

Monthly Update

October 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Before I get into the information contained in this edition of “The Monthly Update” I must compliment the members of St. Paul Church (SPC) in Fairbanks, Alaska on the dedication of their new building. As you will remember they were under attack by the Alaska Missionary Conference, (AMC) for standing for our traditional Wesleyan Christian faith. The AMC eventually “won” in court and was able to seize their property.

The members of SPC started plans and efforts for a new building. They did so – and the new structure is larger and more functional than the original one. The SPC’s activities, dedication, and service were impressive and – I believe – an indicator of the great things to come in the life of that church. Please keep these good people in your prayers – for their continuing ministry for Jesus Christ at the top of the world.

Meanwhile, the congregation that had arranged with the AMC to “purchase” the property (with funds furnished by the AMC) have not been doing so well.

Heavy stuff. That is what is contained in this edition of “The Monthly Update”. As usual, there was more information that we had wanted to pass on to you but a shortage of space precluded it. Foremost in this were continuing reports on what is happening in the annual conferences across the United Methodist Church. Hopefully, we will present the last of the reports in the November edition of “The Monthly Update”.

In this issue there is news on the twin areas of structural and budgetary changes facing The United Methodist Church, sexuality standards facing the Presbyterian Church (USA) which affect our denomination as well; and the continuing issue of homosexuality.

Leading off in the information is an article with the compelling question, “Can Israel Survive?” This is a topic that is of integral importance to every Bible-believing Christian. We know that His word tells us that He will “bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel.” This tiny country is the site of our spiritual foundation and contains the birth place of Him who has called us to faithful service. The Jewish people we know to be God’s chosen people – the “apple of His eye” and priests to take the life-saving message of salvation to the world when expressed in the fuller sense of Jesus Christ’s redeeming and transformational mission to earth. Please continue to pray for Israel.

Thank you again for your support and prayers. They are a necessary part of our ministry as we continue to do what the Lord has called us to.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

October 2011 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

“It’s not whether you get knocked down. It’s whether you get back up. – Vince Lombardi

* * * * *

Of Interest

+ *Can Israel Survive?*

That question hasn't really been asked since 1967. Then, a far weaker Israel was surrounded on all sides by Arab dictatorships that were equipped with sophisticated weapons from their nuclear patron, the Soviet Union. But now, things are far worse for the Jewish state. Egyptian mobs just tried to storm the Israeli embassy in Cairo and kill any Israelis they could get their hands on. Whatever Egyptian government emerges, it will be more Islamist than before -- and may renounce the peace accords with Israel. One thing unites Syrian and Libyan dissidents: They seem to hate Israel as much as the murderous dictators whom they have been trying to throw out.

The so-called "Arab Spring" was supposed to usher in Arab self-introspection about why intolerant strongmen keep sprouting up in the Middle East. Post-revolutionary critics could freely examine self-inflicted Arab wounds, such as tribalism, religious intolerance, authoritarianism, endemic corruption, closed economies and gender apartheid. But so far, "revolutionaries" sound a lot more like reactionaries. They are more often retreating to the tired conspiracies that the Israelis and Americans pushed onto innocent Arab publics homegrown corrupt madmen such as Bashar Assad, Muammar Gadhafi and Hosni Mubarak. In 1967, the more powerful periphery of the Middle East -- the Shah's Iran, Kemalist Turkey, a military-run Pakistan and the Gulf monarchies -- was mostly uninvolved in the Israel-Arab frontline fighting.

Not now. A soon-to-be-nuclear Iran serially promises to destroy Israel. The Erdogan government in Turkey brags about its Ottoman Islamist past -- and wants to provoke Israel into an eastern Mediterranean shooting war. Pakistan is the world's leading host and exporter of jihadists obsessed with destroying Israel. The oil-rich Gulf states use their vast petroleum wealth and clout to line up oil importers against Israel. The 21st century United Nations is a de facto enemy of the Jewish state.

