

Monthly Update

April 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As in the previous editions of the Monthly Update, we continue to focus on coverage of issues that are of foundational concern to our United Methodist Church and the world.

Although we have not addressed the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan for several months, we need to remember our troops there in prayer. They are in the forefront of defending our freedom here in the United States by “taking the fight” to the enemy on their own territory. As a military man, I can without hesitation validate the saying that, “The best defense is a good offense.” The reason this is true is that if we go after the “bad guys” on their own territory, it puts them into the position of having to defend their own country; when they do that, they don’t have time attack us on ours. The second reason is that it denies them a base from which to launch aggression against us. The third and final reason is that if we ever hope to defeat an enemy, we must go after them in their home base of operations – and capture it. War can be brutal, but we need to recognize that we live in a very dangerous world where we face a dangerous enemy.

This is an area close to my heart. During Operation Desert Storm I was almost killed twice during the fighting. When I returned to the States I found out that many people were praying for me – to include the kids in a Roman Catholic parochial school in the Chicago area, thanks to a sweet 12-year-old Irish Catholic girl named Eileen Collins. Prayer and compassion have no denominational boundaries.

Another area of concern is that of the present health care debate. This causes much discussion on a pressing need in our country – health care reform. But we need to look beneath the surface at other reasons for such an aggressive rush to pass this bill.

Finally, of especial interest is the attention given to a study on our denomination itself – serious questions by leaders of our church. We are gratified that they are taking a serious look at our decline. Let us pray they will find the answers – although we know that it rests in the soul-saving message of Jesus Christ. That is key – if every Methodist had a “heart-warming” experience with Him, we would be on the road to revival.

I thank you so much for your faithfulness in standing with us in support and prayers. It means more to us than you know. I would ask that you continue to support us as the Lord leads you, both prayerfully and with your finances. As so many other ministries during these challenging times, we are continuing to experience shortages in what we want to do. But you may be assured that we will accomplish all that we are able to with the gifts He provides through you to us.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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April 2010 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

My personal warning to educational tyranny and tyrants is this: best not to test or mess with Texas. If you thought we fought hard for the Alamo, wait until you see what we can do for the right to educate our children. – Chuck Norris

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The Good Stuff

+ *Chapel to Be Named for Official Who Died in Haiti*

A room in the new North Carolina Annual Conference headquarters will be dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Samuel W. Dixon Jr., a clergy member of the conference who died in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake. The room will be dedicated as the Dixon Chapel and Meeting Room during the building dedication service planned for early June. -UMNS

+ *Stopping Educational Corruption*

As I wrote in my newly released and expanded paperback version of "Black Belt Patriotism," if you want to join me in stopping educational corruption, gridlock and tyranny, then consider doing any of the following:

1. Stay active in your child's education, homework, classroom, PTA, school boards, etc.
2. Get familiar with how academic curriculum is reviewed and chosen in your state, then e-mail your thoughts on it to your state's education board (For those in Texas, the contact info is e-mail, 512-463-9007 (phone) or 512-936-4319 (fax).
3. Get involved in local, state and national politics and make your voice heard. The time for passivity is over. As Thomas Jefferson once said, "All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent."
4. Learn your state's laws on education and understand your parental and educational rights, and teach them to others. To quote Thomas Jefferson again, "Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. ... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty."
5. Petition your representatives to support a constitutional amendment protecting the child-parent relationship from unreasonable government intrusion.
6. Consider petitioning your state's education board, school district and local school to adopt "The National Council of Bible Curriculum in Public Schools" curriculum about the influence of the Bible in history, civilization, law, literature and the founding of America.

If you have a good public school with balanced curricula, congratulations. If not, & you've exhausted the above measures or believe the educative inculcation and indoctrination is a substantial risk, for many parents the only responsible choice is to send their children to a Christian, parochial or private school or to homeschool, as my wife, Gena, and I have chosen to do with our 8-year-old twins.

Our right to liberty includes our right to educate our children as we, not the government, prefer. Indeed, our founders would be appalled if we surrendered this right, which they took for granted in their own time.

It's a travesty that we have even come to this point that we have to protect our children from the public-school systems, by policing their policies, testing their textbooks and combating their biases to education. But such is the sign of our times. [The full text from the quote above is: "My personal warning to educational tyranny and tyrants is this: best not to test or mess with Texas. If you thought we fought hard for the Alamo, wait until you see what we can do for the right to educate our children. You can hide behind your No. 2 pencils, but our branding irons will find your tail sides." – AOM]

– Chuck Norris

+ *Call to Action Survey*

The Council of Bishops adopted the Call to Action: Reordering the Life of the Church in May 2009 and established a steering committee "to refashion and reposition the church for the 21st century". The Committee has posted a survey for members of the UMC to give their perspective on the vitality of the church. It is so important for evangelicals to let their voices be heard by filling out this brief survey. Please let them know what you believe is important in "reordering the life of the church". The survey can be found at: <http://survey.confirmit.com:80/wix2/p1147480312.aspx>

+ *The Call to Action project*

Neil Alexander, president and publisher of the United Methodist Publishing House, speaks about the research underway for the Call to Action project and urges your participation in an online survey of United Methodist leaders. The Call to Action

project, endorsed by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table seeks to review leadership, governance and other organizational issues in The United Methodist Church. The goal is to consider and propose actions that will lead to decisions that will help the Church better achieve its mission to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" and fully integrate the Four Areas of Focus (major ministry initiatives) into the fabric of the UMC connection.

