

Monthly Update

September 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This Monthly Update is a continuation of annual conference summaries from the Methodist Church around the world, with special focus on the ones here in the United States. In addition we have initialized summaries of a few trends – some of which are predictable to include membership decline.

Some weeks ago, when I raised the question with a pastor friend of mine, a Spirit-filled Christian, of why so many in places of leadership in our church don't see what the problems and the solutions are, he said, "It is a spiritual battle and Satan has blinded them to the truth." I am satisfied that he went straight to the heart of the matter, because when folks ignore what is so blatantly obvious, this is the only conclusion we can draw. It is the same now. When I worry about world today, I remind myself that this is a spiritual battle.

Just one area of concern is what is happening with Iran at this time. The information given in this Update seems to be in a political area, but its impact will potentially affect every aspect of life in this country and around the world.

Mark Tooley gives on pages 5 and 6 of the Update another glimpse into the political activism of some of the American denominations and as played out in the World Council of Churches. This reflects activism by a host of leftist organizations financed by the church and so damaging to the work God would have us do. We have known this to be true for quite some time. Indeed, for those who want to further examine this area, we have the entire book *The Betrayal of the Church* on our website at: <http://cmpage.org/betrayal/>.

May I ask a favor of you? I so much appreciate your faithfulness in partnering with us in ministry and your continued prayers for our work, but we are in an especially lean time during the summer months and in this period of our work. Would you pray as to the Lord's leading in making a contribution to Concerned Methodists at this time? Just as a little over a year ago, we "pulled out all the stops" in order to defeat the "separation amendments" that were so harmful to the United Methodist Church, we are doing the same in fighting for the soul of our denomination and against those forces that would harm and possibly destroy our church as we know it.

Truly we live in interesting times. Please continue to pray for us, for the United Methodist Church, and for our country – that there would be a move of the Holy Spirit across this land of ours drawing people to the Source of all life.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

September 2010 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

A vision without a task is a dream; a task without a vision is drudgery; a vision and a task is the hope of the world.

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Of Interest

+ U.S. Conferences Report Declining Numbers

In statistical reports from 39 U.S. conferences, most disclosed declines in membership, worship attendance or church-school participation in 2009. Twenty-six conferences reported losses in all three categories. Thirteen reported membership drops of more than 2 percent. Four conferences gained members. The 2009 figures continue a decades-long decline in U.S. membership. The UMC is growing worldwide, however. In the decade between 1998 and 2008, for example, overall membership grew by 14% for those who come into membership by profession of faith and 27 percent for baptized members. At the end of 2008, the church had approximately 11 million professing members and an additional 2.5 million baptized members in Africa, Europe, the United States and the Philippines. However, U.S. membership has declined every year since The UMC was formed in 1968 and dropped by nearly 590,000 between 1998 and 2008, according to the 2010 State of the Church Report, commissioned by the Connectional Table.

Earlier this year, the General Council on Finance and Administration reported U.S. membership dropped 1.01 percent to 7,774,420 in 2008. It was the largest percentage decline since 1974, when membership dropped 1.06 percent. Four annual conferences reported increases in membership, and five reported increases in worship attendance. The North Carolina Annual Conference so far is the only conference to report gains in both membership and attendance. Membership increased by five people to 237,495, and worship attendance is up by 400 to 83,452. The conference has seen its membership grow for the past 15 years, said the Rev. George D. Speake, the conference statistician.

The UMC long has looked for ways to reverse the trend of dwindling numbers in the United States.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in Newscope, August 4, 2010.

+ Vital Congregations and a Creeping Crisis of Relevancy

Two research studies commissioned by the Call to Action Project have recently been posted at umc.org/calltoaction <<http://umc.org/calltoaction>>. Both reports are being analyzed by the Call to Action Steering Team, commissioned by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table. Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, chair of the steering team, said, "Radical, deep and strategic change is needed for The UMC to align our culture, structure and processes in order to foster vitality in congregations. The research findings help clarify and confirm the areas that need attention and the Steering Team will now do its work in devising recommendations for prioritizing activities, clarifying leadership responsibilities and aligning financial and other resources." The steering team continues its deliberations and will deliver its report and recommendations to the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table in the fall.

