

Monthly Update

March 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the “Monthly Update” contains further information on what is happening in our United Methodist Church – both good and those of concern.

In the last issue of the Update, we had addressed the devastation in Haiti – and assuredly our sympathy is with the people there. It is for that reason that support provided to alleviate the suffering there should be maximized in the way it is used. We have long supported doing all that we can for the Lord in the use of our material resources. Part of ensuring this happens is channeling your giving through channels that are both responsible and efficient. Two of these groups that we unhesitatingly recommend are the Salvation Army and Samaritan’s Purse, in addition to the mission in Haiti Rehoboth Ministries. During this past trip to Asbury Theological Seminary, I spoke with two officers from the Salvation Army and confirmed that their ministry is actively involved in relief efforts there.

I have read and heard advertisements to give through a government agency, the United Nations, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), and the Red Cross. Unfortunately, all four of these channels have been problematic in different instances of aid in the past – and so we cannot endorse these as channels for your giving to provide meaningful help. I regret making this recommendation but I must.

In addition we had provided a good deal of information provided by official United Methodist agencies. In reading this information please notice the perspectives that are offered and the concentrated attention given to United Methodists as opposed to the general populace. We need to ask, “Are we being focused internally on our denomination as opposed to reporting the news as it is?”

We are currently looking ahead to and strategizing for the 2012 General Conference. We thank you for your support in standing with us at this important time in the life of our United Methodist Church. we would ask that you continue to pray for us – that we will make the best possible use of our time and resources in “contending for the faith” as we believe the Lord has called us to do, our United Methodist Church – that it will once again be a powerful institution to spread the true gospel message, and our United States of America – that it will return to its roots that has made it the greatest nation in the history of the world.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

March 2010 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

*"Democracy is two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch.
Liberty is a well-armed lamb contesting the vote." – Benjamin Franklin, 1759*

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The Good Stuff

[Editorial note: Of all the issues which we are addressing this month – and indeed – at this time in our denomination's and our nation's history, we believe none are so important as those which are foundational to our country as we know it. If we lose this focus, we shall lose our well-being as a sovereign nation. This we must not allow to happen. That is the reason that we are placing first *The Mount Vernon Statement*. – AOM]

+ *United We Stand*

On the grounds where George Washington once walked, it seemed fitting for 100 plus conservative leaders to gather in recognition of the timeless principles for which our Founders fought. This afternoon, I joined fellow signers Attorney General Ed Meese, Heritage Foundation President Edwin Feulner, Media Research Center President Brent Bozell, Federalist Society co-founder David McIntosh, and Americans for Tax Reform President Grover Norquist, American Conservative Union Chairman David Keene, and others in rededicating our movement to a document of conservative unity: the Mount Vernon Statement. With almost universal disappointment in the direction of this administration, we want to show the country that there is a better way.

As a new generation rises up, this is a perfect time to remind America of the enduring values of national security, economic opportunity, religious liberty, and personal responsibility. Especially now, in the face of great challenges, it's more important than ever that the coalition of social, fiscal, and national defense conservatives remain unified. If you'd like to join us in reaffirming these Constitutional ideals, take the step to become a part of history. Log on to our website and signing the Statement yourself.

– Tony Perkins

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The Mount Vernon Statement Constitutional Conservatism A Statement for the 21st Century

We recommit ourselves to the ideas of the American Founding. Through the Constitution, the Founders created an enduring framework of limited government based on the rule of law. They sought to secure national independence, provide for economic opportunity, establish true religious liberty and maintain a flourishing society of republican self-government.

These principles define us as a country and inspire us as a people. They are responsible for a prosperous, just nation unlike any other in the world. They are our highest achievements, serving not only as powerful beacons to all who strive for freedom and seek self-government, but as warnings to tyrants and despots everywhere.

Each one of these founding ideas is presently under sustained attack. In recent decades, America's principles have been undermined and redefined in our culture, our universities and our politics. The self-evident truths of 1776 have been supplanted by the notion that no such truths exist. The federal government today ignores the limits of the Constitution, which is increasingly dismissed as obsolete and irrelevant.

