

Monthly Update

May 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In this month's edition of the Monthly Update we are covering a plethora of news across the denomination that affects its operation and ministry, but the subject of the normalization of homosexuality is still a matter of grave concern to us. Two years ago this month we were in the middle of fighting the amendments to the constitution of the United Methodist Church that would have paved the way to the normalization of this practice in our denomination. Well, this is still a "front-burner issue."

I cannot help but observe, as it conforms to material in the "Update" itself, that the more our bishops and retired bishops bring this up and try to push it through, the more that makes me wonder if these folks are irrelevant to what the church should be about? The church calls us to not conform to the world but to "be holy" even as God is holy. As we have iterated so often, every reference in the Bible to homosexual practice calls it "sin" and is negative or condemning of the practice. What is it about this that the bishops do not understand? They are supposed to be our leaders – yet if they cannot grasp so simple a truth that our "common" layman and laywoman can, how can they be qualified to lead our once-great denomination?

Furthermore, it costs money to maintain the office of even one bishop. Is this an expense that we should continue to bear? Common sense would tell us that the answer is "no" if those who are designated to be spiritual leaders over us cannot recognize simple truths that are contained in our Bible. Or could it be the case that they don't really, truly believe the Bible is true and the Word of God? If the latter is the case, they are most assuredly unfit to provide the sound Christian leadership that our United Methodist Church needs.

Martin Luther had wisely observed, "If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point." This we must do – and this issue is indicative of the central problem in our denomination – the authority of the Bible and the centrality of our nature as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Please continue to pray for us and to stand with us financially.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

May 2011 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Be kind to each other – I prefer you make mistakes in kindness, than that you work miracles in unkindness.

– Mother Teresa of Calcutta

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Of Interest

+ *Church Court Clarifies Voting Eligibility*

When UMs start electing clergy delegates to General Conference, several new groups will be eligible to vote for those representatives. The Judicial Council clarified the new categories of electors for the 2012 General Conference in a special called session Feb. 12. The new categories are the result of the adoption of Amendment 19 to Paragraph 35 of the Constitution of The UMC. As interpreted by Judicial Council in a ruling released Feb. 14, those now eligible to vote are:

- Full clergy members
- Associate members
- “Provisional members who have been judged by the annual conference to have completed the educational requirements and have been elected to provisional membership.”
- “Local pastors who have met two criteria: they have, by either of two options as determined by the annual conference, completed the constitutionally specified level of education; and they have been appointed by the bishop and served for two consecutive years, during which time no withdrawal of the appointed status has occurred.”

The 2008 legislation was part of a long-term effort by the UM Rural Fellowship (UMRF), the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors and other groups to expand the pool of those eligible to elect delegations, said the Rev. Roger Grace, UMRF president. The 2008 General Conference refined the original petition and adopted what became Amendment 19. That action later was ratified, as required, by the annual conferences, with a vote of 79 percent in favor of the legislative change.

– *UMNewscope, February 23, 2011; vol. 39, issue 8, p. 2.*

+ *Christian Number-Crunching*

For 27 years, the International Bulletin of Missionary Research has published an annual “Status of Global Mission” report, which attempts to quantify the world Christian reality, comparing Christianity’s circumstances to those of other faiths, and assaying how Christianity’s various expressions are faring when measured against the recent (and not-so-recent) past. The report is unfailingly interesting, sometimes jarring, and occasionally provocative.

The provocation in the 2011 report involves martyrdom. For purposes of research, the report defines “martyrs” as “believers in Christ who have lost their lives, prematurely, in situations of witness, as a result of human hostility.” The report estimates that there were, on average, 270 new Christian martyrs every 24 hours over the past decade, such that “the number of martyrs [in the period 2000-2010] was approximately 1 million.” Compare this to an estimated 34,000 Christian martyrs in 1900.