The Congregational Vitality study was conducted by the international firm Towers Watson and analyzed data from more than 32,000 UM churches in North America. It found that diverse types of congregations can be classified as vital and that the four main drivers of vitality are: 1) a mix of both traditional and contemporary worship services, 2) small groups including programs for children and youth, 3) inspirational preaching and length of pastoral appointment, and 4) committed and engaged lay leadership. The Operational Assessment research was specifically mandated by the Council of Bishops in their charge to the Call to Action project and was conducted by the Apex Group. Findings included the conclusion that the denomination is experiencing a "creeping crisis" of relevancy. "Although the crisis is being influenced by financial duress, it is not foremost a financial crisis," said the report. "In other words," Palmer said, "the church would still face some serious troubles even if it overcame the financial challenges posed by the current economy."

Among the problems outlined by the operational assessment are a general lack of trust within the denomination and a perception of great distance among local churches, annual conferences and the general church agencies.

The study indicated some areas where improvement is needed:

- More clarity and understanding about the denomination's mission, culture and values
- Less perceived organizational "distance" between and among the foundational units of the church
- Better defined leadership roles, responsibilities and accountability and improvements in trust
- More standardized management processes and reporting systems
- Utilizing opportunities for improved affordability and effectiveness

According to the report a decentralized structure like The UMC "is heavily dependent on mission, values and culture forces for healthy and effective functioning." The report points out areas of weakness in The UMC's culture related to trust, mutual respect and civil dialogue and clarity about the roles of leadership and accountability.

The Apex report observes that the sizes (geographical expanse and numbers of churches) of annual conferences and districts are factors contributing to the sense of distance and lack of trust. It also asks if the regional jurisdictional structures are too expensive and remote to justify their cost. "There is a mismatch of form and function of legislative and operating entities with their respective governance structures [that] is [a] blocking factor in achieving greater organizational effectiveness," says the report. The report describes how General Conference may attempt to manage too many aspects of church life through legislation, resulting in an increasingly rigid and rule-bound culture at the very time The UMC needs to be more nimble and adaptive. Another identified area of weakness is the way clergy leadership is recruited, prepared, deployed, developed and supervised with no central place for accountability for the whole process and a lack of common definitions of effectiveness.

The comprehensive study found that general agencies' "brands and communications compete with one another and result in confusion and dilution of the impact at the annual conference and local church levels." The reports says the autonomous organizational structure that provides for more than a dozen distinct boards of directors that are too large, too expensive (some meetings cost over \$50,000 each) and meet too infrequently has lessened their value to the church. "As accountable stewards, we must accept the implicit criticisms and make changes that address them," said Neil Alexander, a steering team member and president and publisher of the UM Publishing House. "Many of us share deep concern that overall The UMC is not seeing the magnitude and quality of results we aspire to achieve. And we have urgent and difficult work to do."

One of the main challenges the church faces as a connectional system is a pervasive sense of distrust between the pew and the leadership, the operational assessment said. To generate trust and effectiveness the Apex Group suggests leadership consider how to gain greater clarity about roles and goals for leaders at all levels, investing in them sufficient authority to carry out their responsibilities and holding all leaders accountable for their results.

The 16-member Call to Action Steering Team, which includes clergy and laity, is continuing its work of analysis and consideration of a few key interventions that if implemented could be the catalyst for deep and meaningful change. The goal is for The UMC to adopt practices and use its resources in ways that cultivate and sustain a dramatic increase in the number of highly vital congregations fulfilling our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The Call to Action Steering Team welcomes ideas and feedback from church members online:

http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.6125881/k.83A1/Comments_on_the_Operational_Assessment_of_The_Connectional_Church.htm.