Some insist that America must change, cast off the old and put on the new. But where would this lead -- forward or backward, up or down? Isn't this idea of change an empty promise or even a dangerous deception?

The change we urgently need, a change consistent with the American ideal, is not movement away from but toward our founding principles. At this important time, we need a restatement of Constitutional conservatism grounded in the priceless principle of ordered liberty articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The conservatism of the Declaration asserts self-evident truths based on the laws of nature and nature's God. It defends life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It traces authority to the consent of the governed. It recognizes man's self-interest but also his capacity for virtue.

The conservatism of the Constitution limits government's powers but ensures that government performs its proper job effectively. It refines popular will through the filter of representation. It provides checks and balances through the several branches of government and a federal republic.

A Constitutional conservatism unites all conservatives through the natural fusion provided by American principles. It reminds economic conservatives that morality is essential to limited government, social conservatives that unlimited government is a threat to moral self-government, and national security conservatives that energetic but responsible government is the key to America's safety and leadership role in the world.

A Constitutional conservatism based on first principles provides the framework for a consistent and meaningful policy agenda.

- + It applies the principle of limited government based on the rule of law to every proposal.
- + It honors the central place of individual liberty in American politics and life.
- + It encourages free enterprise, the individual entrepreneur, and economic reforms grounded in market solutions.
- + It supports America's national interest in advancing freedom and opposing tyranny in the world and prudently considers what we can and should do to that end.
- + It informs conservatism's firm defense of family, neighborhood, community, and faith.

If we are to succeed in the critical political and policy battles ahead, we must be certain of our purpose. We must begin by retaking and resolutely defending the high ground of America's founding principles.

February, 2010

– Taken from the Family Research Council (FRC) website: frc.org. Their address is: 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. Phone: 202/393-2100 or 800/225-4008

+ *As applies to the renewal movement in our United Methodist Church*

“If we fall silent about what you have done promoting unbiblical sexual immorality and we overturn or ignore the decision to declare a severing of relationship with the Episcopal Church USA, poor displaced persons will receive aid. Here is our response: The Gospel of Jesus Christ is not for sale, even among the poorest of us who have no money. Eternal life, obedience to Jesus Christ, and conforming to His Word are more important. – Anglican Archbishop Nkoyoyo of Uganda. This was written shortly after the Episcopal Church in the U.S. had confirmed Gene Robinson as it's first actively homosexual bishop. The Episcopal Church had wanted to send a delegation to Uganda to offer financial assistance to the people of his country.

– Taken from a letter from Good News.

+ *Fighting litter in Dallas* ... I have a friend who is president of his homeowners association in the Dallas, Texas suburbs. They were having a terrible problem with litter near some of his association's homes. The reason according to Wallace (my friend) is that six very large, luxurious new houses are being built right next to their community. The trash was coming from the Mexican laborers working at the construction sites ~ bags from McDonald's, Burger King and 7-11, plus coffee cups, napkins, cigarette butts, coke cans, empty bottles, etc.. He went to see the site supervisor and even the general contractor, politely urging them to get their workers not to litter the neighborhood ~ to no avail. He called the city, county, and police ~ got no help there either!

So here's what his community did. They organized about twenty folks, named themselves The "Inner Neighborhood Services" group, and arranged to go out at time and "police" the trash themselves. It is what they did while picking up the trash that is so hilarious. They bought navy blue baseball caps and had the initials "INS" embroidered in gold on the caps. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand what they hoped people might mistakenly think the letters really stand for. After the Inner Neighborhood Services group's first lunch time pickup detail, with all of them wearing their caps and some carrying cameras, 46 out of the total of 68 construction workers did not show up for work the next morning ~ and haven't come back yet. It has been ten days now. The General Contractor, I'm told, is madder than [anything], but can't say anything publicly because he could be busted for hiring illegal aliens.

Wallace and his bunch can't be accused of impersonating federal personnel, because they have the official name of the group recorded in their homeowner association minutes along with a notation about the vote to approve formation of the new subcommittee ~ and besides, they informed the INS in advance of their plans and according to Wallace, the INS said basically, "Have at it!"

Texas Ingenuity Triumphs Again!

