

# Monthly Update

March 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Monthly Update reads almost like one of those “good news” “bad news” jokes. The only thing is that, sadly, it is not a joke. On the positive side is information on our Methodist heritage and how it has influenced some in the public sector to include well-known presidents of our country. On the “down side” is a topic that we would just as soon get past so that we can truly be about the “business of the Lord” – that of homosexuality. The bishops have brought up again public opposition against not only our church’s stance, but more importantly, the Bible. It appears that they place no authoritative confidence in what the Bible has to say. If they did, they would not even continue to push for this as they do. I would invite your attention to my “editorial note” at the beginning of their statement. Dr. Riley Case offers cogent arguments.

In the public sector, there is a group of people who are stridently trying to separate the founding of our country with its Christian heritage. Let us examine just three of the testimonies that show a firm link with our Christian past. On the aluminum cap atop the Washington Monument in Washington, DC, are displayed two words: Laus Deo. No one can see these words. In fact, most visitors to the monument are totally unaware they are even there and for that matter, probably couldn't care less. “Laus Deo!” Two seemingly insignificant, un-noticed words. Very simply, they say “Praise be to God!”

Secondly, from atop the Monument, visitors may see the view of the city with its division into four major segments. From there, one can also easily see the original plan of the designer, Pierre Charles L’Enfant...a perfect cross imposed upon the landscape, with the White House to the north, the Jefferson Memorial is to the south, the Capitol to the east and the Lincoln Memorial to the west. A cross? Yes, a cross. This belies the “separation of church and state” argument.

Third is Washington’s prayer for America. Have you never read it?

“Almighty God; We make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection; that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; and entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large. And finally that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility, and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Thank you again for your continuing support of Concerned Methodists. Words cannot express how much we appreciate – and need your prayers and financial gifts. Without them, we would not be able to do what the Lord has called us to.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,  
Executive Director

## **March 2011 Update**

### **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

*Friendship isn't about who you have known the longest  
It's about those who came and never left your side ....*

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#### **The Good Stuff**

##### **+ *Many U.S. presidents have Methodist ties***

Stained-glass windows were given to President McKinley's Methodist church, Church of the Savior, in Canton, Ohio, as a memorial from his wife. Images courtesy of Church of the Savior and Wikipedia Creative Commons.

They escorted Abraham Lincoln's body to his burial in Illinois. They served lemonade to guests at the White House in an age of temperance. They had roles in inaugurations and extended spiritual advice to presidents on justice issues, ranging from slavery to war.

United Methodists have a long history of ties to U.S. presidencies. In fact, Methodism began its relationship with the presidency through the general who would become the nation's first elected leader.

After the Revolutionary War, Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury approached George Washington (1789-97) twice, first presenting an anti-slavery petition from Methodist bishops, and later to assure the new president of Methodist support for the new republic.

It would be more than a century after the nation's birth, however, before a Methodist would be in the White House as president. Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-81) attended Methodist schools and, as president, attended Foundry Church, a Methodist church in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Lucy. One of the founders and the first president of the Home Missionary Society (a precursor of United Methodist Women), Lucy was known affectionately by White House guests as "Lemonade Lucy" because she did not serve alcohol at White House functions, following Methodism's commitment to temperance. First Lady Lucille "Lucy" Ware Webb Hayes was a devout Methodist. She joined the president in saying prayers after breakfast and conducting hymn sings with members of Congress. A UMNS photo courtesy of United Methodist Commission on Archives and History. View in Photo Gallery

Less than two decades later, another Methodist, William McKinley (1897-1901), was elected president. Early in life, McKinley had considered the Methodist ministry, but later became a lawyer. He remained active at the Methodist Church of the Savior in Canton, Ohio. He served as Sunday school superintendent and trustee. McKinley's assassination in 1901, after election to his second term in office, left an impact on the Methodist denomination, according to Dale Patterson at the United Methodist Commission on Archives and History. "It touched the hearts of church members in a lot of places," he said. "I've personally seen windows dedicated to President McKinley inside churches in Kansas and Oklahoma."

Funeral services were held at McKinley's home church in Canton, where reminders of the assassinated president still can be found. On the west wall of the sanctuary are four stained-glass windows, given to the church by his widow in memory of her late husband. The flag that draped his casket is displayed in the church library.