Meanwhile, the West is nearly bankrupt. The European Union is on the brink of dissolving, its population shrinking amid growing numbers of Islamic immigrants. America is \$16 trillion in debt. We are tired of three wars. The Obama administration initially thought putting a little "light" into the once-solid relationship between Israel and the United States might coax Arab countries into negotiating a peace. That new American triangulation certainly has given a far more confident Muslim world more hope -- but it's hope that just maybe the United States now cannot or will not come to Israel's aid if Muslim states ratchet up the tension.

It is trendy to blame Israel intransigence for all these bleak developments. But to do so is simply to forget history. There were three Arab efforts to destroy Israel before it occupied any borderlands after its victory in 1967. Later, it gave back all of Sinai and yet now faces a hostile Egypt. It got out of Lebanon -- and Hezbollah crowed that Israel was weakening, as that terrorist organization moved in and stockpiled thousands of missiles pointed at Tel Aviv. Israel got out of Gaza and earned as thanks both rocket showers and a terrorist Hamas government sworn to destroy the Jewish state.

The Arab Middle East condemns Israel for not granting a "right of return" into Israel to Palestinians who have not lived there in nearly 70 years. But it keeps embarrassed silence about the more than half-million Jews whom Arab dictatorships much later ethnically cleansed from Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, and sent back into Israel. On cue, the Palestinian ambassador to the United States again brags that there will be no Jews allowed in his newly envisioned, and American subsidized, Palestinian state -- a boast with eerie historical parallels.

By now we know both what will start and deter yet another conflict in the Middle East. In the past, wars broke out when the Arab states thought they could win them and stopped when they conceded they could not.

But now a new array of factors -- ever more Islamist enemies of Israel such as Turkey and Iran, ever more likelihood of frontline Arab Islamist governments, ever more fear of Islamic terrorism, ever more unabashed anti-Semitism, ever more petrodollars flowing into the Middle East, ever more chance of nuclear Islamist states, and ever more indifference by Europe and the United States -- has probably convinced Israel's enemies that finally they can win what they could not in 1947, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982 and 2006.

So brace yourself. The next war against Israel is no longer a matter of if, only when. And it will be far more deadly than any we've witnessed in quite some time.

- By Victor Davis Hanson; Sept. 22, 2011. <http://www.JewishWorldReview.com>; “Will Israel survive?” Victor Davis Hanson, a classicist and military historian, is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and a recipient of the 2007 National Humanities Medal.

+ *Budget Cuts Recommended to General Conference*

A recommended budget of \$603 million for the 2013–2016 operations of the denomination’s general agencies will go before General Conference in 2012. The figure represents a 6.04% reduction from the previous four years and marks the first time a smaller budget will go before the church’s top legislative body for approval. General Conference could adjust the recommendation when it next meets April 24–May 4 in Tampa, Fla. General Conference will also take up two constitutional amendments that would allow the body to empower a unit of the denomination to make budget adjustments between conference sessions. At present, after General Conference adjourns, no entity can make changes to the allocated budgets. To be ratified, constitutional amendments must win a two-thirds majority at General Conference and next must be approved by at least two-thirds of the members voting during annual conferences. By contrast, the budget requires a majority vote by General Conference.

The 40-member board of the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) and the 60-member Connectional Table (CT) in May gave provisional approval for the budget for all seven general apportionments, including the World Service Fund that supports most general agencies. After a review during their July 27–29 meeting, the two groups agreed to send the proposed budget to General Conference. As it stands, the recommended budget will mean “reductions in programming or staff depending on how the individual agencies react to reductions in funding,” said John Goolsbey, a GCFA executive. Reductions in the number of members in U.S. congregations and declining revenue already have forced general agencies to eliminate some staff positions and programs.

The Rev. Andy Langford, pastor of Central UMC in Concord, N.C., and a member of the Connectional Table, said most of the denomination’s money is spent at the annual conference and local church level: “That \$603 million is only 3% of the total expenditures of the denomination.” The reduced budget should provide some relief to congregations and annual conferences, Langford said. “What the annual conferences are going to say is, ‘We’re going to have more flexibility with what we do.’ And the local churches are going to say, ‘We will have more flexibility in what we do.’ I think this could actually help the church.”