Recognizing that alignment across the connectional church is essential in fostering and supporting effectiveness at all levels, one important aspect of the Call to Action project includes a focus on the factors that are most important in assuring vitality in local churches since they "provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs." (Paragraph 120 in The Book of Discipline). This survey is one part of a multi-phase research effort. The survey is one of the tools to gain qualitative insights and quantitative evidence about the factors associated with congregational vitality in United Methodist Churches. The results from this survey will be used to develop hypotheses about what factors (leadership, programs and structures) are most often found in churches that are seen as effective and vital. Those hypotheses will be further tested through another survey and statistical analysis. Our hope is to have as many persons as possible from across the church (clergy and lay) complete the survey.

Researchers from the independent outside consulting firm of Towers Watson are overseeing this part of the project and will report their findings to the Call to Action Steering Team based on a combination of personal interviews, focus groups, literature review, surveys and rigorous analysis of statistical reports from churches and annual conferences about what defines church vitality, and what impacts that vitality. The Steering Team will incorporate this information and other data as a part of its discernment process, leading to reports and recommendations that will be made in the fall of 2010 to the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table.

– This was found at: <http://abouttheconnection.blogspot.com:80/2010/03/umphs-neil-alexander-urges-ums-to-take.html>

+ **Can The UMC Break Out of Its Institutional Mold?**

The question, "Can UMC break out of its institutional mold?" is the headline affixed to Donald Haynes' current article in the United Methodist Reporter. Haynes, who was quoted extensively in the last Happenings article, continues his discussion of renewal in The United Methodist Church in the March 5 issue of the Reporter. As the headline suggests, Haynes believes a serious barrier on the road to renewal is "institutionalism."

Haynes is just one of a number of concerned persons who is contributing to the discussion about change and new life in The United Methodist Church. Persons in the evangelical renewal groups also share the concern about the future of The United Methodist Church. The next few Happenings articles will be dealing with this. The subject of redesigning and restructuring The United Methodist Church has relevance at the present time for two reasons:

1) Latest statistics from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) indicate that in 2008 The United Methodist Church lost 1.1% of its members, the largest percentage decline since 1974. Worship attendance was down 1.83%. Only 84% of apportionment funds were received. And, even more discouraging, the Western Jurisdiction reached only 74.8% of its apportionment askings in 2009. We are not slowing the decline.

2) A planning, study, and recommending group-The Call to Action Steering Committee-appointed by the Connectional Table upon the recommendation of the Council of Bishops, is meeting during the next few months with the promise that some major changes will be made in the denomination. The group is welcoming input and has even developed a survey for this purpose. The survey can be found at: <http://survey.confirmit.com/wix2/p1147480312.aspx>.

While Donald Haynes uses the term "institutionalism" to describe a problem that needs to be addressed in The United Methodist Church, others of us would prefer the term "corporate culture." Institutionalism itself is not so much the problem as the corporate culture behind the institutionalism. "Corporate culture" is a term used to describe the way church leaders think and act. It involves the language that is used, values and beliefs that drive decisions, and the mind-set behind those values and beliefs. Many evangelicals would argue that the present corporate culture has a life of its own and does not adequately reflect the history and doctrine of the church, nor even the Discipline of The United Methodist Church. "Corporate culture" is a phrase that can also be used of local churches. The corporate culture of some congregations is like that of a religious Rotary Club. The corporate culture of other congregations, especially small rural churches, might reflect that of a family (both good and bad). In other instances the corporate culture is that of a social agency.

With this as background it should be possible to talk about "branding," which might be defined as the marks that distinguish us first of all as Christians living in a secular world, but also the marks that distinguish us as United Methodist from other churches.

Our present advertising slogan, "Open hearts, Open minds, Open doors," is our official attempt to brand United Methodism. The slogan suggests that United Methodists are accepting, welcoming, and open to new ideas. The problem is

that this is sending a wrong message, at least to many people. In a world hungry for certainty and needing very much to come into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the "Open doors" message sounds like it could be a slogan for a restaurant..., or for schools recruiting students.