– E-mail received from an associate

+ ***Partners in Primetime: Walmart and P&G Launch Must-See TV***

Most Americans know Proctor and Gamble as the name brand behind some of their favorite household products--things like shampoo, dish soap, and laundry detergent. After years of helping to tidy up homes, P&G is ready to clean up television as part of a blockbuster partnership with Walmart. Together, the companies have kicked off a new campaign to produce TV programs that are profanity-free and morality-filled. Launched last week, the collaboration between two of the United States' corporate powerhouses is part of a broader effort to give parents a refuge from the around-the-clock filth on American networks.

Both Walmart and P&G have invested millions of dollars into this exciting venture with the goal of giving families more entertainment options--a mission that 77% of moms and dads overwhelmingly support. Leading up to the launch, P&G and Walmart did plenty of market research to see how adults felt about the current state of television. Based on their research, this is the kind of partnership that American viewers not only need--but want. Only 23% of those surveyed said they were satisfied with the networks' current fare. Another 85% said they would go out of their way "to find and watch quality family-friendly programming."

Fortunately, they won't have to go far. On April 16, NBC is premiering the first installment of the team's made-for-TV movie series, "Secrets of the Mountain." In an era when most of Hollywood's heavyweights are trying to out-sleaze the competition, a partnership of this magnitude could be exactly the kind of peer pressure this industry needs to nudge it toward more wholesome programming. "I like to think of it as 'no lunge TV,'" said Marc Pritchard, an executive with P&G, "meaning that I don't have to lunge for my remote." Walmart echoed the sentiment in its statement and announced that this joint movement is part of a broader "Family Moments" campaign by the chain. It seems to be heeding the call of consumers to pull back from politics and try to engage the culture with traditional values.

According to surveys, it's a goal that's not only positive--but profitable. A 2009 poll found that ads were less effective when they aired on shows with gratuitous sex, violence, and obscenity. As a result, both P&G and Walmart have promised to be more judicious about how they spend their advertising dollars. That includes putting a safe distance between their brands and some of primetime's most risque programs. As someone who has met with the CEOs of both companies to discuss the concerns that many families had about past anti-family policies, I'm pleased to see how two of the country's businesses are setting the example for others by promoting what's good for the family. Our hats go off to P&G and Walmart for paving the way for other Fortune 500 companies to follow suit. Decency is making a comeback, and these two companies are leading the charge!

– E-mail received from The Family Research Council (FRC); February 16, 2010

Of Interest

+ ***Haiti***

In the last 18 days, the impression given by news reports out of Haiti, has turned a group of well-intentioned Baptists into the villains of an elaborate plot to kidnap Haitian children for money. This couldn't be more wrong. As more facts surface about the incident, it is becoming clear that this team of missionaries wasn't operating outside the law at all. Instead, this group was the victim of a local government in complete and utter shambles. Thanks to our friends at the Liberty Institute, which is representing one of the men on the trip, the team did apply to take the children to the Dominican Republic and even passed through the appropriate checkpoints. Unfortunately for the missionaries, their paperwork was never processed--mainly because the government was operating in a state of total disarray. When they finally did get to the border, officials told them they needed more documentation, so the group made a trip back to Port-au-Prince to "sort things out." They were arrested on the spot, despite statements from the children's parents that they consented to the team's care.

As of today, these 10 members of the Central Valley and East Side Baptist Churches will have been in jail for more than two and a half weeks--without a peep from the U.S. State Department. Just to be clear, these are some of the worst prisons in the entire hemisphere. In fact, U.S. officials have called the Haitian cells the "sewers of hell" with conditions so deplorable that they violate the country's human rights obligations. Making matters worse, two of the team's members are

just teenagers who joined the mission because they felt compelled to help. Although a local judge granted a release to eight of the missionaries this afternoon, one is in the hospital and the other is still waiting for help from the American government. The fallout from this misunderstanding has been devastating for the children of Haiti, many of whom are in critical medical condition. International pilots and missionary organizations have suspended their airlifts for fear that they too will be arrested for kidnapping. With only a few kids a day reaching the U.S. for care, hundreds of others are dying--all because this group was wrongly accused.