GCFA did not support two study group proposals: One to combine the seven general apportioned funds into one fund and one to restructure the apportionment formula to move from an expenditure-based model to an income-based model. The council did support a study group’s recommendation to emphasize stewardship as a spiritual discipline. Additional legislation will include a recommendation for the restructure of the GCFA board of directors and committees, reducing the number of members from 40 to 21. In other action, the board approved four requests totaling \$515,805 from the CT for grants from World Service contingency funds to provide additional support for projects and programs currently under way. The board also approved release of \$125,000 to the CT as part of an annual budgeted amount for their allocation to emerging ministries and unanticipated events.

Bishop Lindsey Davis, president of the council, stated, “I want to thank the GCFA council members, CT members, and the Interim Operations Team for their work on some very difficult issues. There are hard decisions to be made and now legislation will be drafted to present to the General Conference. All involved have made an effort to be prayerful and intentional about their decisions. We will move forward to General Conference based on these decisions.”

– Heather Hahn, UMNS and GCFA, as reported in the August 17, 2011 edition of the UMNewscope

+ *Conservative Presbyterians Weighing Next Step after Sex Vote*

Washington, DC—A large gathering of Presbyterians concerned about the liberal direction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) convened in Minneapolis. After the 2 million-member denomination’s vote to end clergy ordination standards on sexual fidelity, many traditionalists are weighing new accountability structures that would enable them to remain in the PCUSA. Meeting August 25-26, the Fellowship Gathering of Presbyterians expected to draw over 2,000 participants.

IRD President Mark Tooley commented: “The PCUSA decision to abandon Christian sexual ethics predictably is fueling accelerated membership decline and schism.

“Some traditionalists are struggling to stay within the PCUSA while creating new forms of accountability to compensate for the denomination’s failure.

“Every denomination that has embraced sexual liberation over Christian orthodoxy has similarly faced schism and spiraling membership.

“Sexual liberationists in the churches clearly are choosing their faddish brand of social justice over the church’s health. Love for the church should instead compel us to contend against the secular culture’s baser demands rather than surrendering to them.”

– The Institute on Religion & Democracy, 1023 15th Street NW, Ste. 601 • Washington, DC 20005-2601.

+ ***“Bold” Changes Proposed for Church Structure, Funding***

Members of the Connectional Table, meeting July 25–28, endorsed five proposals that would change The UMC’s structure and potentially its funding. East Ohio Area Bishop John L. Hopkins, the Connectional Table’s chairperson, called the proposals “far-reaching.” “What we’re trying to do is simplify the church and integrate it more,” he said. He added that the changes are intended to help the general church’s programs and resources better serve the needs of annual conferences and local churches. The proposals came from the Interim Operations Team and are the result of the church’s Call to Action process, adopted by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table in their fall 2010 meetings. The 60-member Connectional Table coordinates the denomination’s mission, ministries and resources, and it is responsible for recommending changes in agency structures. The body voted to recommend:

- * Making “necessary changes” to allow for “a just, reasonable and compassionate process” for low performing clergy to leave the itinerancy.
- * Consolidating 10 of the denomination’s 13 general agencies into five offices that will be part of a new UM Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. The center will have a 15-member board of directors, which will be accountable to a 45-member advisory board that will “represent the diversity and inclusiveness of our Church.” Under the recommendation, the consolidation will take place in two phases and be completed by 2014. (The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns would be moved from oversight by the Council of Bishops.)
- * Forming a special study task force to determine the optimal organizational structure, governance and business/ministry models of the UM Publishing House (UMPH) and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB), both of which are financed based through their performance and receive no general church funds. The task force is to make its recommendations by the end of 2013.
- * Having the General Conference authorize the board of the new UM Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry to study the most effective ways to fulfill the mission of the church. Under this proposal, the board would evaluate programs and spending at all levels of the church and ultimately could direct the reallocation of up to \$60 million in general church funds during the 2013–2016 quadrennium.
- * Forming a task force that would conduct a denomination-wide financial analysis and initiate proposals for a more equitable and effective apportionment system across all annual conferences. Apportionments support ministries at both the annual conference and General Conference levels.