Behind the "brand" is, of course, the "progressive" emphasis on "inclusiveness." The idea that our church is open to all people is commendable, but the message relayed is that our United Methodist Church has no standards--that is to say--any life style, any belief, any value, whether it is consistent with the gospel or not, is to be accepted and affirmed. Many of us see this when our United Methodist children, or persons from our congregations, move to a different community, and end up in an independent church, or a church of another denomination, because The United Methodist Church they visited has no substance. One man who joined The United Methodist Church explained, "I was going to this other church and they didn't like the way I was living, so I joined the United Methodists, who don't care."

The problem is that this "inclusiveness" image of the church is not consistent with our church's official doctrine, nor its mission statement ("to make disciples"). Unfortunately, the image is projected not only by some local churches, but by church leaders. When one bishop made a statement that "inclusiveness" is the foundation of United Methodism, she was supported by the Council of Bishops. And so we have a problem, not just with our "institutionalism" as Donald Haynes suggests, but with our corporate culture.

Will the Call to Action Steering Committee address the problem of United Methodist "branding"? The concern is that the kind of people on the committee (bishops and board executives) are the very kind of people who have guided us thus far into the problems we face.

And so the church has lost another 1.1% of its members. We can do better.

– "Can The UMC Break Out of It's Institutional Mold?" is authored by Dr. Riley Case, a retired UM pastor from Indiana.

Of Interest

+ *The health care bill*

Following is the text of a facsimile I as a private citizen sent to congressional leaders – here for your information. – AOM

The health care bill presently before Congress will push our country over the edge financially, politically, and in terms of our constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. This will not only drive us into financial distress from which we as a country will never recover, it is an egregious intrusion into the lives of every living American. This bill, coupled with the excessive waste of money for the "stimulus bill" and the crushing burden levied on businesses by the "Cap and Trade" bill, will saddle the taxpaying citizens with yet another financial hardship. In addition, it is problematic, having been brought into the legislative process through a path of secret meetings, misstatements, back-room deals, and financial excess. We are told there is a "health care crisis"! First of all, I don't believe it, since we have the best health care system in the world – despite all of its faults. Secondly, the phrase "health care crisis" is being used to manipulate us into thinking we have to do something right now – without carefully examining what it is we are doing in this massive bill. If this is truly a crisis, why does it not take effect for four years, yet we are to start paying for it immediately? This is akin to telling us that we desperately need a new house now, start paying for it now – but not be able to move into it until four years later. This is simply not logical and flunks the "common-sense" test.

This "health care bill" will not result in improved health care. In addition to all of the reasons above, a new survey points out that just because more Americans have access to "health care" doesn't mean they will have doctors to go with it. According to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, anywhere from a third to a half of all practicing doctors say they would leave their profession if the President's health care plan passes. As reported by CNS News, "a majority of physicians said health care reform would cause the quality of American medical care to 'deteriorate' and it could be the 'final straw' that sends a sizeable number" of their peers out of the field. Not only would these doctors leave their profession, but 63% would urge others to not go into it as well.

Andrea Santiago, a spokeswoman for Medicus Firm, which was responsible for the poll, refuted the claim that this plan has the backing of most American doctors – but backers are only 17%. While almost every physician is in favor of some kind of reform (96%), relatively few believe in the President's takeover plan. Today's *Wall Street Journal* featured a column about health care in Massachusetts, similar to the universal system being pushed now.... As Grace-Marie Turner tells it, 56% of state doctors are "no longer accepting new patients" because they cannot keep up with the demand. In fact, it takes an average patient 44 days just to see a physician.

An added issue of great concern is the provision for abortion in the measure. This is one aspect of the "death ethic" that

is incorporated into the legislation with billions of taxpayer dollars flowing into U.S. abortion clinics.

I agree with Monica Crowley who said, “What does Mr. Obama mean when he says, ‘It’s within our grasp?’” He’s saying that the fundamental remaking of America is within his grasp.” This is not about health care; it’s about control.

This troubled bill needs to be set aside and work initiated on one to address any shortcomings of our current system in a meaningful, practical way. The free enterprise system in the private sector is the most efficient solution for this.

– Allen O. Morris; a Commentary; March 17, 2010.

+ *Religious Left Rallies for Obamacare’s Final Stand*

The Religious and Evangelical Left, plus the Islamic Society of North America and a few others, are making a final Custer-like stand on behalf of much cherished Obamacare. In an ad featured in *The Hill*, a Capitol Hill newspaper aimed at congressional staffers, a religious coalition called “Faithful Reform in Health Care” demanded that Congress “complete the task at hand on behalf of the millions who are left out and left behind in our current health care system.” Supposedly, these insistent religious groups speak on behalf of millions of religious Americans, most of whom are politically more conservative than the general population. If Americans as a whole reject Obamacare, then almost certainly most religiously active Americans oppose Obamacare. Presumably, the various bishops and other ostensibly important clerics who signed this ad are hoping that Capitol Hill readers will not realize that most churchgoers don’t look to Episcopal or Lutheran or Methodist bishops for wise political counsel.