– Family Research Council, February 17, 2010

+ *Muslim playwrights focus on universal themes for audiences*

[Note: One wonders why space is given in UM News Service for this type of coverage. Would the UMNS also consider publishing in its media what the Koran says about the forcible conversion of non-Muslims to their faith? Or perhaps they would cover the genocide that is being conducted against the primarily Christian population of southern Sudan since they have resisted converting to Islam. However, one should not be too quick to look for such articles. This is offered to you to illustrate the priorities of denominational officials by giving publicity to this type of activity. Would this not indicate an oversight or a lack of objectivity as to the true nature of this religion? – AOM]

“The success of movies like *Slumdog Millionaire* have signaled a broader change in the perception of Muslims in popular culture, making room for a new wave of Muslim playwrights to make their mark.”

NEW YORK—Let’s start with a disclaimer: the Islamic prayers, Urdu expressions and youth-culture slang (like FOB, as in “Fresh Off Boat”) which pepper the new play, *The Domestic Crusaders*, may not be familiar to all American audiences. But if they’re paying attention, playwright Wajahat Ali says, they’ll look beyond the story of a Muslim-American family and maybe even see traces of themselves in the characters.

“This is not a Muslim play. This is a family drama,” said Mr. Ali, whose play opened Sept. 11 for a one-month run at New York’s Nuyorican Poets Cafe. “I wanted it to be authentic but universal.”

The Domestic Crusaders is the latest in a string of stage plays written by Muslim Americans, and they’re receiving critical praise at a time when many Americans, still affected by the 9/11 terror attacks, view Muslims negatively.

This fledgling Muslim theater scene suggests an evolution among U.S. Muslims, whose immigrant forbears, like other newcomers, routed their children into financially secure professions like law or medicine and away from the arts and media.

Although Muslim characters are still rare in TV and film, actors like Aasif Mandvi of Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show* and movies like the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*, in which the underdog hero is Muslim, hint at a subtle change in the broader entertainment industry.

The live stage, while less visible and lucrative, offers a good medium for the first generation of Muslim-American artists because it relatively inexpensive and open to risk. At the same time, a few theater companies are specializing in plays written by Muslim playwrights, including Chicago’s Silk Road Theatre Project and the Rasaka Theatre Company, and San Francisco’s Golden Thread Productions.

“It takes a few generations from the first one to feel you can participate more in the creating of culture,” said Yusef El Guindi, an Egyptian-born playwright who lives in Seattle. “That’s what Muslims need to do more, tell their stories.”

Playwrights say the negative images surrounding 9/11 helped accelerate the rise of Muslim theater. “Muslims see themselves working hard, raising a family, paying taxes and being good citizens, and then they turn on the TV and all they see is ‘dirty rag-head,’” said Mr. Ali, who started working on the play shortly after 9/11.

“When you belong to a minority that is so demonized, you have a responsibility to use your voice and speak.”

The playwrights take on a number of sensitive themes, from discrimination and civil rights abuses, to problems specific to Muslim communities, such as materialism, misogyny and racism. Salman and Fatima, the immigrant parents in Mr. Ali’s play, disapprove of their daughter Fatima having a black boyfriend, even though he is Muslim. “Everybody’s equal in Islam,” Fatima shouts at her mother. Meanwhile, Fatima’s older brother Salahuddin, to the chagrin of his parents, drinks and has a preference for white women.

“I have to write stuff that I didn’t agree with, but forced myself to write it because I know the characters would say it,” said Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali, who was born and raised in Silicon Valley to successful Pakistani immigrant parents, is well-versed in the expectations, pressures, and judgments in any tight-knit immigrant community, which is a common theme across many of the plays.

“It’s the struggle to find your place, and the emotional and practical challenges,” said El Guindi, adding that he was inspired by becoming a U.S. citizen in 1996. “I wanted to vote, I wanted to participate. I was startled by how transformative it was. It was almost like a baptism.”

While many Muslim Americans welcome the plays, others have been critical. When Chicago’s Silk Road Theatre Project put on *10 Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith*, a family drama by El Guindi that explored arranged marriage, homosexuality and loss of faith, an official with the Chicago chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) complained it wasn’t the family drama that producers were advertising.