– Heather Hahn at UMNS and Newscope, as reported in Newscope, August 4, 2010

+ Conference Features

Each spring and summer, the U.S. conferences of The UMC meet to conduct business, pass petitions on social issues, install new clergy and hold worship services. With several mergers, the number of conferences was reduced from 62 to 59 this year, but more people than ever were following the proceedings as numerous conferences took advantage of new technology to stream their sessions live over the Internet and post news on Facebook and Twitter. In a number of localities, deeds punctuated discussions, as members across the connection volunteered in community ministries. Many conferences had made generous contributions for Haiti earthquake relief throughout the year, and President Gesner Paul of the Methodist Church in Haiti visited some of them. Battling malaria in Africa has become a priority for many annual conferences, particularly through Nothing but Nets and the Imagine No Malaria campaign.

One of the top issues of social legislation was the call for comprehensive immigration reform. Supporters included the Iowa, Northern Illinois, Eastern Pennsylvania, New York, Central Texas, Rio Grande and North Carolina conferences.

Among other legislation: Minnesota denounced a 2010 U.S. Supreme Court decision that corporations' financial support of political candidates is a form of constitutionally protected free speech. California-Nevada supported a bill that would exclude offenders under the age of 18 from being sentenced to "life without possibility of parole" and approved a resolution supporting self-determination and independence for the people of East Turkistan. Rocky Mountain called for a February Valentine's emphasis on Global HIV/AIDS. New York supported a global health initiative for mothers and babies. Detroit and Northern Illinois called for the divestment of funds in companies that profit from the occupation of the Palestinian territories. Peninsula-Delaware voted to reach out more aggressively to people with disabilities and their families and caregivers, as well as persons with mental illness and their families. West Virginia called for a complete investigation into the April 5 explosion at the Montcoal, W.Va. mine and recommended new legislation be created as needed to protect

miners. Western Pennsylvania urged action to remove barriers to safe, accessible and affordable housing, repeal Pennsylvania's gaming laws and encourage abstention from gambling. Arkansas asked churches to evaluate their environmental impact and reduce their carbon footprints.

– Linda Bloom, UMNS, as reported in Newscope, August 4, 2010

Annual Conference Reports

Alaska. The Alaska Annual Conference held its annual meeting June 4–6 after an all-day “ReThink Church” workshop on June 3. The conference was held at Anchor Park UMC in Anchorage. Bishop Grant Hagiya presided. The main action taken at conference this year was a shift in how we understand the direction of our conference. After more than a year of praying and planning and meeting and dreaming, we adopted a new vision with five priorities: revitalization of churches, new church development, stewardship, Native outreach and youth and young adults. Like many conferences and churches, we struggle with financial issues, but we succeeded in passing a budget for 2011 with virtually no increase over the previous year. We also struggled with health care costs and resolved to shift some of the burden from churches to pastors. These were not easy discussions. We grappled with what it means to be a church involved in missions while dealing with a new level of economic uncertainty. Membership in the Alaska Conference as of Dec. 31, 2009 is 3,733, down 132, for the 28 churches.

– Alaska Annual Conference, as reported in Newscope, August 18, 2010

New England met at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass., June 17-19. For a final time, the "old" configuration of New England Annual Conference convened briefly to vote on transferring membership and voting rights for lay members and clergy members from Vermont churches. Following the vote, the old configuration of New England Annual Conference adjourned so that the new and expanded New England Annual Conference could convene. Keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Zan Holmes, affirmed our need to be unified in our common love for Christ and in our mission to make disciples for the transformation of the world, while stressing the value of our diversity. The conference approved an amended 2010 budget of \$6,648,548, reflecting the addition of ministries and mission shares from the Vermont churches; approved a 2011 budget of \$7,265,451, including nearly \$1.8 million for the general church and world missions; and approved 43 resolutions, including a call for an end to the Korean War, a call to reaffirm the sacred dignity and rights of undocumented immigrants, the establishment of a Board of Congregational and Community Development and an update to the conference's clergy sexual misconduct policy, which has been in effect since 1992. Membership in the previous configuration of the New England Conference is 86,094, down 2,706. With the Vermont churches included, the New England Annual Conference now stands at 97,979 members.