“Opportunities to comprehensively address our broken health care system are rare,” the pro-Obamacare religious coalition insisted with a ...sense of panic. “Decades of failed attempts at reform testify to the difficulty of this task, and we know that the current effort has not been easy. However, we now stand closer than ever before to historic health care reform. Turning back now could mean justice delayed for another generation and an unprecedented opportunity lost.” Foisting government control of the health care system on America is so urgent that lawmakers are implicitly implored to disregard their constituents’ views. The old Religious Left, now joined by the emerging Evangelical Left, typically joined by left-wing Catholic groups and the oddly paired Islamic Society, has insisted for much of the last century that biblical social justice equals nearly unrestricted statism. “We are communities of faith who have supported comprehensive health care reform for decades,” they noted with accuracy in their ad. “We have also offered vocal support – and occasional constructive criticism – of the health care reform effort over the last year.”

In truth, the Religious Left et. al. would prefer a Canadian/British style single payer system rather than trifle with Obamacare’s more complicated preservation of private insurance under tight federal control. But the Religious Left rightly understands that Obamacare’s incrementalism likely would lead to more total government subjugation. So they are willing to be patient. “We know that no comprehensive health care reform bill will be perfect,” they indulgently opined. “Indeed, if any piece of legislation ever fulfills our full vision, our vision is far too small,” they candidly admitted. Likely for much of the Religious Left and its allies, their holistic “vision” would entail coercive state management of every arena of human life.

Traditional Christians and Jews have understood that Providence has a vital vocation for families, religious institutions, private business, independent charities, and a whole range of non-government actors. Traditionally, they have believed that the government only does, to paraphrase Lincoln, what the people cannot do for themselves. But the old Religious Left, joined increasingly by Evangelical Left wannabes, leaves almost no civic space for the private sphere. In their almost totalitarian perspective, the state is an endless cornucopia of goods and services providing for every human need. Families, churches, businesses and charities become almost inconsequential, or are, at best, mere compliant handmaidens to an all powerful government. Most religious people would find this fantasy nightmarish. But this nightmare animates nearly all the social justice activism of religious leftists.

Seizing control of America’s health care industry is naturally a key ingredient of the Religious Left’s statist absolutism. They rightly understand that Obamacare’s defeat could forever forestall socialized medicine in America. Hence the dire urgency. “As people of faith, we envision a society where every person is afforded health, wholeness and human dignity,” their ad sermonized, once again assuming non-governmental solutions are incapable of assuring health or dignity. Quoting Martin Luther King, Jr, they beseeched: “Let us not delay health care justice any longer. This is your moment for political courage, vision, leadership and faith. We urge you to take heart and move meaningful health care reform forward.”

There are the usual claims that without government control, chaos and suffering will ensue. After all, how can anything be accomplished unless tax-funded bureaucrats are in charge? The religious leftists assert that Obamacare’s demise will mean “tens of thousands will continue to die needlessly each year,” “tens of millions will remain uninsured,” “health costs

will continue to grow much faster than wages,” “many millions of hard-working people and their children will join the ranks of the uninsured,” “businesses...will either drop coverage or will be unable to make needed investments,” and the “nation’s economy – and its ability to create jobs – will suffer.” How nice that the religious leftists actually mentioned “businesses” and the need for “investments.” Maybe this was a talking point added by the coalition’s political consultants. For the Religious Left, private businesses are the enemy, motivated only by greed and private, and to be suffered only grudgingly, and only then if under a tight government leash entailing endless regulation and high taxation.

Signers of this “Call for Political Courage, Vision, Leadership, and Faith” include officials of the Episcopal, Presbyterian USA, Evangelical Lutheran, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist denominations, along with Jim Wallis’ Sojourners, Evangelicals for Social Action, the National Council of Churches, Quakers, Mennonites, left-wing Catholic orders like the Maryknollers, a couple [of] Muslim groups and several Jewish organizations. Some of these groups, or at least their elites, have very little theology any more. But they are increasingly unified behind a single unifying spiritual principle: worshipping at the altar of the state.

– A commentary by Mark D. Tooley, March 5, 2010

+ *Methodists, Catholics, Lutherans celebrate milestone*

CHICAGO (UMNS) – Justification by faith. Those three words divided Western Christianity for centuries, splitting apart families and nations. Wars were fought over their meaning. So it is with a sense of awe and wonder that representatives of three major Christian traditions - Methodism, Lutheranism and Catholicism - will gather in a Chicago church Oct. 1 to celebrate their fundamental agreement on how sinful human beings are forgiven and brought into a right relationship with God. Young churchgoers like Nikki Rhoads, 31, say they see their Catholic and Lutheran friends "as just Christians." What would Jesus do? "He'd want us all to love each other," says Rhoads, who attends Hillcrest United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tenn.