A century later, George W. Bush (2001-09) entered the office as the nation's first United Methodist president. Raised in Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, Bush became a United Methodist after marrying his wife, Laura, a lifelong Methodist, in 1977. Both attended and taught Sunday school at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas. After he was elected governor of Texas in 1994, Bush worshipped at the Tarrytown United Methodist Church in Austin. Today, his presidential library is under construction on the Dallas campus of Southern Methodist University, the alma mater of his wife.

#### **Other presidents also have Methodist connections.**

James K. Polk (1845-49) had a conversion experience at a Methodist camp and considered himself a Methodist, though he continued to attend Presbyterian services out of respect to his mother and his wife. Shortly before his death, Polk was baptized and confirmed into the Methodist church by the Rev. John B. McFerrin, the same pastor who was present at his conversion years before.

While in the White House, Andrew Johnson (1865-69) accompanied his wife, Eliza, to services at Foundry Church. Almost 125 years later, Bill Clinton (1993-2001), a Southern Baptist, would do the same with his wife, Hillary, a lifelong Methodist.

### 'God bless the Methodist church'

Although never baptized into any church, Ulysses S. Grant (1869-77) regularly attended services at Metropolitan Memorial Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. "Grant was very sympathetic with the Methodists," said Patterson, noting Grant was friends with Methodist Bishop John P. Newman, who was present when Grant died of cancer in 1885.

Even Abraham Lincoln (1861-65), who frequently spoke of Christian principles but had no specific church ties, was touched by Methodism. His parents were married by a Methodist minister in Washington County, Ky. Later, at Lincoln's White House, a frequent visitor was Methodist Bishop Matthew Simpson. After Lincoln's assassination in 1865, Simpson traveled with the president's body back to Springfield, Ill., and delivered the eulogy. The presence of a Methodist bishop for Lincoln's funeral was no surprise given his respect for the Methodist church. In 1864, shortly before his death, Lincoln offered this praise for the young denomination:

"It is no fault in others that the Methodist Church sends more soldiers to the field, more nurses to the hospitals, and more prayers to Heaven than any. God bless the Methodist Church. Bless all the churches and blessed be God, who in this our trial, giveth us the churches."

– By Courtney Aldrich, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), Feb. 21, 2011. Aldrich is a freelance writer from Nashville, Tenn.

### + ***Billy Sunday***

A baseball star, Billy Sunday played for the Chicago White Stockings (Sox) in the 1880's and later the Philadelphia Phillies. Born during the Civil War in a log cabin in Iowa, his father, a Union Army soldier, died of pneumonia when Billy was a month old.

At age 15, he struck out on his own, working several jobs before playing baseball. His career took off when he was recruited by A.G. Spalding, owner of the White Stockings and founder of Spalding Sporting Goods Company.

Sunday became one of the most popular athletes in the nation.

While recovering from a baseball injury in 1887, he heard a group of gospel singers after leaving a Chicago saloon. They invited him to their mission where he experienced a conversion. He began attending YMCA meetings, quit drinking and got married.

A national sensation occurred February 17, 1889, when Billy Sunday preached his first sermon as an evangelist in Chicago. He went on to pioneer radio broadcasting so enthusiastically that the FCC was formed in response.

During the next 46 years, till his death November 6, 1935, over 100 million people would hear him. In his animated style, Billy Sunday said:

"Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile."

– American Minute with Bill Federer, February 17, 2011

### **Of Interest**

#### + ***Americans Slain by Somali Pirates were Delivering Bibles***

Americans Jean and Scott Adam were on a mission to distribute Bibles around the world when their yacht was hijacked by Somali pirates, friends of the couple said. On Tuesday, the U.S. Central Command said the Adams, along with Philis Macay and Bob Riggle, had been killed by their captors.

A U.S. Navy ship had been trailing the captured Americans after their yacht, Quest, was overtaken by pirates on Friday. "As (U.S. forces) responded to the gunfire, reaching and boarding the Quest, the forces discovered all four hostages had been shot by their captors," the statement from U.S. Central Command said. "Despite immediate steps to provide life-saving care, all four hostages ultimately died of their wounds."

While their faith may not have played a role in their death, it was a motivating factor for their sailing adventure around the world. They also spoke openly about their faith on the site, saying the goal of the Bible distribution was, "friendship evangelism - that is, finding homes for thousands of Bibles, which have been donated through grants and gifts, as we travel from place to place."