– Alexx Wood, communications director, as reported in Newscope, August 4, 2010

New York met with Bishop Jeremiah J. Park presiding over the 211th session of the New York Annual Conference at Hofstra University Arena. The theme for the June 9–12 gathering, “For Such a Time as This: We Are Building Up a Healthy Body of Christ,” is an ongoing exploration of the conference’s vision statement. In his episcopal address, the bishop insisted that what the church needs is “urgent, trusting and radical change.” Park also announced that the conference has committed to create 30 new faith communities in the next three years. The new starts this year range from urban foreign-language congregations to a rural trailer-park community. Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. of the Holston Area, guest preacher for the commissioning and ordination service, brought the crowd to its feet numerous times. Bishops Alfred Johnson and F. Herbert Skeete, as well as ELCA Bishop Robert J. Rimbo of the Metropolitan New York Synod, participated in the service. More than 5,000 adults and children came to the “Momentum of Ministry” festival, which began with events in tents outside the arena. The attendance exceeded Bishop Park’s 2009 challenge to fill the arena with 5,000 new witnesses for Christ. The Bishop’s Partners in Mission Fund gave \$95,000 for mission trips to Haiti, Ghana, Mozambique, Cambodia, Bolivia, and Ecuador, and to the Central Conference Pension Fund.

A 2011 expense budget of \$9,678,558 (a 6.8 percent increase over 2010), was adopted. This includes an apportionment budget of \$8,594,558, a 1.3 percent increase. Among legislation passed was a call for action on immigration reform, support for a living wage campaign and global health initiative for mothers and babies, the imperative to respond to hate crimes, a call for equality in ministry and the request for a Judicial Council decision on the right of some clergy to marry. Conference approved four church mergers. Membership is 115,813, down 2,782.

– Joanne Utley, editor, The Vision, as reported in Newscope, July 28, 2010

Pacific Northwest gathered for its 137th session from June 17–20 at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Wash. At opening worship, Bishop Grant J. Hagiya reiterated the values of the conference theme “Everybody Fed.” The Rev. Adam Hamilton, author and senior pastor of The UM Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kan., led three learning sessions that set the tone of renewed excitement and hope for the connection. Board of Congregational Development chair the Rev. Sandy Brown shared the state of the District Planning and Strategy Process. After an update from the three faith communities planted last year, the Rev. David Gillespie, director of new faith development, announced the launching of three new faith communities this year, keeping on track with the goal of 20 new faith communities by 2014. Dr. Lura Powell, CF&A chair, reported on the procedural, practical and philosophical changes that are being implemented by the council with a budget reduction of 0.11 percent. The Connectional Table shared an updated version of the “Trainings” booklet. The body approved a special session to decide on a proposed capital funds campaign and passed 33 petitions. Bishop William Chris Boerger of the ELCA was the ecumenical connection. Membership is 52,093, down 1,065.

– The Rev. David Valera, as reported in Newscope, July 28, 2010

Susquehanna met with Bishop Jane Allen Middleton presiding who announced, "On this historic day, we birth a new annual conference and you are here. Today we are a part of history!" About 1,000 members gathered on June 12 for the inaugural session of the new Susquehanna Annual Conference, comprised of the two Pennsylvania districts of the former Wyoming Conference in the northeastern corner of the state and the nine districts of the former Central Pennsylvania Conference. Vision Team co-chairs, the Rev. Dr. Timothy Baer, Chambersburg district superintendent, and the Rev. Beth Jones, Scranton district superintendent, presented a comprehensive report for discussion and approval. The report set the conference on a course with a biblical foundation based on Isaiah 43. The eleven districts of the new Susquehanna Conference will serve 173,000 members. The conference center is Mechanicsburg, a few miles from the state's capital of Harrisburg.