– UMNS, September 30, 2009

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues. Problems accompany legal euthanasia

Assisted suicide has been legal for a year in Washington, and the state health department has issued its first report. During the first year, 63 people requested and received lethal prescriptions to kill themselves. 47 have since died, while 36 are confirmed to have used the poison to accomplish it. Although 79 percent suffered from cancer, few cited pain as the reason for seeking end of life treatment as the main concern was the cost for alternate treatment.

What is and has been the reality of this [is] that when you transform assisted suicide into a medical treatment, it makes it just like every other medical treatment, except it's lots cheaper. And people begin to see it as a benefit for the family," comments Rita Marker, attorney and president of the International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide (ITF).

Many of the patients had insurance, but Marker says that means nothing. It does, however, serve as a reminder of an Oregon cancer victim whose treatment was rejected by her insurance. She was told, though, that they would cover her drugs for assisted suicide.

The report shows there are too many unknowns, and the possibility of murder is an example. "After that individual got the prescription, we don't know if once they got it home they put it into the medicine cabinet and then decided, 'I don't think I'll take this' and then whether someone else thinking maybe it would be a good idea for them to take it, mixed it into their food," the ITF president poses. "There's no way of knowing."

There is an open chance for elder abuse, but no way to track it or prosecute those responsible since the law requires prosecutors to treat the death as natural.

– Charlie Butts, OneNewsNow; 3/16/2010. OneNewsNow is a news service ministry of the American Family Association.

Homosexuality.

+ *Church to hold gay weddings*

Clergy at Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., have vowed to perform same-sex weddings—putting themselves

at odds with the denomination’s Book of Discipline. The city council in December passed an amendment to legalize same-sex marriage in the District of Columbia, joining five states that allow the unions. Dumbarton’s pastor, the Rev. Mary Kay Totty, and 12 other ordained clergy who attend the church have agreed to conduct the weddings. “Some of them are retired clergy, some are serving in appointments beyond the local church,” Ms. Totty said in an interview. The Book of Discipline prohibits clergy from performing homosexual unions. The 2008 General Conference affirmed marriage as the union of one man and one woman. In a March 5 statement, Washington Bishop John Schol said he is required to uphold the Discipline

“and will process and follow through with any complaint or charge brought against a United Methodist clergyperson of the Baltimore-Washington Conference who performs a same-sex wedding or holy union.”

– Extracted from *The United Methodist Reporter*, Mar 16, 2010

+ ***Episcopal Church USA approves lesbian bishop***

LOS ANGELES - The Episcopal Church has approved the election of a lesbian assistant bishop in the Diocese of Los Angeles, making her the second openly homosexual bishop in the global Anglican Communion. Episcopal conservatives said the approval of the Rev. Mary Glasspool was "grieving the heart of God." The Episcopal Church, which is the Anglican body in the United States, caused an uproar in 2003 by consecrating the first openly homosexual bishop, V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire. Breakaway Episcopal conservatives have formed a rival church, the Anglican Church in North America. – Taken from the Internet.

(UM) Men *UM Men Begin New Chapter*

UM Men want to be known less as a group of retired old men eating out and more as advocates for the hungry. Marking a new era, the organization has elected a new chief executive and is expanding its hunger ministries and creating a new online learning center. The National Association of Conference Presidents of UMM, meeting Mar. 3-7 in Nashville, installed Gilbert C. Hanke as the new chief executive officer of the General Commission on UM Men. The 42 presidents and their 23 prayer advocates also learned about plans to launch an online learning center to provide continuing education experiences for persons interested in men's ministry, scouting, prayer and anti-hunger activities.

Over the past 12 years, UMM have given \$2.3 million to anti-hunger efforts led by the Society of St. Andrew, an agency based in Big Island, Va. Funds collected by the men provided 176.8 million meals. In addition, hunger relief advocates related to UMM led over 50,000 volunteers in more than 4,000 gleanings to provide 19.7 million pounds of produce donated to 11,306 critical feeding agencies. Participants at the March meeting also agreed to help Stop Hunger Now, based in Raleigh, provide 13-ounce packages of nutritious dried food for hungry families throughout the world and were encouraged to host food-packaging events.

The presidents learned about the proposed creation of a web-based "Leader Learning & Development Center" where participants can improve their skills as local, district and annual conference leaders. When it is complete, it will be available 24 hours a day for self-paced learning at the commission's website

– J. Richard Peck, UMM; <http://www.gcumm.org/>.

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Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. – President George Washington signed into law the Northwest Ordinance in 1789 during the same time when the First Amendment was written.

