

Monthly Update

April 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is with a note of sadness that we tell you about the passing of Art Wetzstein, one of the valued members of our Board of Directors. He had fought a 7-year battle with a serious illness; we were blessed to have him during that time. I must tell one of the “stories” on him that I had narrated at his memorial service. At our church I was the one to climb trees and trim them with a chain saw. Since our church dates from 1837, some of the oak trees in the front tower above the buildings. One year when Art and his wife Ruth were visiting, it fell to me to trim them in anticipation of our annual homecoming. Art came by the church, saw me perched high in one of the trees working on it. He took a picture of the ladder leading up into the branches, made a copy, gave it to me – and then told me that he didn’t want me climbing any more trees. I looked at the picture, and agreed – not just because I am accountable to the Board (which I, assuredly, am) – but because Art always spoke from a perspective of balanced, grounded reasoning. He spoke, I heard, and obeyed.

As we look forward to the 2012 General Conference (which will be from April 21st through May 4th) things have been busy with all there is to do. That is great! It is then we must pray, “Lord, show us what You want us to do. Where are Your priorities?”

This “April Update” contains ongoing news of issues that will be addressed in Tampa; we are especially focused on those that will significantly affect our United Methodist in the restructuring our denomination. As the saying goes, “The Devil is in the details.” We must be careful that we do not agree to anything that will put into place a structure that will be harmful to the mission of the church to proclaim the clear good news of Jesus Christ. Specifically, we have a problem with the proposed legislation that has come from the Connectional Table. This is presented in the Update with key provisions to a “Plan B” that comes from more trusted sources and is a far better plan. As happened in 1968 with the merger, a massive, top-heavy structure was put into place rendering the UMC unwieldy.

These are truly interesting times. In addition to our focus on the General Conference, we have issues and concerns across our country and around the world. We shall continue to include information on these challenges to our safety as this becomes available.

May I take this opportunity to thank you for the support you have offered to this ministry – both in terms of prayer and finances? Your prayers and support are such a blessing to all of us here at Concerned Methodists. We ask that you would redouble your prayers for us through the General Conference.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

April 2012 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

The values in a man create the value of a man. – Dr. Bettie B. Youngs, Taste Berries for Teens, p. 144.

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The Good Stuff MANHATTAN DECLARATION: A CALL OF CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

Drafted October 20, 2009 & Released November 20, 2009

[Note: This was included in summary form in the December 2009 edition of the “Monthly Update” – but we believe that the times now are such that we need to be reminded of what it said. I urge that you take it, read it, and communicate the essence of what it says to your friends and neighbors. Then, as you feel led, go to the website and sign it. – AOM]

Website for the Manhattan Declaration is: <http://manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx>

If you wish to sign the Manhattan Declaration, see the website: <http://manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/sign.aspx>

PREAMBLE

Christians are heirs of a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God's word, seeking justice in our societies, resisting tyranny, and reaching out with compassion to the poor, oppressed and suffering.

While fully acknowledging the imperfections and shortcomings of Christian institutions and communities in all ages, we claim the heritage of those Christians who defended innocent life by rescuing discarded babies from trash heaps in Roman cities and publicly denouncing the Empire's sanctioning of infanticide. We remember with reverence those believers who sacrificed their lives by remaining in Roman cities to tend the sick and dying during the plagues, and who died bravely in the coliseums rather than deny their Lord.

After the barbarian tribes overran Europe, Christian monasteries preserved not only the Bible but also the literature and art of Western culture. It was Christians who combated the evil of slavery: Papal edicts in the 16th and 17th centuries decried the practice of slavery and first excommunicated anyone involved in the slave trade; evangelical Christians in England, led by John Wesley and William Wilberforce, put an end to the slave trade in that country. Christians under Wilberforce's leadership also formed hundreds of societies for helping the poor, the imprisoned, and child laborers chained to machines.

In Europe, Christians challenged the divine claims of kings and successfully fought to establish the rule of law and balance of governmental powers, which made modern democracy possible. And in America, Christian women stood at the vanguard of the suffrage movement. The great civil rights crusades of the 1950s and 60s were led by Christians claiming the Scriptures and asserting the glory of the image of God in every human being regardless of race, religion, age or class.

This same devotion to human dignity has led Christians in the last decade to work to end the dehumanizing scourge of human trafficking and sexual slavery, bring compassionate care to AIDS sufferers in Africa, and assist in a myriad of other human rights causes – from providing clean water in developing nations to providing homes for tens of thousands of children orphaned by war, disease and gender discrimination.