– Gerald Wolgemuth, as reported in Newscope, August 11, 2010

Tennessee met June 13–15 in Brentwood, with “Intentional Faith Development.” A “Multicultural Explosion” celebration of the diversity within the Tennessee Annual Conference, led by Bishop Richard Wills, Patty Smith and children of the conference. An offering of \$27,131 was received to support The Central Conference Pension Initiative. Speaker at the Sunday evening worship service and for two extended teaching sessions on Monday was the Rev. Dr. Leonard I. Sweet. The budget recommendation for 2011 is \$14,385,706, up 3.57% from the \$13,890,282 approved for 2010. This is about the same as the amount budgeted in 2009. Resolutions passed by conference relate to rental/housing allowances for retired or disabled clergy persons of the Tennessee Annual Conference, inclusiveness training, Disability Awareness Sunday on the 4th Sunday in October, abolition of the death penalty, funding for McKendree Village, Inc. Resolutions from the cabinet that passed related to discontinued churches, newly formed charges and district realignment. Conference also approved recommendations from the Sexual Ethics Task Force Report; agreed to implement a media crisis response plan; recommended that every church submit a Safe Sanctuary policy during charge conference; approved the establishment of conference teams to review policies, make recommendations for changes and oversee the ongoing work of Safe Sanctuary and Sexual Ethics issues; and urged aggressive movement in filling a full-time staff position to administer and monitor the Safe Sanctuary commitments of the conference. At the end of 2009, membership was 119,446, up .4% from 2008.

– UMNS, as reported in Newscope, July 28, 2010

West Michigan held its gathering on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, June 3–6. More than 400 congregations were represented by more than 900 clergy and laity and hundreds of additional viewers tuned in during the live webcast of the event. The theme was “Making New Spaces for New Faces,” the second of a four-year themed series focusing on the Four Areas of Focus. Worship themes and the plenary stage incorporated the images of a “front porch and a family reunion.” The Rev. Benton Heisler, director of connectional ministry, welcomed conference delegates by reminding them “the front porch represents both the gathering point for family and friends and the meeting space where new relationships are formed.” Bishop Jonathan Keaton called the conference to action, noting his personal commitment to stamping out biblical illiteracy and calling attention to the absence of prayer as the single most critical cause of spiritual decline. The keynote presenters were Donita Harris, John Edgar and George Howard from “The Church 4 All People,” in Columbus, Ohio, who gave three presentations and a workshop on the “Free Store” ministry and how it became a worshipping community addressing health and housing issues.

President Gesner Paul of the Methodist Church in Haiti shared his vision of providing education for children as the

means to move forward in Haiti. He also thanked the conference for the more than \$614,000 given for Haiti relief this year thus far. Paul and Bishop Keaton blessed bicycle riders who are representing the six districts of West Michigan and the Detroit Conference in a six-day, 400 mile ride from the Indiana state line to the Mackinaw Bridge. Their goal is to raise \$10,000 for relief and projects in Haiti. The conference approved a significantly revised Flexible Housing Policy and defeated proposals to move the annual conference session to various sites and a proposal to reduce the number of districts. The conference approved a budget for 2011 of \$6,159,550. Membership is 64,724, down 1,211.

– Mark Doyal, director of communications, as reported in Newscope, July 28, 2010

West Virginia June 10–13 on the campus of West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, W.Va. The four-year emphasis on evangelism continued with the theme “I Will Be Your Witness—Passion.” In his opening sermon, Bishop Ernest Lyght asked worshipers to “find the fire” of Christ in their churches, communities, and lives.

Guest preacher, Bishop Gregory V. Palmer of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, urged us to regain our passion and sense of urgency. He said the church should not be attached to its institutions but instead should focus on being in “the resurrection business.” Crossfire UMC from North Wilkesboro visited conference on Friday and Saturday to share how their church reaches beyond the typical upper middle-class demographic of The UMC. Dr. Alan Rice, pastor of Crossfire, talked about the church’s unlikely start and shared his experience with the Circles program, designed to help people free themselves from generational poverty. Ron Crandall, who recently retired as a professor of evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary near Lexington, Ky., presented ABIDE: A Model for Renewing Smaller Congregations.