Global Outlook

All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent. – Thomas Jefferson

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National Council of Churches *National Council of Churches – Uneasy Messenger*

The National Council of Churches Struggles to Address Islamic Violence

The National Council of Churches (NCC) has not always seemed sure of itself when addressing Islam. Eager to please its interfaith partners and to counter alleged Islamophobia in American society, it has often exercised self-censorship. Islam, in its account, is a religion of peace and justice—not a cause of war and oppression. At the same time, this American ecumenical body cannot dismiss the cries of partner churches overseas suffering persecution under Islamist regimes.

“My life could be in danger,” the Reverend Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali told the gathered church delegations at the NCC General Assembly in Minneapolis in November 2009. An Anglican from the (United) Church of Pakistan who now teaches at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Amjad-Ali explained that his family had a Muslim background; thus, their conversion to Christianity made them apostates in the eyes of Islamic radicals. Amjad-Ali made these comments in the course of leading a Bible study on 1 Thessalonians 5, a passage that the Apostle Paul addressed to a church that was undergoing persecution.

Amjad-Ali noted that at least 234 people were currently being held in Pakistani jails for alleged blasphemy against Islam. Under Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws, these prisoners could face the death penalty. And not only prisoners' lives are in danger: Sometimes Islamist-incited mobs don't bother with the law, but take matters into their own hands. Amjad-Ali told

of “nuns raped [and] people burned” in recent attacks on Christian villages.

He noted that the Apostle Paul wrote to the churches assuming that they would be under some degree of persecution. Then, strikingly, he argued that if today’s churches are not encountering resistance, then they are probably in some way compromising the gospel.

Skittish About Islam

As an ecumenical body of 36 member churches, spanning the mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and historically African-American denominations, the NCC regards itself as the most prestigious Christian organization in the United States. It frequently highlights its partnerships and dialogues with various Islamic organizations. At the same time, it has often shied away from criticizing militant Islam, seemingly fearing that any such criticism might provoke or justify reactionary discrimination against American Muslims. By comparison, the council seems less concerned about the threat posed by extreme elements within the Islamic faith.

While the NCC has sometimes been willing to draw attention to persecuted groups, it has been reluctant to fault governments—unless, that is, the governments were those of the United States, Israel, or other US allies. Regimes hostile to the United States, whether Communist or Islamist, have generally gotten a pass. (A 2004 report published by the Institute for Religion and Democracy, titled *Human Rights Advocacy in the Mainline Protestant Churches*, notes that, of seven human rights criticisms made by the NCC’s General Assembly in the years 2000–2003, four were against Israel, two against the United States, and one against Sudan.)

In its response to the violence against Christians in the Indian state of Orissa in 2008–2009, the NCC clearly named Hindu extremists as the aggressors. But its accounts of the Darfur genocide in Sudan (itself carried out against a Muslim people) portrayed those responsible as an unnamed force spurred by “ethnic and tribal hatred.” American and other Western governments were criticized for their ineffectiveness in protecting the Darfurians, but the fundamentalist Islamic government in Khartoum, which instigated and supplied the Arab Janjaweed militias carrying out the slaughter, did not receive the NCC’s ire. Similarly, the Islamist connection in the persecution of southern Sudanese Christians was also downplayed or unmentioned.

Encouraging on Pakistan

It has been surprising, therefore, to note the increasingly strong stance taken by the NCC over the past year against anti-Christian persecution in Pakistan. Perhaps this marks at least a partial turning point for the council. Having in the past been reluctant to name the persecutors of Pakistani Christians, the NCC has recently joined a World Council of Churches petition condemning Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. It also directly named Islamic fundamentalists as responsible for the attacks on Pakistani Christians.

In September 2009, the Episcopal Bishop of Lahore, Pakistan, the Reverend Dr. Alexander John Malik, visited the NCC, highlighting the Pakistani church’s concerns following attacks on Christian villages in the country the month before. During Malik’s visit, NCC General Secretary Michael Kinnamon released a statement noting the pressure Christian minorities are under around the world and declaring that the NCC’s member communions stood in solidarity with overseas Christians.

Discouraging on Fort Hood

But despite these encouraging signs, and even though Amjad-Ali’s Bible study was well-received by the General Assembly delegates, other events and messages at the Minneapolis meeting seemed to lapse back into the old pattern of self-censored restraint or willful diversion. For example, a statement adopted by the General Assembly about the Fort Hood massacre in Texas referred to the “tragic loss of life” and even to “extensive gun violence,” but made no mention of the context of the shootings or the stated Islamic motivations of the gunman. Instead, the statement cautioned that “anger and suspicion of the unknown individual can lead some to stigmatize an entire community of faith.”

Indeed, NCC officials seemed eager to use the attack mainly as an opportunity to denounce gun availability. In an address, former NCC President Michael E. Livingston cited the Fort Hood shootings as a consequence of loose gun control policies in Texas. Again, no mention was made of the gunman’s motivations. Instead, Livingston hypothesized that the gunman “may himself have been to some extent a victim,” presumably of an unjust military culture or workplace stress. The fact that other servicemen had not gone on a shooting rampage against their fellow soldiers, or that the gunman, Major Nidal M. Hasan, had yelled “God is great” in Arabic during his attack, apparently did not figure in the NCC’s analysis.