Like those who have gone before us in the faith, Christians today are called to proclaim the Gospel of costly grace, to protect the intrinsic dignity of the human person and to stand for the common good. In being true to its own calling, the call to discipleship, the church through service to others can make a profound contribution to the public good.

DECLARATION

We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians, have gathered, beginning in New York on September 28, 2009, to make the following declaration, which we sign as individuals, not on behalf of our organizations, but speaking to and from our communities. We act together in obedience to the one true God, the triune God of holiness and love, who has laid total claim on our lives and by that claim calls us with believers in all ages and all nations to seek and defend the good of all who bear his image. We set forth this declaration in light of the truth that is grounded in Holy Scripture, in natural human reason (which is itself, in our view, the gift of a beneficent God), and in the very nature of the human person. We call upon all people of goodwill, believers and non-believers alike, to consider carefully and reflect critically on the issues we here address as we, with St. Paul, commend this appeal to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

While the whole scope of Christian moral concern, including a special concern for the poor and vulnerable, claims our attention, we are especially troubled that in our nation today the lives of the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly are

severely threatened; that the institution of marriage, already buffeted by promiscuity, infidelity and divorce, is in jeopardy of being redefined to accommodate fashionable ideologies; that freedom of religion and the rights of conscience are gravely jeopardized by those who would use the instruments of coercion to compel persons of faith to compromise their deepest convictions.

Because the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage as a union of husband and wife, and the freedom of conscience and religion are foundational principles of justice and the common good, we are compelled by our Christian faith to speak and act in their defense. In this declaration we affirm: 1) the profound, inherent, and equal dignity of every human being as a creature fashioned in the very image of God, possessing inherent rights of equal dignity and life; 2) marriage as a conjugal union of man and woman, ordained by God from the creation, and historically understood by believers and non-believers alike, to be the most basic institution in society and; 3) religious liberty, which is grounded in the character of God, the example of Christ, and the inherent freedom and dignity of human beings created in the divine image.

We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences to affirm our right—and, more importantly, to embrace our obligation—to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season. May God help us not to fail in that duty.

LIFE

+ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

+ I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Although public sentiment has moved in a pro-life direction, we note with sadness that pro-abortion ideology prevails today in our government. Many in the present administration want to make abortions legal at any stage of fetal development, and want to provide abortions at taxpayer expense. Majorities in both houses of Congress hold pro-abortion views. The Supreme Court, whose infamous 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* stripped the unborn of legal protection, continues to treat elective abortion as a fundamental constitutional right, though it has upheld as constitutionally permissible some limited restrictions on abortion. The President says that he wants to reduce the "need" for abortion—a commendable goal. But he has also pledged to make abortion more easily and widely available by eliminating laws prohibiting government funding, requiring waiting periods for women seeking abortions, and parental notification for abortions performed on minors. The elimination of these important and effective pro-life laws cannot reasonably be expected to do other than significantly increase the number of elective abortions by which the lives of countless children are snuffed out prior to birth. Our commitment to the sanctity of life is not a matter of partisan loyalty, for we recognize that in the thirty-six years since *Roe v. Wade*, elected officials and appointees of both major political parties have been complicit in giving legal sanction to what Pope John Paul II described as "the culture of death." We call on all officials in our country, elected and appointed, to protect and serve every member of our society, including the most marginalized, voiceless, and vulnerable among us.

A culture of death inevitably cheapens life in all its stages and conditions by promoting the belief that lives that are imperfect, immature or inconvenient are discardable. As predicted by many prescient persons, the cheapening of life that began with abortion has now metastasized. For example, human embryo-destructive research and its public funding are promoted in the name of science and in the cause of developing treatments and cures for diseases and injuries. The President and many in Congress favor the expansion of embryo-research to include the taxpayer funding of so-called "therapeutic cloning." This would result in the industrial mass production of human embryos to be killed for the purpose of producing genetically customized stem cell lines and tissues. At the other end of life, an increasingly powerful movement to promote assisted suicide and "voluntary" euthanasia threatens the lives of vulnerable elderly and disabled persons. Eugenic notions such as the doctrine of *lebensunwertes Leben* ("life unworthy of life") were first advanced in the 1920s by intellectuals in the elite salons of America and Europe. Long buried in ignominy after the horrors of the mid-20th century, they have returned from the grave. The only difference is that now the doctrines of the eugenicists are dressed up in the language of "liberty," "autonomy," and "choice."