The role of General Conference in guiding the work of the church remains paramount in the new model. “We really feel that General Conference sets the values of our church, not a board of directors,” Hopkins noted. The Connectional Table took up and refined the recommendations as part of the multiyear Call to Action process, which has found that that the status quo practices of a shrinking and aging U.S. church need greater accountability, efficiency and renewed trust in order to thrive. The suggested changes originated with the Interim Operations Team, a group of laity and clergy working with denominational leadership to implement the Call to Action recommendations. The recommendations will be drafted into legislation for the 2012 General Conference, which has final say on whether these structural changes come to pass. Proposed General Conference legislation from the Connectional Table and other church agencies must be completed by Sept. 1.

Illinois Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, the convener of the Interim Operations Team, expressed confidence that the changes will help the church promote vital congregations and address the decades of membership decline in the United States. “I think some bold directions have been embraced,” Palmer said. “We’re looking at a much more nimble structure (i.e., the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry) that creates some new possibilities of coherence and flexibility.”

Just about every category of church leadership will be affected by the proposals. The first recommendations dealing with clergy follow on the heels of a number of church studies questioning the sustainability and effectiveness of job guarantees for ordained elders. The denomination’s current process to dismiss incompetent clergy is unwieldy, said Washington Area Bishop John Schol, a Connectional Table member.

The Connectional Table’s recommendation is conditioned on no other body in the church proposing legislation to General Conference to alter the process for dismissing ineffective pastors. If no other legislation is submitted, the Connectional Table asks that General Conference appoint a team to study and report to the 2016 General Conference a process for transitioning clergy in a way that best serves congregations, clergy and the denomination. The Rev. Kim Cape, GBHEM’s general secretary, told the Connectional Table that the 2008–2012 Commission to Study the Ministry will issue its final recommendations Aug. 12, and they are likely to include an end to “security of appointment” for elders.

The proposed structural changes have implications for approximately 600 people who work for the denomination’s 11 general agencies that receive general church funds. The number of staff positions in the general agencies has decreased steadily for the last 40 years. In the Connectional Table’s proposal, many of the ministries of the current agencies would be

subsumed under the newly created Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry, in five offices:

The first would be an office of shared services that would include the “essential functions” of groups such as the GCFA, UM Communications (UMCOM), the General Commission on Archives and History, and information technology support. (UM News Service is part of UMCOM.) The other proposed offices are designed with the denomination’s Four Areas of Focus in mind, according to Mary Brooke Casad, executive secretary of the Connectional Table. “An intentional effort was made to pull the functions that our agencies are currently charged with into offices that reflect the work of the Four Areas of Focus.”

* An Office of Congregational Vitality, encompassing “the essential functions” of the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) and multicultural ministries. (New Places and People)

* An Office of Leadership Excellence, encompassing much of the work currently done by the GBHEM. (Developing Leaders)

* An Office of Missional Engagement, responsible for much of the work of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), including global health, missionaries, Volunteers in Mission and the UM Committee on Relief. (Global Health)

* An Office of Justice and Reconciliation, encompassing the essential functions of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW). (Ministry with the Poor)

* How the work of UM Men and the Women’s Division fits into this model is still being worked out. If this recommendation gains General Conference approval in 2012, the plan calls for the transition to be conducted in two phases, with all agencies operating in their current structures initially and then moving to the new organizational chart over a period of about two years. Still, Hopkins acknowledged that the merger of the agencies would likely lead to at least some downsizing of people whose roles at different agencies overlap. The Call to Action research found that there is a great sense of distance between leaders at all levels of the church and the people in the pews. Hopkins and others expressed hope that the changes would close some of that gap.

In other business the Connectional Table, in consultation with the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), approved nearly \$457,000 in four grants from the World Service Contingency Fund:

* \$187,400 to the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns to support consultations, educational materials and a General Conference worship service in response to a General Conference resolution seeking justice for indigenous people. General Conference will next meet April 24–May 4, 2012.