As for the interesting, try the aggregate numbers. According to the report, there will be, by mid-2011, 2,306,609,000 Christians of all kinds in the world, representing 33 percent of world population—a slight percentage rise from mid-2000 (32.7 percent), but a slight percentage drop since 1900 (34.5 percent). Of those 2.3 billion Christians, some 1.5 billion are regular church attendees, who worship in 5,171,000 congregations or “worship centers,” up from 400,000 in 1900 and 3.5 million in 2000.

These 2.3 billion Christians can be divided into six “ecclesiastical megablocks”: 1,160,880,000 Catholics; 426,450,000 Protestants; 271,316,000 Orthodox; 87,520,000 Anglicans; 378,281,000 “Independents” (i.e., those separated from or unaffiliated with historic denominational Christianity); and 35,539,000 “marginal Christians” (i.e., those professing off-brand Trinitarian theology, dubious Christology, or a supplementary written revelation beyond the Bible).

Compared to the world’s 2.3 billion Christians, there are 1.6 billion Muslims, 951 million Hindus, 468 million Buddhists, 458 million Chinese folk-religionists, and 137 million atheists, whose numbers have actually dropped over the past decade, despite the caterwauling of Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Co. One cluster of comparative growth statistics is striking: As of mid-2011, there will be an average of 80,000 new Christians per day (of whom 31,000 will be Catholics) and 79,000 new Muslims per day, but 300 fewer atheists every 24 hours.

Africa has been the most stunning area of Christian growth over the past century. There were 8.7 million African Christians in 1900 (primarily in Egypt, Ethiopia and South Africa); there are 475 million African Christians today and their numbers are projected to reach 670 million by 2025. Another astonishing growth spurt, measured typologically, has been among Pentecostals and charismatics: 981,000 in 1900; 612,472,000 in 2011, with an average of 37,000 new adherents every day—the fastest growth in two millennia of Christian history. As for the quest for Christian unity: There were 1,600 Christian denominations in 1900; there were 18,800 in 1970; and there are 42,000 today.

Other impressive numbers: \$545 billion is given to Christian causes annually, which comes out to \$1.5 billion per day. There are some 600 million computers in Christian use, up from 1,000 in 1970. 71,425,000 Bibles will be distributed this year, and some 2

billion people will tune in at least once a month to Christian radio or television. 7.1 million books about Christianity will be published this year, compared to 1.8 million in 1970.

The big lesson of the 2011 Status of Global Mission report can be borrowed from Mark Twain's famous crack about his alleged death: Reports of Christianity's demise have been greatly exaggerated. Christianity may be waning in Western Europe, but it's on an impressive growth curve in other parts of the world, including that toughest of regions for Christian evangelism, Asia. Indeed, the continuing growth of Christianity as compared to the decline of atheism (in absolute numbers, and considering atheists as a percentage of total world population) suggests the possibility that the vitriolic character of the New Atheism—displayed in all its crudity prior to Pope Benedict's September 2010 visit to Great Britain—may have something to do with the shrewder atheists' fear that they're losing, and the clock is running.

That's something you're unlikely to hear reported in the mainstream media. The numbers are there, however, and the numbers are suggestive.

– George Weigel, Feb 9, 2011. George Weigel is Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

+ *Chick-fil-A*

I believe I'll go to Chick-fil-A and get some "Jesus Chicken" and waffle fries for my family at least once a week. Chick-fil-A is an American success story. Founded by Georgian entrepreneur Truett Cathy in 1946, the family-owned chicken-sandwich chain is one of the country's largest fast-food businesses. It employs some 50,000 workers across the country at 1,500 outlets in nearly 40 states and the District of Columbia .. The company generates more than \$2 billion in revenue and serves millions of happy customers with trademark Southern hospitality.

So, what's the problem? Well, Chick-fil-A is run by devout Christians who believe in strong marriages, devoted families, and the highest standards of character for their workers. The restaurant chain's official corporate mission is to "glorify God" and "enrich the lives of everyone we touch." The company's community-service initiatives, funded through its WinShape Foundation, support foster-care, scholarship, summer-camp, and marriage-enrichment programs. On Sunday, all Chick-fil-A stores close so workers can spend the day at worship and rest.