“Of course, as artists, they are free to tackle what they want, but I think it becomes unfair when a play with a subject matter that is distant from the classic struggles of the American-Muslim community, and is moreover not endorsed by it, uses the ‘Muslim bridge-building’ card to market itself,” CAIR spokesman Ahmed Rehab told the Chicago Sun-Times in 2005.

While the number of Muslim-American playwrights is growing, so too are theaters willing to host their works. The Domestic Crusaders was the first in Nuyorican’s 36-year history to sell out all three performances on opening weekend.

Rome Neal, Nuyorican’s theater director, said he missed the relevance of the play at first, but warmed up to it after seeing it as a universal family drama. “A Pakistani-Muslim play just didn’t click for me,” Mr. Neal said. “But after reading it and finding that universal thread, that’s when I thought it could work.”

More plays are on the way. *Tennis in Nablus*, by Ismail Khalidi and set in 1939 Palestine, will be produced in January by Atlanta’s Tony Award-winning Alliance Theater. *Language Rooms*, a dark comedy about two Arab-American investigators by El Guindi, opens next March in Philadelphia’s Wilma Theater. *Unveiled*, a play by Rohina Malik that follows five Muslim women in a post-9/11 world, also opens in March in Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theater.

Suehyla El Attar, who is cast in *Tennis in Nablus*, says she hopes for the day when being “Muslim” on stage will be rather unremarkable.

“I’m waiting for a Muslim Neil Simon, someone who can write story after story,” she said, “and if characters occasionally happen to be Muslim, fine.”

This fledgling Muslim theater scene suggests an evolution among U.S. Muslims, who are now expressing themselves within the greater American culture.

– By Omar Sacirbey, Religion News Service

(UM) General Board of Church and Society

+ ‘Truth commission’ looks at conscience in war

NEW YORK (UMNS) — The United Methodist Board of Church and Society is a co-sponsor of the “Truth Commission on Conscience in War,” which will meet March 21-22, at Riverside Church in New York. The intent is to convene a group of interfaith leaders who want to launch a nationwide conversation aimed at changing the current conscientious objection law to include the conscience of soldiers and “just war” tradition in religion in the regulations. A project of Faith Voices for the Common Good, the commission’s meeting will include a public hearing from 4 to 8 p.m. on March 21 in the Riverside Church nave.

[Note: We have little confidence that anything productive will come of this. The GBCS typically takes an anti-U.S., pacifistic view. This is seen as a waste of giving by the people in the pews. – AOM]

– UMNS, February 10, 2010

+ Leaders call for restoration of rights in Honduras

WASHINGTON (UMNS) – Three United Methodists - the Rev. John McCullough of Church World Service, Jim Winkler of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, and Nan McCurdy, a missionary - joined with leaders of faith-based and other nongovernmental Latin American policy, human rights, labor and peace organizations to support human rights in Honduras following the June ouster of President Manuel Zelaya and Zelaya's secret return to the country Sept. 21. The Sept. 29 statement urged the current government to restore the country's constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties, along with freedom of the press.

– UMNS, October 2, 2009

(UM) General Commission on Religion and Race. Agency reorganization eliminates five executive positions

WASHINGTON (UMNS)--The United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race has announced a restructuring plan that eliminates five executive positions, resulting in the layoff of nearly 60 percent of the small agency's staff. The layoffs will be effective Dec. 10, the agency said today on its Web site. Erin Hawkins, chief executive, said six new positions are being developed that will have a different emphasis than those being eliminated, and they will be at lower salary levels, resulting in a significant cost savings. "By restructuring our agency, we hope to move our mission closer to the needs of the local church, while still serving as a voice of challenge and encouragement in connectional matters," Hawkins said.