* \$170,500 for operational and programmatic expenses of the Global Aids Fund Committee. * \$97,905 to the Christian unity commission to provide funding for the Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site Research and Learning Center. The 2008 General Conference gave \$50,000 to the project, an amount matched by the U.S. National Park Service. The Colorado Historical Society matched the \$75,000 earmarked for the development of virtual learning portals with UM-related Iliff School of Theology in Denver and other institutions.

* \$100,000 for events to aid young adults in a process of vocational discernment and theological education. GCFA did not recommend a proposed grant of \$148,500 to aid the evaluation of all programs and ministries of the general church. Stating that such evaluation was especially important as the general church considers a new structure, the Connectional Table asked the finance agency to reconsider its opposition to the grant. Members of the finance agency defeated a motion for reconsideration but said they would look at the proposed grant again when the plan for professional assistance and software is more clearly defined.

– Based on an article by Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reprinted in the August 3, 2011 UMNewScope

Homosexuality.

+ Minnesota UM clergy pledge to do same-sex unions

Seventy-seven United Methodist clergy in Minnesota have released a statement saying they will officiate at same-sex unions, though church law prohibits that. Nearly all of the 77 signed their names, the others being listed anonymously. The statement’s release earlier this week was timed to coincide with the launching of a “faith-based” campaign against a proposed state constitutional amendment to limit marriage to heterosexual couples. Minnesota statutory law already bans same-sex marriage. At the Minnesota Annual Conference meeting in May, Dr. Bruce Robbins began a movement to have UM clergy pledge in writing to officiate at same-sex unions. It spread to other conferences, and he said that more than 1,000 UM clergy have signed statements to that effect. But there has been a backlash, with a group of 59 pastors recently calling on the Council of Bishops to issue a statement promising to enforce the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s law book, against clergy who say they’ll officiate at same-sex unions.

The same group of 59 pastors is sponsoring a website (www.faithfulumc.com; see articles above) where clergy and laity

can add their names to the campaign to pressure the bishops. As of Thursday, more than 1,200 clergy and more than 3,200 laity had signed.

The Book of Discipline describes the practice of homosexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching,” prohibits “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from serving as clergy, and says UMC clergy cannot officiate at same-sex weddings or other ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions. Efforts to change those positions have failed at General Conference, the quadrennial gathering of clergy and lay delegates that governs the church.

– Sam Hodges, Managing Editor, The UM Reporter, Sep 22, 2011.

+ Clergy Letter to the Council of Bishops

Dear Council of Bishops:

We are writing out of genuine love and deep concern for our church. We believe that the unity and the future of The United Methodist Church are in jeopardy. According to The United Methodist Reporter "more than 900 UM clergy, in conferences across the country (The United States), have pledged to officiate at same-sex weddings and other services celebrating homosexual unions." In the same article, the Rev. Bruce Robbins (identified as the originator of this movement) "acknowledged he had been discouraged by failures to effect change in the church's positions on homosexuality either legislatively or through Judicial Council rulings, and sought a different approach."

For forty years we United Methodists have listened to each other, respected each other and have engaged in holy conferencing on the important issues of same-sex marriage and the practice of homosexuality. And every four years, our discussions have culminated in General Conference determining the church's position. Though the discussions and resultant protests have not always been pleasant, there has been the assurance that we would respect the decisions of General Conference and live by the covenant that holds us together. The unity of The United Methodist Church has been preserved as a result of this commitment to holy conferencing and to respecting the decisions of General Conference.

If we take them at their word, at least 900 of those who want to change the Book of Discipline regarding same-sex marriage and the practice of homosexuality are no longer willing to honor our Wesleyan way of holy conferencing and respectful dialog. As the article cited above states, the Rev. Robbins and others are encouraging and committed to massive acts of ecclesiastical disobedience, hoping that The United Methodist Church will not possess the resources or the resolve to enforce the church's position. We are grieved that, evidently, the process of holy conferencing and the mutual respect necessary for good-faith conversations are no longer valued by so many of our colleagues. Their promised actions not only threaten the integrity of our church's connectional relationships, they undermine any hope of future dialog and prayerfully working out a solution to our church's seemingly intractable divide.