Over the past months, several progressive-activist blogs have waged an ugly war against Chick-fil-A. The company's alleged atrocity: One of its independent outlets in Pennsylvania donated some sandwiches and brownies to a marriage seminar run by the Pennsylvania Family Institute, which happens to oppose same-sex marriage.

In the name of tolerance, the anti-Chick-fil-A hawks sneered at the company's main product as "Jesus Chicken," derided its no-Sunday-work policy, and attacked its operators as "anti-gay." Petition drives on websites are demanding the company change and disavow their standards. Facebook users dutifully organized witch hunts against the company on college campuses.

Progressive groups are gloating over Chick-fil-A's public-relations troubles. This is not because they care about winning hearts and minds over gay rights or marriage policy, but because their core objective is to marginalize political opponents and chill Christian philanthropy and activism. The fearsome "muscle flexing" is being done by the hysterical bullies trying to drive them off of college grounds and out of their neighborhoods in the name of "human rights."

– Michelle Malkin. Received by e-mail.

Note from the American Family Association (AFA):

Dear Friend,

A few weeks ago, AFA alerted you to an attack by homosexual activists against the Christian-owned Chick-fil-A company. Suggestion – **“Eat Mor Chikin! – BuyCott Chick-fil-A each week”**

+ *Webcast summit explores denomination's future* – **“What is God's vision for the United Methodist Church?”**

That question was among several fielded by a panel of three bishops, a young adult leader and agency head at the denomination's Leadership Summit on April 6. There was a notable pause after the question as the leaders considered how best to respond on behalf of the Almighty. Finally, Germany's Bishop Rosemarie Wenner took a crack at it. “We took the words of Matthew 28 as the mission of the church, and that really is God's wish for all of us: Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” she said.

Thousands of church members hoping to make more disciples gathered at sites around the world to participate in the Leadership Summit webcast. Altogether, there were more than 4,000 web connections to the three-hour event. It was the first chance for many to hear how denominational leaders plan to carry out the recommendations in the Call to Action Steering Team's final report to increase vital congregations. All five panel members were part of the Call to Action team. The team's report, adopted by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table, states that the status quo of a shrinking and aging U.S. church is “toxic” and unsustainable.

“Adaptive challenge”

The denomination’s “adaptive challenge,” the report says, is to “redirect the flow of attention, energy and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations. . . .” In short, the panel said, the denomination needs to change how it uses resources and invest more in fostering thriving, disciple-making local congregations.

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory Palmer, a panel member, said in an interview that the goal of the summit was to build greater understanding of that challenge. He noted that during the event, he saw United Methodists respond with great love for the church. “People yearn for local congregations to be effective in the mission and to make a difference together in the world,” said Bishop Palmer. But he added, “Talking about change is both necessary and threatening.”

Tough questions

The panel fielded questions about how to promote evangelism, how to bridge racial gaps within the denomination and how to measure vitality. In addition to Bishop Wenner and Bishop Palmer, the panel included Charlotte (N.C.) Area Bishop Larry Goodpaster, Council of Bishops president; Ben Boruff, a young adult and member of the Connectional Table; and Erin Hawkins, the top executive of the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race. Ms. Hawkins tackled the question about racial divides. “When we look at the future of the United Methodist Church, it’s one that requires us to take a serious look at how we extend ourselves out into the world in a world that doesn’t look like the average United Methodist,” she said. She said it is no longer effective to treat racial/ethnic, youth ministry or women’s ministries as add-on ministries. “Unless we are willing to make the things we consider special interests the main interest or at least equal interest,” she said, “I think we won’t find ourselves much further down the road.”

Another aspect of diversity is age, and Mr. Boruff, 21, spoke to how the church in the United States has long struggled to draw in more teens and young adults. “It would be easy for us to say right now that we need to continue the conversation of how to approach young people,” Mr. Boruff said. “The hard truth is that this is a conversation we’ve been having for quite some time.”

