder, John Wesley, had a burning passion for health and the desire to see people have access to goods and services needed to live life abundantly as well as faithfully."

– By Wayne Rhodes, as reported in UMNS, January 28, 2009. Rhodes is director of communications for the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.

+ *Winkler applauds passage of stimulus act*

WASHINGTON — Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church & Society, issued a statement on Feb. 16 applauding Congress for passing the $787 billion "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act" because it will provide funding for critical programs that serve those hit hardest by the ongoing recession. The statement also praises efforts to orient the U.S. economy towards a sustainable environmental future. Winkler points out, however, that the package is not perfect. "We regret the decision to include tax provisions whose benefits accrue exclusively to relatively well-off persons," the statement says. "While some relief for those taxpayers may have merit, it should not have been pursued at the expense of other low-income priorities and projects designed to promote the common good such as education and housing." President Obama is expected to sign the act into law on Feb. 17 in Denver.

– UMNS, February 18, 2009.

(UM) General Board of Higher Education. ***Universities, churches to attract more Methodist students***

ARLINGTON, Texas — United Methodists are known for their commitment to higher education, having launched many U.S. colleges and universities in the 19th century. For generations, most of the students were from Methodist families. That's no longer the case; the relationship between United Methodist churches and affiliated institutions of higher education has faltered over the years.

While 122 colleges and universities are still affiliated with the church and receive apportionment dollars, some critics say they became too secularized in the 20th century and now resemble non-church institutions. Many local churches fail to welcome college students in their area or even encourage their young people to enroll at the schools. To help nurture that relationship, university staff and clergy will be invited to participate in jurisdictional events held by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry through March.

– UMNS, February 10, 2009.

Homosexuality. ...Pro-family advocates say a new report from the largest homosexual advocacy group in America ought to be raising some alarm bells. In a report titled "The State of the Workplace," the Human Rights Campaign notes that state and local governments, as well as major corporations, are doing more to prohibit discrimination against both homosexuals and transsexuals. But the report calls for more to be done. Robert Knight of the Culture and Family Institute believes there ought to be a high level of concern among those who support traditional family values. He believes the agenda of the homosexual lobby is to make pro-homosexual workplace policies mandatory. Knight tells Cybercast News that he sees the day when companies that want to maintain traditional family values will find themselves very pressed to compete in the marketplace. He says they will not be able to get government contracts or do business with larger companies that have bought into the "radical sexual agenda." And that, Knight warns, is exactly the goal of homosexual activists: to force everyone to approve their lifestyle.

– "AgapePress News Summary" by AgapePress Christian News Service, Jody Brown, Editor.

United Methodist Publishing House. ***Publishing House feels impact of economic downturn***

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The United Methodist Publishing House is experiencing its greatest sales decline in 20 years, causing it to slow down its work on revising The United Methodist Hymnal as well as take other cost-saving measures. "At the United Methodist Publishing House, we've seen the largest drop in year-to-year sales performance in more than 20 years," said Neil Alexander, publisher and president. "Our polling of local church leaders reveals that they are extremely cautious about spending for resources given current conditions and are often coping by reusing materials or simply doing without." The Publishing House receives no general church apportioned funds. The difficult global economic climate has affected the Publishing House, causing a shortfall of 12 percent in this fiscal year and a reduction in the value of investment reserves of 25 percent.

– UMNS, February 10, 2009.

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Don't put a question mark where God put a period.

Global Outlook

Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous.

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The Episcopal Church. ***Commission to aid Anglican-Methodist relations***

[Note: We can only hope that this will truly multiply ways to "cooperate in mission, in evangelism, in service" in preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ around the world. We will be watchful of this.]

NEW YORK — How Methodists and Anglicans relate to each other can vary widely from country to country. The new Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission, which had its first meeting in January in Mexico City, hopes to have an impact on those relationships. According to the Rev. W. Douglas Mills, an executive with the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, the new group "will look for ways to cooperate in mission, in evangelism, in service" even as the two denominations wrestle with theological divisions.

– UMNS, February 4, 2009.

Kenya. ***Without help, Kenyans face starvation***

NAIROBI, Kenya — Without immediate, massive intervention and assistance, starvation in Kenya will become a deadly reality, according to a new assessment report from global humanitarian agency Church World Service. The country's leaders proclaimed a national crisis on Jan. 16, with some ten million Kenyans-- nearly a third of the country's population-- now being affected by food insecurity. CWS has launched a U.S. fundraising campaign and its Nairobi-based East Africa office is responding to the growing crisis with immediate food and nutritional aid in the agricultural districts of Makueni and Mwingi in Kenya's drought-plagued Eastern Province. The effort is targeted to benefit 20,237 people. CWS found a serious need for emergency food relief and supplementary feeding for those five and under and for the aged, as well as rehabilitation of dry water basins and construction of water-retaining sand dam structures. More information is available

– UMNS, February 3, 2009.

Nigeria. ***Delegates divide Nigeria Area into three conferences***

MONROVIA, Liberia — The United Methodist Church's Nigeria Area has been divided into three annual conferences for better management. Nigerian delegates to the West Africa Central Conference, meeting Dec. 18-22 in Liberia, filed a petition asking that the conference be split into three areas with one bishop. Nigeria's size, coupled with a rough terrain, could be difficult to manage under one annual conference, said Bishop Arthur Kulah, interim leader of the area. The conference has more than 600,000 members.

– UMNS, February 4, 2009.

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God loves everyone, but probably prefers "fruits of the spirit" over "religious nuts!"