We do not know how many, if any, marriages or "holy unions" of same-sex couples will be performed by UM clergy in the near future. But we do know the destructive effects that will result in our local churches and throughout the denomination if such services are performed by UM pastors. Even if such acts of disobedience are dealt with appropriately, if they occur in large numbers, the members of our church will simply not understand how such actions are possible. And they will wonder who is allowing them to occur. If pastors performing such services are not dealt with quickly and with genuine consequences for their disobedience, our members will believe that the leadership of the church has failed them.

As the Call to Action Committee reported, many of the persons in our pews do not have a high degree of trust in our denominational leaders. How the threatened disobedience is handled will either restore their trust or further weaken it. What we are sure of is that our members will not support an institution that will not enforce its covenant. Many of us struggle every year to defend to our members why we should pay apportionments that support boards such as the General Board of Church and Society that regularly lobbies and writes legislation to change the church's position regarding the practice of homosexuality. If we ever come to the point that we are having to explain why the church is not holding those who break the Discipline accountable in a real way, we may no longer be able to convince our members of the wisdom of contributing to the general ministries of a church that seems bent on its own destruction. Telling them that we are required to do so by the Discipline and by our being a United Methodist congregation will not have much moral force if others are allowed to break the Discipline and be unfaithful to our United Methodist positions without meaningful consequences. Some of our members will demand to know why we and our congregations should be required to live by the Discipline, if others are not so required.

Honestly, we fear that many of our people will decide that if The United Methodist Church will not live by the covenant that holds us together, it will be time for them to find another church. The positive ministries of transformational discipleship that we are attempting to build are threatened by this group of defiant clergy. This is true even if the threatened disobedience occurs in a different annual conference from our own. What happens in one part of the church affects the perception of the church in all geographical areas.

We are asking you as a Bishops of The United Methodist Church and we are asking the entire Council of Bishops to issue a statement before the threatened disobedience occurs. Please take to heart how much damage will be done to our congregations and to the entire church if Dr. Robbins and others disregard our time-honored process of holy conferencing and respecting the decisions of General Conference. Disobedience to the Discipline is the antithesis to holy conferencing and to our United Methodist way. Please lead and issue a statement proactively that the Council of Bishops, regardless of their individual beliefs, will enforce the Discipline, will seek appropriate discipline for those who break our covenant, and that the unity and the integrity of the church will be maintained.

Such a statement will hearten our members and give us a foundation for calming their concerns and persuading them to remain faithful members of The United Methodist Church. We sincerely believe that the future of The United Methodist Church is at stake. What Dr. Robbins and others are proposing will lead to anarchy - and the end result will be the demise of the church we love. We write not as members of any board or caucus group, but as United Methodist pastors who have committed our lives to this great denomination and who treasure our Wesleyan heritage.

We believe there is a way forward - and that way requires that pastors and congregations live by the Book of Discipline, and that our Episcopal leaders maintain its integrity by enforcing it unapologetically.

The Church needs you to lead. We need you to act before the promised disobedience occurs. We need you to issue a public statement that you understand the proposed disobedience to be a grave threat to the unity and the life of the UM Church and that you stand together in your commitment to defend and enforce the Book of Discipline. We pray and trust that you will.

Yours in Christ

Originators

Rev. Tom Harrison, Asbury UMC, Tulsa, OK, Oklahoma Annual Conference

Rev. Charles Kyker, Christ UMC, Hickory, NC, Western North Carolina Annual Conference

Rev. Ed Robb III, The Woodlands UMC, The Woodlands, TX, Texas Annual Conference

Rev. Ken Werlein, Faithbridge UMC, Spring, TX, Texas Annual Conference

Rev. Steve Wood, Mount Pisgah UMC, Alpharetta, GA, North Georgia Annual Conference

– FaithfulUMC.com. <http://www.faithfulumc.com/clergy.html>

+ Lay Statement to the Council of Bishops

Dear Council of Bishops:

We the undersigned have a genuine love and deep concern for our church. We believe that the unity and the future of The United Methodist Church are in jeopardy. We agree with the sentiments expressed in the clergy letter to the bishops of The United Methodist Church [contained above in this edition of the "Update"].