We will be united and untiring in our efforts to roll back the license to kill that began with the abandonment of the unborn to abortion. We will work, as we have always worked, to bring assistance, comfort, and care to pregnant women in need and to those who have been victimized by abortion, even as we stand resolutely against the corrupt and degrading notion that it can somehow be in the best interests of women to submit to the deliberate killing of their unborn children. Our message is, and ever shall be, that the just, humane, and truly Christian answer to problem pregnancies is for all of us to

love and care for mother and child alike.

A truly prophetic Christian witness will insistently call on those who have been entrusted with temporal power to fulfill the first responsibility of government: to protect the weak and vulnerable against violent attack, and to do so with no favoritism, partiality, or discrimination. The Bible enjoins us to defend those who cannot defend themselves, to speak for those who cannot themselves speak. And so we defend and speak for the unborn, the disabled, and the dependent. What the Bible and the light of reason make clear, we must make clear. We must be willing to defend, even at risk and cost to ourselves and our institutions, the lives of our brothers and sisters at every stage of development and in every condition.

Our concern is not confined to our own nation. Around the globe, we are witnessing cases of genocide and "ethnic cleansing," the failure to assist those who are suffering as innocent victims of war, the neglect and abuse of children, the exploitation of vulnerable laborers, the sexual trafficking of girls and young women, the abandonment of the aged, racial oppression and discrimination, the persecution of believers of all faiths, and the failure to take steps necessary to halt the spread of preventable diseases like AIDS. We see these travesties as flowing from the same loss of the sense of the dignity of the human person and the sanctity of human life that drives the abortion industry and the movements for assisted suicide, euthanasia, and human cloning for biomedical research. And so ours is, as it must be, a truly consistent ethic of love and life for all humans in all circumstances.

MARRIAGE

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:23-24

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Ephesians 5:32-33

In Scripture, the creation of man and woman, and their one-flesh union as husband and wife, is the crowning achievement of God's creation. In the transmission of life and the nurturing of children, men and women joined as spouses are given the great honor of being partners with God Himself. Marriage then, is the first institution of human society—indeed it is the institution on which all other human institutions have their foundation. In the Christian tradition we refer to marriage as "holy matrimony" to signal the fact that it is an institution ordained by God, and blessed by Christ in his participation at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. In the Bible, God Himself blesses and holds marriage in the highest esteem.

Vast human experience confirms that marriage is the original and most important institution for sustaining the health, education, and welfare of all persons in a society. Where marriage is honored, and where there is a flourishing marriage culture, everyone benefits—the spouses themselves, their children, the communities and societies in which they live. Where the marriage culture begins to erode, social pathologies of every sort quickly manifest themselves. Unfortunately, we have witnessed over the course of the past several decades a serious erosion of the marriage culture in our own country. Perhaps the most telling—and alarming—indicator is the out-of-wedlock birth rate. Less than fifty years ago, it was under 5 percent. Today it is over 40 percent. Our society—and particularly its poorest and most vulnerable sectors, where the out-of-wedlock birth rate is much higher even than the national average—is paying a huge price in delinquency, drug abuse, crime, incarceration, hopelessness, and despair. Other indicators are widespread non-marital sexual cohabitation and a devastatingly high rate of divorce.

We confess with sadness that Christians and our institutions have too often scandalously failed to uphold the institution of marriage and to model for the world the true meaning of marriage. Insofar as we have too easily embraced the culture of divorce and remained silent about social practices that undermine the dignity of marriage we repent, and call upon all Christians to do the same.

To strengthen families, we must stop glamorizing promiscuity and infidelity and restore among our people a sense of the profound beauty, mystery, and holiness of faithful marital love. We must reform ill-advised policies that contribute to the weakening of the institution of marriage, including the discredited idea of unilateral divorce. We must work in the legal, cultural, and religious domains to instill in young people a sound understanding of what marriage is, what it requires, and why it is worth the commitment and sacrifices that faithful spouses make.

The impulse to redefine marriage in order to recognize same-sex and multiple partner relationships is a symptom, rather than the cause, of the erosion of the marriage culture. It reflects a loss of understanding of the meaning of marriage as embodied in our civil and religious law and in the philosophical tradition that contributed to shaping the law. Yet it is critical that the impulse be resisted, for yielding to it would mean abandoning the possibility of restoring a sound

understanding of marriage and, with it, the hope of rebuilding a healthy marriage culture. It would lock into place the false and destructive belief that marriage is all about romance and other adult satisfactions, and not, in any intrinsic way, about procreation and the unique character and value of acts and relationships whose meaning is shaped by their aptness for the generation, promotion and protection of life. In spousal communion and the rearing of children (who, as gifts of God, are the fruit of their parents' marital love), we discover the profound reasons for and benefits of the marriage covenant.