In business, conference approved the resolutions related to mine safety and to monitoring for diversity in conference worship and business sessions. Conference also approved the report of the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits with provisions related to the transfer of retirees to Medicare Part D for prescription benefits; conference will continue to provide coverage for about 50 percent of participants to assist retirees with high prescription costs. Health care premiums will increase next year. Conference approved a three-year Comprehensive Protection Plan Holiday (CPP). instead transferring the 3 percent collected for CPP to death and disability liabilities for retired clergy who served between 1982 and 2006.

Offering at conference will go to the Central Conference Pension Initiative (\$3,899.10), Global AIDS (\$2,131.25), UMCOR (\$2,775.95), campus ministries (\$1,965.71) and CareNet (\$3,576). The Bishop’s Bike Ride to Conference raised \$11,426.02 for children suffering with HIV/AIDS around the world. Statistics on membership and attendance were not available at the time of publication

– Laura Harbert Allen, director of communications, as reported in Newscope, July 28, 2010

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If life keeps knocking you down, maybe you’re doing something wrong while standing.

Global Outlook

If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans. If you want to make Satan cry, remind him of God’s plan.

– Read John 3:17

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Iran. On the Brink

The Jerusalem Post report[ed] that Russia will start loading uranium fuel into the nuclear reactor of the Bushehr nuclear power station in Iran on August 21. This is the crucial step in outfitting Iran with nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Russia says the latest U.N. sanctions against Iran will not affect the Bushehr project. This project was slated to happen in late September but now we are just days away from the point of no return. Israel must decide what she will do, and quickly. Former U.N. Ambassador John Bolton told Fox News that, "Once the fuel rods are loaded it makes it essentially immune from attack by Israel. Because once the rods are in the reactor, an attack on the reactor risks spreading radiation in the air, and perhaps into the water of the Persian Gulf."

The story immediately became front-page news in Israel, which has laid precise plans to carry out an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Bolton made it clear that it is widely assumed that any Israeli attack on the Bushehr reactor must take place before the reactor is loaded with fuel rods. If that is the case, Israel must act before August 21.

I often hear Yoni the Israeli blogger on the Hugh Hewitt program. In a recent blog, he suggested war is imminent for the following reasons:

- 1) Hizbullah has dug tunnels into northern Israel. Hizbullah also has 60,000 rockets, many with chemical warheads. Israel has delivered letters to the U.N., Lebanon, and USA, showing where Hizbullah has hidden rockets in civilian areas.
- 2) Israeli satellite has captured photos of submarines off-loading weapons to Hizbullah in northern Lebanon. Intelligence later showed these weapons were special chemical weapons engineered to eat through protective equipment. This agent may now be loaded onto Hizbullah rockets.
- 3) The Israel Air Force (IAF) is training in long- range missions, jets, and helicopters, which would suggest commando raids a long way from home. Additionally, Israeli Defense Force (IDF) reserves have been called up and are being trained at an abnormal pace.
- 4) Israeli subs are sitting off Iran and the Israeli Air Force (IAF) has an airbase in Saudi Arabia.
- 5) Israeli intelligence has captured data showing that Hizbullah will preemptively attack Israel at month's end. The objective is to take out IAF bases so Israeli planes cannot hit Iran.