In light of the following facts:

* Thirty-six retired bishops have called upon The United Methodist Church to reverse its long-standing position on the practice of homosexuality and same-sex "marriage"

* According to The United Methodist Reporter "more than 900 UM clergy, in conferences across the [United States] have pledged to officiate at same-sex weddings and other services celebrating homosexual unions."

* The Northern Illinois Annual Conference passed a resolution saying that clergy who disobey the Book of Discipline by performing services celebrating homosexual unions should receive only a 24-hour suspension.

* In a recent trial, a UM clergyperson who performed a holy union service was given only a 20-day suspension and invited to write a paper promoting her views on how to resolve this issue.

* Various annual conference groups are enlisting clergy to perform same-sex weddings and publicize their availability to the gay community, as well as the broader public.

We believe that a minority within The United Methodist Church is attempting to hold the whole church hostage to its determination to change over 3,000 years of Judeo/Christian teaching on the nature of marriage and sexual morality. We support our church's gracious, loving, and truthful position on the nature of marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman, and that sexual relations be reserved only for heterosexual marriage. Our church's position is a balanced reflection of the teachings of Scripture and portrays the mind of God on these matters. We are grieved that a minority has abandoned the process of "holy conferencing" that has characterized our church's deliberations on these issues. We see these

actions as an affront to our United Methodist connection and a betrayal of clergy vows of ordination.

Therefore, we support the following steps:

1. We expect the Council of Bishops to issue a public statement affirming and supporting our church's teaching on marriage and human sexuality and declaring their intention to enforce the requirements of the Book of Discipline fairly and swiftly. Out of integrity, any bishop who cannot affirm and support our church's scriptural teaching on these issues should resign from his/her position of leadership in the church.
2. We expect pastors who admit to being practicing homosexuals and pastors who have charges brought against them for performing holy unions or same-sex "marriages" to be put on immediate leave until their trial is completed.
3. We expect pastors who are convicted of performing holy unions or same-sex "marriages" to be suspended without pay from their ministerial functions for a minimum of one year, and that before such pastors are allowed to practice ministry again, they must affirm in writing their intention to abide by the provisions of the Book of Discipline by not performing any more such unions or same-sex "marriages."
4. We do not want monies that we give to the church to fund any board or organization within The United Methodist Church that advocates against the current position in the Book of Discipline regarding our definition of marriage or our refusal to ordain or marry practicing homosexuals.
5. We expect that clergy who can no longer in good conscience abide by the requirements of the Book of Discipline will exercise personal integrity and surrender their clergy credentials or transfer to another denomination more in keeping with their beliefs.

We sincerely believe that the future of The United Methodist Church is at stake. What the dissidents are proposing will lead to anarchy - and the end result will be the demise of the church we love. We speak not as members of any board or caucus group, but as United Methodists who have committed our lives to this great denomination and who treasure our Wesleyan heritage. We believe there is a way forward and that way requires that pastors and congregations live by the Book of Discipline, and that our episcopal leaders maintain its integrity by enforcing it unapologetically.

No institution that values its health and its integrity can allow those who represent that institution to willfully, publicly, and repeatedly undermine its policies by their actions or their statements. Doing so, whether in the name of compassion or diversity, will rupture our unity, weaken our witness, and cause our members to mistrust our leaders. The United Methodist Church must not sacrifice all the positive ministries of transformational discipleship that we are attempting to build for the sake of a defiant minority.

In this time of crisis in our church, words and statements are important, but words are not enough. We must see our leaders act with integrity to uphold and support the Discipline as they promised in their ordination and consecration to ministry. We ourselves must act with courage and faithfulness to uphold our commitment to Scripture, The United Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan way. By God's grace we will do so.

– FaithfulUMC.com. **To sign the statement, go to the website:** <http://www.faithfulumc.com/laity.html>

* * * * *

“Luck is what you have left over after you give 100%.”