Time to Give Witness

If the NCC is to stand up for believers like Malik and Amjad-Ali, it will sometimes have to risk uncomfortable conversations with its Muslim interfaith partners. But in the process, it will give a witness to the persecuted churches. It will be acting not as a hand-wringing religious elite saying “tut-tut” to its own nation, but as a defender of “the least of these” in the far corners of the earth.

– “National Council of Churches – Uneasy Messenger, *The National Council of Churches Struggles to Address Islamic Violence*” by Jeff Walton

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Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. ... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.

– Thomas Jefferson

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Addendum to the April Update

Report from Concerned Methodists on UM responsibility in the “Health Care” and “Amnesty” bills

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Although those of us in Concerned Methodists do not engage in political advocacy, nor are we doing so here, these events and actions do need to be discussed in light of the political advocacy by our own denominational officials in the United Methodist Church. As to how the recent events in the public sector with the passage of “health care reform” and pushing the "amnesty for [illegal] immigrants" bill should inform those of us in the UMC, we need to understand that many of our most prominent denominational leaders have merged spiritual priorities together with political advocacy – and have blurred them so that they are often indistinguishable to us and almost certainly to themselves.

Make no mistake about it – these are serious times. Both of these actions together – the "health care bill" and "amnesty for illegal immigrants" will result in a seismic shift of the balance of power in the direction of those who would "remake America"! Our country is founded on the Judeo-Christian base, and if we leave it we will no longer have the chance to again become the once-great nation that we once were. Certain political actions have been espoused by our denominational leadership – and we need to see how in these actions they have taken the side of those who will lead to “remaking America” in a way that will take us away from our Christian base and hence our Methodist foundation, heritage, and future. As “Christian” leaders they are taking actions that go against our teachings from the Bible and sound Christian teachings. There is an inconsistency here.

If "amnesty" is being pursued, as it is, it would be more difficult to oppose because the same appeal would be on humanitarian grounds. Some of the non-political groups to include Roman Catholic bishops in the United States who aggressively opposed the "health care bill" are in support of "amnesty for [illegal] immigrants," so they would lend their political advocacy to its passage. If all of these groups combined could not successfully oppose the "health care bill" those remaining groups who oppose passage of “amnesty” will not be able to stop passage of this bill.

The subsequent results would be this.

If the “amnesty” bill is enacted into law the political party that pushed for its passage, which is the same political party that aggressively promoted the “health care bill,” would be the beneficiary of the results, since these health care benefits will now be extended to the formerly illegal immigrants but now legal immigrants. With between 12 and 18 million voters added to their side, it very well might be they would have an unassailable position of power. If this happened, it would be difficult to overcome the result in all subsequent elections to include the one this coming November. This means that those in power now would remain in power. Very possibly this would be with the leader of that political party in an invulnerable position – and maybe becoming "President for life."

Again, passage of both of these actions taken together – first the "health care bill" and then the "amnesty for illegal immigrants" bill – will lead to a dramatically changed country, one which will take us away from our Christian base and may even lead to the persecution of orthodox Christians within the border of our country.

And our denominational leadership has been in the forefront for political advocacy for both of these bills.

Farfetched? Where we are today would have seemed unthinkable twenty years ago.

I play chess, and in that game this would be called "Checkmate" – victory won by the other side!

One possible help website (I have not checked it out but a friend e-mailed it to me) for those wishing to become engaged is: NovemberIsComing.com Perhaps this is a viable website to help you to network with concerned people from across the nation in making a change with whatever is happening in Washington. Until those who are concerned translate their nationwide anger and frustration into meaningful action, our denominational and national leadership will continue to take us down the road toward what is seen as a socialist state – or national collapse.

Two issues in the following report from RENEW (reprinted below) need to be addressed:

RE: "Therefore, care should be taken by boards and agencies, clergy, and bishops when they engage in political activism in the name of the whole church."

Our denominational agencies work tirelessly for causes that are not Christian, but come from a radical, left-wing political objective. Even worse, many are anti-Christian with a veneer or religiosity and religious talk over it. They pay no attention to concerns expressed by the good laypeople in the pews whose money supports this activism that is inconsistent with basic Christian beliefs. Sometimes even in the face of overwhelming laity opposition or the clear teachings of the Bible do denominational employees continue to pursue radical political agendas in the hopes of wearing down internal opposition and final accomplishment of their goals. In other words, they are serving their own goals over and against Christian beliefs and the welfare of the people of the United Methodist Church.

RE: "The only way to stop it is through General Conference---so carefully select your delegates and let your voices be heard!"