While at first glance Americans think this will not affect them all that much, I am taking some thoughts from my frequent radio guest, Bill Salus, who has written the book *Israelestine*, Salus states, "Iran's apocalyptic-minded president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has publicly threatened the closing of Hormuz in retaliation for an Israeli or American strike upon his country. "Additionally, two significant correlating events made the news in May, 2010. First, the Islamic Republic of Iran warned that it would launch terrorist attacks and suicide strikes inside of America in the event of a strike upon Iranian soil. Second, the Iranian Navy conducted a massive war exercise in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf, called 'Judgment Day.' This drill reportedly demonstrated Iran's sole and sovereign ability to control those strategic bodies of water." Salus continues, "Regarding the possibility of Iran playing the 'oil card' against America, on September 15, 2009 The Wall Street Journal published a Bret Stephens article entitled *Obama Is Pushing Israel Towards War*. In the article Stephens suggested that a Middle East War could push the price of oil up to \$300 per barrel. Lately, on average, that precious black gold has been closing between \$70 to \$80 per barrel. Stephen's estimate suggests an oil-dependent world could be about to experience a spike at the pump of about four times the present amount. Iran still ranks number two behind Saudi Arabia in the OPEC oil cartel, which is responsible for two-thirds of the world's oil supply."

Are Americans, Chinese, Europeans, and others ready for such a steep increase? Americans could expect to feel pain in the waiting lines at the pump and in their pocket books, as increased transportation costs would certainly be reflected in the price of goods sold over the retail counters across the country.

When this strike actually happens, tomorrow or next year, the world will react -- as it did after Israel bombed Iraq's Osirak facility in 1981 -- with universal condemnation. Israel can do nothing right -- including take out a major de-stabilizer of the world -- Iran's nuclear capability.

And just where will America be in this scenario? Would she participate with Israel? Even Saudi Arabia is participating, by allowing Israel to use a Saudi air base. But don't count on our current White House or State Department to do anything but join the condemning chorus. As George Will says, "Will Israel do what the world won't? If it attacks Iran, the world was warned. If not, the world may regret it."

– Received by e-mail from Jay Ramsey, research associate: By Jan Markell; August 16, 2010. www.olivetreeviews.org

World Council of Churches. *The KGB Connection*

[Note: This was definitely established in the book *Betrayal of the Church* on the Concerned Methodists' website.]

During the 1970's and 1980's the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC), to which hundreds of Protestant and Orthodox communions belonged, routinely espoused pro-Soviet and anti-Western stances. It even funded Marxist guerrilla groups. Critics assumed that the WCC was simply naively captive to Liberation Theology, which tried to exchange salvation for class warfare and revolution. But a new book by a Bulgarian author reveals that the KGB and its Bulgarian intelligence affiliate exploited the Bulgarian Orthodox Church for direct influence on the WCC and the Conference of European Churches. In "Between Faith and Compromise," Bulgarian historian Momchil Metodiev chronicles how the Soviets and their Bulgarian proxies employed the Bulgarian Orthodox and WCC to promote Soviet strategic goals globally. "Participation of the Bulgarian church in ecumenical organizations was not inspired by the idea of interdenominational dialogue and co-operation," Metodiev reported amid his book's release this month. "If, in popular perceptions, state security is classified as a state within the state, then the ecumenical activity [conducted by Soviet bloc representatives] could

be classified as a church within the Church,” wrote Metodiev, who has researched Bulgarian communist archives for the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson Institute in Washington, D.C.

According to Metodiev, Bulgarian intelligence had already identified the WCC as an “object of penetration” even before the

Bulgarian and other East Bloc churches joined the WCC in 1961. He also explains in his book how East bloc intelligence services and

communist committees on church affairs collaborated to influence ecumenical groups like the WCC. Metodiev writes that during the 1970’s, Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad, at the KGB’s behest, led this collaboration, while Bulgarian Metropolitan Pankrati of Stara Zagora did his part in Bulgaria. Nikodim, who unsurprisingly worked closely with the Soviet-front, Prague-based Christian Peace Conference, became a WCC president in 1975 after browbeating Third World delegates with threats of a Soviet-aid cut-off to their countries if they did not cooperate.

East Bloc intelligence services, working through East Bloc churches belonging to the WCC, helped to ensure that the WCC focused its critique on the United States and its allies, while deflecting any attempted interest in human rights abuses in the East Bloc. Metodiev says a rare exception was the WCC’s debate at its 1975 Assembly in Nairobi, when some delegates tried to address Soviet repression of religion. At that gathering, a Swiss delegate named Jacques Rossel proposed this brief stance: “The WCC is concerned about the infringement of religious freedom, especially in the Soviet Union. The General Assembly respectfully asks the government of the USSR to abide by Article 7 of the Helsinki Final Act.”