‘Internal audit’

He pointed out that the terms the church uses on Sunday mornings sometimes do not translate well to younger visitors. “We need to do an internal audit of how to best communicate the love of Jesus Christ that we have,” Mr. Boruff said. Church members following along on Twitter at #umclead had their own sometimes critical take on the event. One of the concerns on Twitter and among those questioning the panel was the church’s reliance on worship-attendance and membership statistics in measuring vitality. Bishop Goodpaster suggested that churches include the involvement and impact of their outreach ministries as part of their “scorecards.”

Bishop Wenner stressed that counting worshippers is important because that’s how a congregation knows that people are joining. Still, she added, she doesn’t consider statistics key to moving the denomination forward. “It’s important to make measurements; however, it’s even more important to tell our stories, to share best practices and to learn how other congregations are reaching out,” she said. “It’s really the spiritual foundation that will bring us forward, not more bureaucracy and more statistics.” The panelists were gratified by the level of participation in the summit, especially from church members in the central conferences outside the United States. For example, some 300 United Methodists in Zimbabwe gathered at the country’s world trade center to watch the webcast.

More questions

By the end of the three-hour summit, the panel had received 513 questions—far more than the members were able to address in the time allowed. Bishop Palmer said church leaders will aggregate the questions and post responses at www.umclleadershipsummit.org no later than May 1. Bishop Wenner said she hoped the summit...can better fulfill God’s vision. “Methodism is a mission movement, and it is all about regaining that spirit,” she said. “We are privileged to be part of God’s mission in this work. “It’s not about building the church. It is about living as the church of Jesus Christ in sharing the gospel.”

An archive of the webcast is available for viewing at <http://umc.to/umclsvideo>. Viewers were asked to participate through April 10 in a survey about the Leadership Summit; the findings have been posted at <http://umclleadershipsummit.org>

– By Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); NASHVILLE, Tenn, April 18, 2011.

+ *Lambuth students ‘torn apart’ by school closing*

[Note: Lambuth University has had the reputation of maintaining sound, orthodox, Biblical standards of excellence. Their closing is indeed sad. – AOM]

Lambuth University will cease academic operation as of June 30. This news was communicated beyond the Jackson, TN campus to Lambuth alumni and friends in an email announcement Thursday afternoon, April 14. The email, from Candy Donald, Director of Alumni Relations and Special Assistant to the President, called April 14 “a very emotional and moving day.”

While the Board of Trustees met to decide the fate of the 168-year-old Methodist school, “students spent all day on the front lawn wearing Lambuth blue and chanting support for their beloved university,” according to Donald.

Lambuth has struggled financially for several years and was facing what Donald referred to as a “looming lawsuit appealing the decision by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to deny reaccreditation” of the school. Two resolutions were passed by the Board of Trustees on Thursday -- one to cease operations as of June 30 and one to create a transition team, said Donald. Donald’s email included the following details that she said were communicated to faculty, staff and students by the administration on Thursday afternoon:

- During the final weeks of Lambuth’s spring 2011 semester, the primary focus will be on meeting the needs of students.
- Lambuth will formulate “teach-out agreements” with other higher education institutions to provide students the opportunity to complete their degrees. A teach-out agreement, according to SACS, is a written agreement between accredited institutions that provide for the equitable treatment of students if one of those institutions stops offering an educational program before all students enrolled in that program complete the program.”
- Assistance will be provided to students to transfer to higher education institutions that are not involved in a teach-out agreement with Lambuth. This assistance will cover academics and extracurricular activities.
- A transition team will continue working with other interested higher education institutions to ensure the Lambuth campus in Jackson “remains an educational facility.”

Lambuth’s spring commencement is scheduled for Saturday, April 30, with 65 students expected to receive diplomas.

Donald’s email said updates will be communicated on Lambuth’s Web site at www.lambuth.edu and Lambuth’s Facebook page.