This is where I respectfully disagree with RENEW. In addition to what RENEW has recommended which we fully support, we can do other things and take other actions:

1. Let our money speak for us. As we in Concerned Methodists maintain (even under severe criticism for doing so), you as a Christian are not obligated to give the money you want for the Lord's work into wasteful or, even worse, un-Christian activities – to include carefully watching what you give into your local church. Rather, make efficient use of your tithes and offerings to give to what is truly the Lord's work. Contrary to what your preacher would tell you, your tithes are not owed to your local church, especially not into the apportionments ((the "tax" paid to the denominational bureaucracy). This is not scriptural, as attested to by numerous Bible scholars the most notable of whom is Dr. Ralph Richardson. A careful examination of this area is covered in the chapter entitled "Responsible Christian Stewardship" in our book *Stewardship Perspectives - 2007*.

2. What we can do to change things in addition to the General Conference in 2012 is to resolutely let your giving speak for you and refuse to support un-Christian political activity at whatever level in our United Methodist (UM) Church and in the face of social pressure to do so in your local church; write your Congressmen – members of the House of Representatives and the Senate – and tell them emphatically that members of the UM boards and agencies do not speak for you and do not reflect your political views.

For me, I go a step further. Since I know a bit about these areas and the backgrounds of many of our United Methodist Church employees in the general boards and agencies, I am not averse to communicating to our Congressmen that I do not deem our self-chosen church spokesmen to be competent to speak responsibly in these areas – their perspectives often reflect insufficient knowledge of the advocacy areas, uninformed reasoning, shallow Christian spiritual depth, and a lack of perspective as to what has made The United States great.

In addition, you can also write legislators at all levels of the local and state government to inform them of what your positions are on the different moral and ethical issues before the public.

The most obvious fact that the actions of our church leaders are misguided and do not reflect sound judgment is

evidenced by the reality that our United Methodist Church has suffered a 42-year, uninterrupted decline. The responsibility for this is laid squarely at their feet. If denominational leaders do not know what it takes to get our church on the right course so that it can grow, how in the world do they think they are competent enough to presume to run our country? Assuredly, I have no confidence in their leadership, either within our denomination nor outside of our denomination, and do not hesitate to state that they do not speak for me. Yet despite the fact that have failed to responsibly lead the United Methodist Church and to represent it outside of our church, they are paid by laity dollars that go into the offering plate through the apportionment, and to the clergy, bishops, and general boards and agencies.

For the future of our once-great United Methodist Church, heritage, and country, we need to pray and get involved as we have never done before.

Report from RENEW: What a Weekend in Washington!

The healthcare bill passed, much to the chagrin of the majority of United States citizens. Pro-life groups are profoundly disappointed in the last minute deal brokered between the Obama administration and Rep. Bart Stupak which gave the final votes for passage. Perhaps even more shocking to United Methodists was when Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi from the House podium proceeded to thank our church for enabling the passage of health care reform.

What!!

That's right! The General Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division, two agencies within the UMC, have been working tirelessly to promote passage of this legislation. Emboldened with resolutions passed at General Conference, they have been emboldened to speak for all United Methodists Church both nationally and abroad.

This partisan political lobbying is one of the big reasons people leave our denomination and the only way to stop it is for members of the United Methodist Church to say enough is enough! You can do this by staying informed on the issues affecting our church, by voicing your concerns to pastors and bishops, and by carefully selecting delegates to annual, jurisdictional, and General Conference who will stand up to the boards and agencies that control so much of the legislative process of the UMC.

Take a stand and let your voice be heard!

Another Political Rally in Washington

While healthcare was the hot topic yesterday, another large event was also taking place in Washington that involved many United Methodists. A huge "immigration reform" march was taking place on the mall calling for open borders and amnesty for undocumented immigrants [or as some term more correctly "illegal immigrants"]. Bishop Minerva Carcano, the first Hispanic bishop elected to the Council of Bishops, was a featured speaker. Boards and agencies such as Church and Society and the Women's Division were strong supporters of the event. United Methodists faithfully disagree on many political issues due to the diversity within our denomination. Therefore, care should be taken by boards and agencies, clergy, and bishops when they engage in political activism in the name of the whole church.

Every church member should read the 1,000 page UM Book of Resolutions. It is a text-book of leftist political activism on every conceivable subject. The only way to stop it is through General Conference---so carefully select your delegates and let your voices be heard!

Support Renewal Organizations in United Methodism

Besides staying informed on the issues and carefully selecting delegates, another way to advocate for change within our denomination is to support renewal organizations within our denomination. Your prayer and monetary help support the vital work of these organizations.

– Taken from the RENEW Network. “RENEW is a women's ministry network for United Methodists. They promote Christ-centered women's ministries within the local church and advocate for their official acceptance within the denomination. Their mission is....Seeking, Sharing, and Serving...Christ.”