Even such a mild proposed criticism ignited a firestorm of controversy within the reliably far-left WCC and failed to get the required two thirds votes from WCC delegates. A satire appeared in the WCC exhibition hall spoofing the conference theme of “Christ Liberates and Unites” by opining: “Christ has liberated Jacques Rossel to make a motion, he united the East European delegates – but will he divide the WCC movement?”

Amid all this ruffling of normally calm pro-Soviet feathers inside the WCC, the delegates approved a new compromise resolution the next day that nonchalantly noted having “spent considerable time debating the alleged non-observance of religious freedom in the USSR” and concluded that “churches in the different parts of Europe live and work under greatly differing conditions.” Even this non-criticism of the Soviets was too much for the Russian Orthodox delegates, who abstained in protest over the discomfiting “atmosphere” the discussion had unpleasantly enflamed. After that 1975 episode, the WCC would largely avoid any attempt at even tacitly admitting to any lack of religious freedom in the East Bloc.

Metodiev’s book addresses the 1975 incident and also reveals that Soviet and Bulgarian intelligence ensured the selection of Bulgaria’s Todor Sabev as the WCC deputy general secretary.

Sabev was a seminary professor in Sofia, Bulgaria and founded the Institute for Church History and Archives of the Bulgarian Patriarchate for the Bulgarian church. He became almost immediately involved with the WCC after the Bulgarians joined, serving on the WCC’s Central and Executive Committees in the 1960’s and 1970’s. In 1979 he became the WCC deputy general secretary, focusing on WCC ties to Orthodox Churches and Roman Catholics until he retired in 1993. “A devoted friend and colleague, he gained the trust and confidence of all those he has worked with,” recalled then WCC General Secretary Samuel Kobia when Sabev died in 2008. “He will be remembered for his kindness and openness, his readiness to serve all at all moments and under all circumstances. Because of his personality combining moral authority and human warmth, he played the role of bridge-builder between the East and the West, between Orthodox and other member churches of the WCC, between the fellowship of member churches and the Roman Catholic Church.” Of course, Kobia did not mention Sabev’s long service as an agent of East European communism.

In a report by Ecumenical News International (ENI), a WCC official tried to minimize the revelations without explicitly denying them. “These allegations are not new,” insisted Martin Robra, a WCC program director. “Even during the years of the Cold War, it was known that church representatives coming from communist countries had the obligation to report about their activities abroad to their country’s authorities.” Of course, during the Cold War, the WCC never acknowledged this situation and preferred to pretend that East Bloc churches were free agents no more manipulated by their governments than were Western churches. “WCC proceedings and policies were, as they are today, public. There were no real ‘secrets’ to be disclosed,” Robra claimed to ENI. “It was far more important to nurture relationships between the churches across the ‘Iron Curtain’ that divided the nations and to support them as much as possible.”

Only after the collapse of East Bloc communism did some WCC officials sheepishly admit they should have said a bit more about religious oppression under communism. But they also disingenuously claimed that their cooperation with East Bloc churches and even East Bloc governments had opened doors that facilitated the Cold War’s peaceful conclusion. “The

stances taken by the WCC in favor of justice and peace did not follow any KGB script, but the Gospel of Christ, the prince of peace whom we meet among the most vulnerable and suffering people,” Robra assured ENI.

Books like Metodiev’s, based on research in communist archives, increasingly are confirming that the WCC and other religious groups did follow the KGB’s script during much of the Cold War. The question is, as the WCC continues his far-left advocacy, whose script does it follow now?

– Posted By Mark D. Tooley On March 31, 2010 @ 12:07 am In FrontPage

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To worship God we must be aware of the beauty around us: from butterflies to zinnias. – Read Matthew 6:26