The Adams passed out Catholic Bibles from the American Bible Society and New International Version Bibles from the International Bible Society, according to their website. They said they brought two different versions of the Bible because, "Catholics have a slightly different Bible than Protestants. We carry both Bibles, and at several different reading levels." On their website they said many of the teachers and pastors who received the Bibles also used them for teaching English.

– As received from the Presidential Prayer Team. Sources: CNN, Associated Press, Fox News, BBC News, CBS News.

### + ***The Muslim Brotherhood***

Further apropos to James's Clapper's contention that that the Muslim Brotherhood is "largely secular," has "eschewed violence," and really just wants "social ends," Corner readers may want to look at the C-SPAN video of the Hudson Institute's Tuesday panel on Egypt, much of which focused on the Brotherhood.

I argued that one way to judge the Brotherhood, apart from repeatedly parsing its contradictory statements, is to look at what Christian leaders in Egypt are saying. They are not skilled overall political analysts but, as a persecuted minority, they are highly adept at judging how events might affect them. Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican leaders have all expressed their view that the present, bad as it is, may be better than a likely future with a powerful Brotherhood.

Another way is to compare Egypt's neighboring territories. It is not only Gaza that is ruled by a Brotherhood offshoot – so is Egypt's neighbor to the South, Sudan. It seized power in 1983 (when it was only the third largest of the Muslim parties), killed its opponents, and has engaged in two genocidal wars. Nor has it shown signs of mellowing in power. Egypt is very unlikely to be like Sudan, but when two of Egypt's neighbors are already run by MB offshoots, and both are horrendous, it suggests that an Egypt with strong Brotherhood would be a grim place.

– By Paul Marshall; Posted on February 10, 2011 3:40 PM Paul Marshall is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom.

### **Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.**

National Right to Life Legislative Director Douglas Johnson testified before a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives in support of the Protect Life Act, sponsored by Rep. Joe Pitts (R-Pa.). This bill would repeal and/or correct all of the pro-abortion components of Obamacare.

While campaigning for the presidency, then-Senator Obama claimed he was in favor of reducing the number of abortions in America.

Evidence shows that preventing funds from covering abortions significantly decreases the number of abortions. Because of policies such as the Hyde Amendment, well over one million Americans are walking around alive today. Unfortunately, the Guttmacher Institute (the former research arm of Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider), refers to these million people as a "tragic result."

– National Right to Life

### **(UM) Bishops.**

Editorial note: The fact that these retired bishops have taken the lead in coming out with this statement is interesting. First of all, they pick a practice pushed by a radical homosexual element in our society that has been active in many churches to include the "mainline denominations" and society at large. The bishops ignore what the Bible has to say on this practice; what our own denominations has maintained for every General Conference for the past forty years; and what sound sociological, psychological, and medical data say as to the unhealthiness of this lifestyle. The fact that they would yet again bring this up in the hopes of getting it passed is reflective, not on our United Methodist Church, but on their own leadership and spirituality, or lack thereof. We present their arguments here only to let you examine them and then read the sound analysis offered by Dr. Riley Case that is included after the comments by other bishops in the church.

### **A Statement of Counsel to the Church—2011**

Out of concern for the welfare of all God's people, and, out of special concern for the people of The United Methodist Church, we, United Methodist Bishops – retired, believe The United Methodist Church should remove the following statement from The Book of Discipline (2008):

"...The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." ¶304.3

Our lives and ministries over the years have included prayerful, thoughtful consideration of our Holy Bible, our Wesleyan heritage, reflection on our experience of the church and world, and our conviction of God's intention for a world transformed. With this statement of conviction and counsel we seek:

To affirm that the historic tests of "gifts and evidence of God's grace" for ordained ministry override any past or present temporal restrictions such as race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

To urge the Church, ecumenical and denominational, to change the manner in which it relates to gay, lesbian and

transgendered persons in official statements, judicial proceedings, and in congregational life.

To declare our conviction that the current disciplinary position of The United Methodist Church, a part of our historical development, need not, and should not, be embraced as the faithful position for the future.

To make known our names and shared personal conviction on this matter and to encourage other church and Episcopal leaders to do the same.