– Lane Gardner Camp, Memphis Conference Director of Communications. More information is at the website.

<http://memphissite.brickriver.com/news/detail/92>. “Lambuth University to cease operation June 30”; 4/15/2011
<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=5723451&ct=9358441¬oc=1>

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). Debate raises questions about church’s voice

[Note: The GBCS speaks out on a continuing basis from a far-left political perspective that is not representative of many, if not most, of the people in the pews whom they purport to represent. It is not surprising that many question the continued support of this far-left politically active board with the denomination’s money given to support Christian endeavors. This is a far cry from what Christ would have us do. This GBCS activism in the health care arena was detailed in the book *Misguided Shepherds* offered to supporters of Concerned Methodists. This information is nothing new but only the latest in supporting an agenda of far-left political causes and an example of wasted money. – AOM]

The debate over health care reform has touched off deep emotions in the U.S. public, but it has also sparked a separate – and equally passionate – set of reactions among United Methodists. As Congress grappled with the legislation during the weekend of March 20-21, many United Methodists were surprised to hear U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi cite the church as a supporter of reform.

On her Web site, she more specifically listed a church agency, the Board of Church and Society, in a long roll of organizations supporting reform. In the days that followed, United Methodist leaders fielded calls and e-mails from church members who were either elated or angry about the church’s role. Many were confused. Who decided The United Methodist Church supports health care reform? Why is my church involved in a political issue? What authority does the Board of Church and Society have to speak for the church?

The Board of Church and Society operates from a building across the street from the U.S. Capitol and the Supreme Court building. The agency advocated for [the] health care [plan]. Jim Winkler, top staff executive for the agency, led efforts to pass legislation that would [support the Obama plan]. In addition, several other United Methodist leaders, including Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the Council of Bishops, individually urged President Obama to pass “health care reform” [the ObamaCare plan]. At least five official and unofficial UM organizations also advocated for “reform”.

[Note: Peck goes on to make the point... “Withholding funds from a local church cripples ministries around the world. Church members have many options for expressing viewpoints and concerns in the church. They can directly contact their pastor, bishop, the appropriate general agency or one of the many church-affiliated organizations and unofficial groups that represent specific causes in the church.”]

We have found that the first – withholding funds – is the only thing that is effective. There is no reason to support misguided political activism, and that is what this is, with the money we want to go to the Lord’s real work. His further point that withholding funds “cripples ministries around the world” is deceptive since minimal money actually makes it to doing the de facto work of the Lord around the world. His going on to say that people who are unhappy with this political advocacy can “directly contact their pastor, bishop, the appropriate general agency” to express opposition to what is going on in this area is also deceptive. We have found that this is ineffective as our clergy leadership will do nothing to change what is happening since they all too often agree with this political perspective and activism. I shall reiterate: “We have found that the first – withholding funds – is the only thing that is effective. There is no reason to support misguided political

activism...with the money we want to go to the Lord's real work." – AOM]

– By Rich Peck, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); a UMNS Commentary; Nashville, Tenn., April 18, 2011.
<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=5259669&ct=8133605>. Recd. March 26, 2010
Peck is a retired clergy member of the New York Annual Conference and a freelance writer in Nashville, Tenn.

United Methodist Communications. *United Methodist Communications Announces Reorganization, Cutbacks*

UM Communications announced a restructuring plan and reduction in force in response to a twofold challenge: a need to realign personnel with changing agency priorities and a growing budget shortfall. [Note: Is it any wonder? – AOM]

(UM) Women/Women's Issues *Women's Division votes to "structurally separate" from GBGM*

In a historic vote, the Women's Division Board of Directors voted unanimously to "structurally separate" from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and become an independent agency within the United Methodist Church. The action took place at its spring semi-annual meeting April 7-11 in Stamford, Connecticut. While separate, the plan states that the Women's Division will be "missionally connected to GBGM, and would intentionally release seats at the GBGM Board of Directors.....to make it possible for GBGM to add additional representation from Central Conferences within a smaller board."