– UMNS, October 12, 2009

(UM) Women/ Women's Issues. United Methodist Women organize against violence

STAMFORD, Conn. (UMNS)--In recognition of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, United Methodist Women are being encouraged to partner with a United Methodist Men's group or other male church members and hold awareness events on domestic violence in their local churches and communities. Directors of the Women's Division, United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, also voted during their Oct. 9-12 annual meeting to endorse the national declaration by religious and spiritual leaders to address violence against women. The United Methodist Council of Bishops signed the declaration in 2006. [Note: One must wonder why they do not speak out against abortion – rather than support it – since studies have shown that this does violence against women in the psychological trauma they suffer, not to mention that this is believed to be a contributing factor that leads to increased violence against women and children in the home by men – and vice versa. When we get away from biblical values, violence escalates. – AOM]

– UMNS, October 12, 2009

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Travel the path of integrity without looking back, for there is never a wrong time to do the right thing!
– As quoted by Mr. Jack Ramsey

Global Outlook

*The trouble with doing something right the first time
is that nobody appreciates how difficult it was.*

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Iran. Maryam Jalili, Mitra Zahmati and Farzan Matin remain in prison in Iran following their arrest on Christmas Eve. On Dec. 24, Maryam, Mitra, Farzan and 12 other Christians were arrested in Pakdasht, Iran, while celebrating Christmas at a house church. After hearing nothing for a week, family members contacted authorities and demanded to know where the Christians were being held. Officials told the families that the Christians would be released that day, but instead they were secretly transferred to the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. – Voice of the Martyrs

Ivory Coast. African church in war zone grows by 588 percent in five years

KORHOGO, Côte d'Ivoire (UMNS) – There is every reason for a church to fail in this rebel-held area in the mountainous north central region of this African nation. It has been the scene of many armed conflicts between government and rebel forces. Nevertheless, The United Methodist Church in the district has increased from 300 members in 2005 to 2,065 members today, reports Isaac Broune, communicator for the Côte d'Ivoire Conference. District Superintendent Isaiah Mye says the credit for the growth belongs to God. – UMNS, February 18, 2010

Laos. Christians Evicted

In January, 48 Christians were forced from their homes by more than 100 officials and villagers in Katin village, Saravan province, Laos, according to Compass Direct News. After gathering for Sunday worship, the believers were expelled from their church at gunpoint and taken to an open field. Officials then confiscated personal belongings from 11 Christians' homes, and six of the homes were later destroyed. Officials also took a pig, worth the equivalent of six weeks' salary, from one of the believers. When believers refused to renounce their faith, they were forced to leave the village. Officials have posted police at the entrance to the village to prevent the Christians from returning home or retrieving their valuables. At last report, the believers were staying in the woods, with barely any food or survival supplies.

The Christian community in Katin village has endured repeated persecution in recent years. In July 2008, 17 Christian families were detained and ordered to deny their faith. Ten families signed the documents and were able to return to the

village, while the other families were evicted. Eventually, the seven evicted families also signed the recantation forms and moved back into the village. At last report, some of these Christians had again begun to gather for prayer and worship.

The Voice of the Martyrs stands with these persecuted believers and encourages you to pray that they will grow stronger in their faith. Ask God to protect and provide for the 48 Christians who have been expelled. Pray that the Christians who renounced their faith will turn to Jesus for strength and boldness. Finally, please pray that officials and villagers will stop persecuting Christians in Katin village. – Voice of the Martyrs

Sudan. A perspective that may be a bit controversial but needs to be addressed is a comparison to what is happening in Haiti and Sudan. The devastation in Haiti – a natural disaster – is severe and to date has caused an estimated 230,000 deaths in this tragedy. Rightfully a good deal of media coverage has detailed the damage and tragedy there. However, I have to draw the comparison with what has been happening in Sudan among the Christian population in the southern part of that country who are primarily black Africans. They have been the victims of a deliberate campaign of intimidation, enslavement, molestation, forced conversion, and extermination. The deaths there were estimated to be over 1,500,000 – and this is a man-made disaster perpetrated by the primarily Arabic people in the north who are Muslims. Why is there not a commensurate level of concern shown to what is happening there? Is it because the people are black? Is it because the people are Christians? Whatever the reason, we need to address – and correct – this problem.

– Commentary by the editor

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Laughter is internal jogging. It can do wonders for your body as well as your spirit. – Norman Cousins