With increasing frequency we observe and experience the following disturbing realities and know them to be detrimental to the mission of a Church of Jesus Christ:

- Laity and clergy, gay and straight, withdrawing membership or absenting themselves from the support of congregational and denominational Church life in order to maintain personal integrity.
- Young adults, especially, embarrassed to invite friends and expressing dismay at the unwillingness of our United Methodist Church to alter its 39-year exclusionary stance.
- Closeted pastors, currently called and ordained in our church, living divided lives while offering effective appreciated ministry.
- Bishops being drained of energy by upholding Church Discipline while regarding it as contrary to their convictions.
- Bishops caught between care for the Church by reappointing an effective gay or lesbian pastor and care for the Discipline by charging them under current legislation.
- Seminary leaders desiring greater flexibility and openness from the church in order to advance their mission of identifying, recruiting, enrolling, educating and spiritually forming Christian leaders.
- Christian gay men and women understanding themselves called of God to seek ministry opportunities within their United Methodist family Church home, but having to decide between:
  - o leaving to go to accepting denominations, or
  - o staying and praying for change, or
  - o challenging Church law and accepting punitive actions.

Our United Methodist Church, ashamed and repentant in the past, ended official and unofficial restrictions on candidacy, ordination and appointment for reason of race, gender and ethnicity. We believe the God we know in Jesus is leading us to issue this counsel and call – a call to transform our church life and our world.

United Methodist Episcopal Leaders – Retired: Sharon Z. Rader, Donald A. Ott, Beverly Shamana, C. Joseph Sprague, Melvin G. Talbert, S. Clifton Ives, Joe A. Wilson, William Lewis, Forrest Stith, Susan Morrison, Susan Hassinger, Judy Craig, Dale White, William Boyd Grove, C. P. Minnick, Kenneth L. Carder, Roy I. Sano, Joe Yeakel, Kenneth Hicks, Joseph Humper, Monk Bryan, Jesse DeWitt, Jack Tuell, J. Lloyd Knox, Charles W. Jordan, J. Lawrence McCleskey, Marshall L. Meadors, Jr., Franz Schafer, Sheldon Duecker, Fritz Mutti, Cal McConnell, Leontine T. C. Kelly, Robert C. Morgan.

– UMNS; Feb. 15, 2011.

#### **+ *The Bishops' Statement***

A call by a group of retired bishops to end The United Methodist Church's ban on homosexual clergy has prompted varied reactions from church leaders. In the past two weeks, some bishops have urged prayer and thoughtful discussion. Others have expressed disappointment in the retired leaders. Still others have voiced support for the change. In each case, bishops have stressed their commitment to uphold church law.

Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, released a statement on Feb. 3 encouraging "thoughtful, prayerful dialogue about sensitive and challenging issues." "We call this holy conferencing," Goodpaster wrote on behalf of the council's executive committee. "We are committed to embody this in our own life as a council and lead the church in doing the same."

Meanwhile, three more retired bishops have signed the Statement of Counsel to the Church, bringing the total to 36 retired bishops asking the church to change its policy. The three new signers are Bishops Daniel Arichea of the Philippines, Alfred Johnson of New Jersey and Richard B. Wilke of Kansas. About 42 percent of the denomination's 85 retired bishops have signed the statement, released Jan. 31. Most signers live and serve in the United States. But in addition to Arichea, two other retired leaders from the denomination's central conferences signed the statement: Bishops Joseph C. Humper of Sierra Leone and Franz W. Schäfer of Switzerland.

The Book of Discipline states that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-

avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.” The retired bishops’ statement asks that this passage be removed.

Only General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body, can change the Book of Discipline. The subject of homosexuality has surfaced every four years at General Conference, and delegates consistently have voted to keep the restriction. The next such gathering is scheduled for April 24-May 4, 2012, in Tampa, Fla., and Goodpaster asks church members to pray for the whole church as General Conference approaches. In the mean time, Goodpaster assured church members that the Council of Bishops remains “committed to living within the covenant defined by the Book of Discipline.”

#### ‘A serious matter’

Neither active nor retired bishops are allowed to vote at General Conference. Still, it is “a serious matter” when a group of bishops communicates to the church disagreement with established doctrine, Bishops John Schol and James E. Swanson said in separate statements to their respective conferences. “The Council of Bishops needs to teach and lead; and when the church is divided on essential doctrine, teaching and leading becomes even more important,” Schol told the Baltimore-Washington Annual (regional) Conference in his statement. In coming months, Schol said he hopes to invite United Methodist bishops with varying views to share the denomination’s teachings on controversial matters. He committed to pray for the church and asked others in his conference to do the same.