Later that week, the Directors of the General Board of Global Ministries affirmed the proposal from the Women's Division. The directors also voted to reduce their number from 92 to 32 – a recommendation from the board's executive committee. In his presentation of the report, Bishop Peter Weaver of New England said that directors of the mission board must have a clear vision and "focus on where God is leading us into the future." Ideal directors are Christ-centered, have an ability to tell the truth in love, and are deeply collaborative, Weaver said.

According to a GBGM news release, "The formula for the distribution of Global Ministries directors beginning in 2013 would assign 15 seats to five geographical jurisdictions in the US, with three each for the North Central, Northeastern, and South Central jurisdictions, and four to the Southeast and two to the Western, proportioned by membership size. Two spots would go to US bishops, for a total US representation of 17, or 53 percent. "Ten places, nine for clergy and laity and one for a bishop, would go to the central conference outside the US, or a total of 31 percent. There are some 7.8 million US United Methodists and more than 4 million in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. Membership is growing outside the US and Europe."

A new relationship

Key components of the new Women's Division-GBGM relationship plan include:

- The Women's Division would have 5 seats on the 32 member GBGM Board of Directors. (Currently, the Women's Division makes up 30-40 percent of the GBGM Board of Directors as mandated by the Discipline.)
- Women's Division staff would continue to operate the UM Office at the United Nations on behalf of both GBGM and WD at the Church Center for the UN, which is owned by the WD.

The structural separation plan will now be presented to the 2012 General Conference in legislative form. Other major organizational changes concerning United Methodist Women were also approved today by the Women's Division Board of Directors:

- The name "Women's Division" will be replaced with "United Methodist Women, Inc.," and the organization will now be classified as an agency of the United Methodist Church.
- The term "unit" will be replaced with "local organization of UMW" and each local organization would organize as they see fit.
- A new Board of Directors of UMW, Inc. will be created with 25 members (20 elected from jurisdictional organizations of UMW and 5 nominated by a special committee to ensure diversity). The current board size is 50 members.
- A UMW Program Advisory Group would be created, made up of 70-80 members, which would meet annually and be responsible for recommending to the Board of Directors major program directions, strategic plans, and plans for Schools of Christian Mission, leadership training, social policies, Reading Program, and Assembly.

The rationale and impetus behind these major structural changes being proposed by the Women's Division reflect a proactive position toward impending structural reorganizations across the general church. Perhaps these historic changes reflect a willingness by the Women's Division to adapt to the realities facing the United Methodist Church as a whole, and the organization of United Methodist Women in particular. These realities for UMW include continued dramatic

membership loss and revenue decline. (See www.renewnetwork.org for current report on UMW membership and financial structure.)

Hopefully, in the midst of promoting flexibility in structure and reaching more women within the UM Church, the Women's Division will understand the need to embrace other women's ministry models within the church in addition to United Methodist Women. Building vital congregations means building vital women's ministry programs across the UM Church. [Note: This also comes as no surprise. – AOM]

– By Liza Kittle and Steve Beard. Perspective – April 19, 2011. Posted by admin On April 21, 2011.

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When health is absent, wisdom cannot reveal itself, art cannot manifest, strength cannot fight, wealth becomes useless, and intelligence cannot be applied. – Herophilus

Global Outlook

Most people work hard and spend their health trying to achieve wealth.

Then they retire and spend their wealth trying to get back their health.

[This is a modern-day application of the one by Herophilus.

Wisdom never changes but is sometimes “rediscovered”.]

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North Korea and around the world. When the Gospel is Worth Dying For: International Day of Prayer

When "Mary" and her family originally escaped from North Korea into China, relatives introduced them to church and her father came to faith in Christ. But the now 18-year-old woman and her family did not find a safe haven for long. The Chinese government discovered and repatriated her father back to North Korea in 2001. Her pregnant mother died of leukemia. North Korean authorities sent her father to prison. Her father was allowed to return to China after three years, but he didn't stay. Despite the dangers, he returned to his homeland to bring the gospel. He was arrested again, and his daughter says she has not heard from him since. Now Mary has found Christ as well after He appeared to her in a dream. She desires to return to North Korea to continue her father's ministry.