Bishop Swanson shared a similar message with the Holston Conference, which encompasses 900-plus churches in Tennessee, Georgia and Virginia. “We want to make it clear that we respect the right of people of good conscience to disagree with the positions of The United Methodist Church,” Swanson said in a joint statement with Mary Ruth Richards, conference lay leader. “However, we assure you that we are committed to faithfully upholding the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.”

#### Voices of disagreement

Some bishops expressed disappointment with the retired bishops’ public opposition to the Book of Discipline’s current rule. “I think that it’s unfortunate that this group of bishops has stepped outside of the covenant relationship and find this the only way in which to voice their opinion about the issue of homosexuality,” Oklahoma Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr., said in an interview. He said the statement steps outside the accepted process for changing church policy. Any person, regardless of whether that individual is clergy or a layperson, can petition General Conference to ask for a change. “This circumvents our way of handling difficult issues,” Hayes said. “I am very disappointed the bishops chose this way to make their opinions known.”

Bishop Eben K. Nihwatiwa of Zimbabwe said, by and large, people in his conference stand by what the Book of Discipline says about homosexuality. “Africa should not be pushed on this issue,” he said. “The position of The United Methodist Church right now is the position that is in sync with the context of the African church right now.”

Bishop John Innis of Liberia agreed. He said he respects the retired bishops, but he must stand with the Book of Discipline. “We are all created by God,” he said. “A person who practices homosexuality can be my friend, but I cannot condone that behavior.”

#### Voices of support

Note: The bishops whose comments follow offer the same time-worn arguments. Their names are familiar on this stance.

Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata of the Oregon-Idaho Conference takes a very different view. He is among those who endorse the retired bishops’ statement. He believes “good, biblical people” are on both sides of this issue.

Retired Bishops Sharon Z. Rader and Donald A. Ott said they circulated the statement to their fellow retirees urging the change in part because of their experience as church leaders. She said many have told her the initiative “brings hope for the future of our church and the making plain of our desire to invite, receive and empower all who desire to live as faithful disciples of Jesus as part of The United Methodist Church.” [Note: How can one be a “faithful disciple” and not follow the teachings and example of the person purported to be the teacher?] “We hope the change we propose will help bishops and the whole church to find our place beside Jesus where people live on the margins of church and society.”

At this point, the Council of Bishops has not discussed the retired leaders’ proposal as a group. Goodpaster, the council’s president, predicted in an interview that when the council meets in May, “there will be some conversation.”

– By Heather Hahn, UMNS; Feb. 15, 2011. Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service. Linda Bloom, a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service, also contributed to this article.

+ *Retired Bishops Want to Reverse Church's Stand on Homosexuality*, By Dr. Riley Case

Well, the word is out. Thirty-six retired UM bishops have released a statement, "A Statement of Counsel to the Church" saying it is time to change the church's stand in regard to homosexuality. It appears that on the issue of homosexuality the bishops are determined to stir the pot. The topic, as well as the bishops' statement itself, will consume a great deal of the church's time and energy and resources between now and General Conference 2012.

Some preliminary comments about the retired bishops' statement.

1) We should probably welcome the bishops' "coming out." We in the church appear to have our own "don't ask, don't tell" policy in regard to the personal moral and doctrinal stances of our leaders. Many of our church leaders have been equivocating for a long time regarding matters of their personal belief. Leaders say they will uphold what the church affirms but "upholding" is not the same as believing. When I have asked several of the bishops (and other leaders) what they personally believe in regard to the church's Articles of Religion and other standards, I have been told that such questions are inappropriate ("don't ask so we won't have to tell"). We have for years played games at our Jurisdictional Conferences when we have asked Episcopal candidates about their own personal beliefs. Now, at least 33 bishops have put it on the table. At least in regard to the practice of homosexuality (and by extension, the doctrinal standards), they do not, and probably never have, believed what the church has taught. And these are, supposedly, our leaders. They are charged to guard the faith to which they themselves are not committed. This is not a healthy situation.

2) We see progressive ideology at work. Progressive ideology holds that the Bible and church tradition are no longer determinative for our present day. Modern science, secular presuppositions, personal preference-whatever-take precedence. A key to the bishops' statement is the assertion: "the current disciplinary position of The United Methodist Church, a part of our historical development (*italics added*) need not, and should not, be embraced as the faithful position for the future." This is because revelation in progressive ideology is ongoing, truth is ever changing ("developing historically") and if we can get the votes at General Conference the Bible and church tradition can be superseded. "Experience" is the standard by which all is tested in progressive ideology. Bishop Don Ott and Bishop Sharon Rader indicated that they initiated this statement because of "their experience as church leaders." The "experience" of the bishops is that they know of practicing homosexuals who have the calling and the gifts for ministry but whose ordination would be denied because of church standards. Therefore, the church should change its standards to accommodate these people. This is not a healthy situation.

3) Is this a declaration of war? In a church already racked with controversy many had hoped that attention might be directed, especially at the next General Conference, to matters other than homosexuality. Could we not avoid what has characterized past General Conferences whenever the church's stand on homosexuality has been discussed: demonstrations on the floor of the conference, civil disobedience and arrests by civil authorities, hurtful language, smashing of chalices, covering the altar in black, and haranguing of the delegates when the vote doesn't go the desired way? Recent General Conferences have been showcases not for the church's unity in purpose and mission but as an unmasking of a church in disarray. Some have asked in recent months whether we might have a moratorium in 2012 on debate over homosexuality. It appears with this retired bishops' statement that there will be no moratorium. The retired bishops have "made known their names" and wish to encourage "other church and Episcopal leaders to do the same." This sounds a lot like an invitation to a shoot-out. How many names can we generate? In this the retired bishops may be getting more than what they bargained for. There will be push-back. This is not a healthy situation.

4) It is uncertain what it is the bishops hope to accomplish with the statement. It appears that the retired bishops believe society's cultural momentum is on the side of full acceptance of homosexual practice (and by extension homosexual marriage), and that the moral weight of 33 retired ministers can tip the balance and carry the General Conference vote in favor of homosexual practice.

If so the retired bishops are out of touch. I confess that when I served my six-year stint as a district superintendent the office gave me an inflated sense of my own importance. Others, particularly pastors, laughed at my jokes and were impressed by my wisdom. The day I was no longer a superintendent all of that ceased. I remember telling an amusing story one day. Not only did no one else think it was amusing; no one else seemed to be paying attention. I was back to being an ordinary person and my opinions carried no special weight. If so for a district superintendent how much more for a bishop? Retired bishops (or any bishops for that matter) might see themselves as generals in a crusade, with multitudes of troops at their command. They overestimate their sense of importance. The day when the church gets stirred up over bishops' proclamations (especially retired bishops) is past. The church recently voted on whether to ratify constitutional amendments on inclusivity and on the world-wide nature of the church. These amendments were strongly supported by the General

Conference and by the bishops, but when ordinary annual conference delegates voted, amendments that needed 2/3 vote could not even command a 50% majority. One bishop spoke about being blind-sided. Better to talk about a disconnect between the church and its leaders. This is not a healthy situation.

5) Do the retired bishops understand how this looks? The bishops are not speaking on behalf of the church to a lost and dying world, or to a society which has lost its moral grounding. The retired bishops instead are speaking on behalf of a secular culture against the church's own people and against the faith those people have professed. This is not a healthy situation.

6) Have we not learned from Episcopalians, ELCA Lutherans, U.C.C.s and Presbyterians? The retired bishops argue that we are losing members and quality ministers because of the church's present position on homosexuality (and by implication, on marriage). The numbers we might be losing from our present stance would pale to the numbers we would lose if we abandoned our present position. From 2005-2009 the ELCA Lutherans declined 7%, the Episcopalians 9%, the Presbyterians (USA) 9%, and the United Church of Christ 12%. Will United Methodists be next? This is not a healthy situation.

7) The retired bishops' statement ignores, disregards and abandons our overseas brothers and sisters, particularly those in Africa. Despite the fact that one African bishop and one European bishop signed the statement, the statement itself reeks of US-centrism. No global church here. No sensitivity here to the effect this might have in Africa. The statement oozes with implications of US colonialism, imperialism, parochialism, and unilateralism. If changing our stance on homosexuality sexual morality would wreck havoc in American churches, the effect in the African churches would be many times greater. And, the effect in lands where Muslim presence is strong would be devastating. This is not a healthy situation.

8) The word on the street is that the Council of Bishops is so divided it cannot offer the kind of moral vision the church so desperately needs. The word on the street is also that the retired bishops are a hindrance rather than a help in the work of the council. The retired bishops' statement on homosexuality would lend credence to this kind of talk. This is not a healthy situation.

Stay tuned. There is surely more to come.

– By Dr. Riley Case. Received by e-mail from one of our associates.

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*It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to your enemies, but even more to stand up to your friends.*

– J.K. Rowling