Mary represents thousands of suffering believers. A Palestinian man grieves the loss of his father, shot to death by an Israeli soldier, as an Israeli remembers with great sorrow his own family members killed in the Holocaust. And a North African pastor reports that persecution is a basic teaching in his church. In Christ, they all find solace amid unspeakable pain.

These stories brought many to tears at Cape Town 2010: The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization held last month in South Africa. These personal accounts opened the eyes of conference delegates from the developed world, most of whom were unfamiliar with the plight of most of the world's Christians. With such chilling news from believers worldwide, some from the United States wondered why persecution wasn't listed as a conference agenda item.

The answer was simple: It didn't need to be. Beyond our own country's borders, persecution often saturates the lives of Christians. From the perspective of most conference participants, enduring trials because of their faith is nothing unusual. Why talk about normal?

Days after delegates returned home, this reality was underscored by an attack on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad during a Sunday Mass on October 31. Terrorists took about 120 worshippers hostage, beat and killed three priests, and detonated explosives moments before Iraqi security forces stormed the church in a rescue attempt. At least 64 people, mostly worshippers, were massacred and an estimated 300 wounded. An al Qaeda terrorist group issued a message... stating this: "The Ministry of War of the Islamic State of Iraq declares that all the centers, organizations and bodies of Christian leaders and followers have become legitimate targets by the mujahedeen (Muslim holy warriors), wherever our hands will reach them."

Benjamin Kwashi, the Anglican bishop of Jos, Nigeria, shared with the Lausanne conference that he is targeted for murder and his family has been attacked. Following the second attempt on his life in 18 months, Kwashi said that such incidents are nothing new. "The gospel is worth living for; it is also worth dying for," he said. "Persecution has never, and will never, kill the church. Conditions may be difficult or dangerous for a time, but the seed is in the ground and at the right time it will burst out."

Many who have been moved by the Cape Town testimonies ask me, "How can we help them?" If we ever believe that prayer is a flippant way to respond to needs, we need to reexamine our faith. We must pray for these brothers and sisters. But often the call to prayer falls on deaf ears, as many in the West have been sucked into the vortex of self-centered materialism, focusing their lives on that which is not lasting.

We need to be the answer to the prayers for the persecuted. We must not ignore Jesus' hard message that whatever we do not do to bless one of the least of these, we do not do for Him.

A powerful opportunity to pray is coming Nov. 14. Millions worldwide will unite that Sunday for the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP). This global day of intercession promotes prayer for persecuted Christians, their oppressors, nations that promote or ignore persecution, as well as ongoing prayer and educated involvement on behalf of the persecuted.

Many persecuted Christians have asked for more vocal support of their cases. We also must use our advocacy voice to speak out in their behalf. In India, for example, dubious leaders seeking reelection don't want word to spread that India is a horrible persecutor of religious minorities.

Major physical needs exist, such as coming to the aid of Christians affected by flooding in Pakistan and standing beside war refugees in Iraq. Often aid distribution is barred from Christians. Church leaders from one country on Open Doors' World Watch List shared with me the need for an accredited underground seminary. Our generous donations strengthen the Church even as it is attacked.

We must reacquaint the American church with Matt. 10:22, which says, "All men will hate you because of me..."

Jesus promised we would be persecuted. He didn't come with the message that He is but one of many good social options. Jesus is Lord. And it is no small thing to follow Him.

- Carl Moeller, Open Doors USA. Carl Moeller, Ph.D., is president and CEO of Open Doors USA, American arm of Open Doors International, a worldwide ministry that has supported and strengthened persecuted Christians in restricted countries since 1955.

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Undertake something that is difficult; it will do you good. Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow. – Ronald E. Osborn, as received from Nelson L. Castorillo