We acknowledge that there are those who are disposed towards homosexual and polyamorous conduct and relationships, just as there are those who are disposed towards other forms of immoral conduct. We have compassion for those so disposed; we respect them as human beings possessing profound, inherent, and equal dignity; and we pay tribute to the men and women who strive, often with little assistance, to resist the temptation to yield to desires that they, no less than we, regard as wayward. We stand with them, even when they falter. We, no less than they, are sinners who have fallen short of God's intention for our lives. We, no less than they, are in constant need of God's patience, love and forgiveness. We call on the entire Christian community to resist sexual immorality, and at the same time refrain from disdainful condemnation of those who yield to it. Our rejection of sin, though resolute, must never become the rejection of sinners. For every sinner, regardless of the sin, is loved by God, who seeks not our destruction but rather the conversion of our hearts. Jesus calls all who wander from the path of virtue to "a more excellent way." As his disciples we will reach out in love to assist all who hear the call and wish to answer it.

We further acknowledge that there are sincere people who disagree with us, and with the teaching of the Bible and Christian tradition, on questions of sexual morality and the nature of marriage. Some who enter into same-sex and polyamorous relationships no doubt regard their unions as truly marital. They fail to understand, however, that marriage is made possible by the sexual complementarity of man and woman, and that the comprehensive, multi-level sharing of life that marriage includes bodily unity of the sort that unites husband and wife biologically as a reproductive unit. This is because the body is no mere extrinsic instrument of the human person, but truly part of the personal reality of the human being. Human beings are not merely centers of consciousness or emotion, or minds, or spirits, inhabiting non-personal bodies. The human person is a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit. Marriage is what one man and one woman establish when, forsaking all others and pledging lifelong commitment, they found a sharing of life at every level of being—the biological, the emotional, the dispositional, the rational, the spiritual— on a commitment that is sealed, completed and actualized by loving sexual intercourse in which the spouses become one flesh, not in some merely metaphorical sense, but by fulfilling together the behavioral conditions of procreation. That is why in the Christian tradition, and historically in Western law, consummated marriages are not dissoluble or annulable on the ground of infertility, even though the nature of the marital relationship is shaped and structured by its intrinsic orientation to the great good of procreation.

We understand that many of our fellow citizens, including some Christians, believe that the historic definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman is a denial of equality or civil rights. They wonder what to say in reply to the argument that asserts that no harm would be done to them or to anyone if the law of the community were to confer upon two men or two women who are living together in a sexual partnership the status of being "married." It would not, after all, affect their own marriages, would it? On inspection, however, the argument that laws governing one kind of marriage will not affect another cannot stand. Were it to prove anything, it would prove far too much: the assumption that the legal status of one set of marriage relationships affects no other would not only argue for same sex partnerships; it could be asserted with equal validity for polyamorous partnerships, polygamous households, even adult brothers, sisters, or brothers and sisters living in incestuous relationships. Should these, as a matter of equality or civil rights, be recognized as lawful marriages, and would they have no effects on other relationships? No. The truth is that marriage is not something abstract or neutral that the law may legitimately define and re-define to please those who are powerful and influential.

No one has a civil right to have a non-marital relationship treated as a marriage. Marriage is an objective reality—a covenantal union of husband and wife—that it is the duty of the law to recognize and support for the sake of justice and the common good. If it fails to do so, genuine social harms follow. First, the religious liberty of those for whom this is a matter of conscience is jeopardized. Second, the rights of parents are abused as family life and sex education programs in schools are used to teach children that an enlightened understanding recognizes as "marriages" sexual partnerships that many parents believe are intrinsically non-marital and immoral. Third, the common good of civil society is damaged when the law itself, in its critical pedagogical function, becomes a tool for eroding a sound understanding of marriage on which the flourishing of the marriage culture in any society vitally depends. Sadly, we are today far from having a thriving marriage culture. But if we are to begin the critically important process of reforming our laws and mores to rebuild such a culture, the last thing we can afford to do is to re-define marriage in such a way as to embody in our laws a false proclamation about what marriage is.

And so it is out of love (not “animus”) and prudent concern for the common good (not “prejudice”), that we pledge to labor ceaselessly to preserve the legal definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman and to rebuild the marriage culture. How could we, as Christians, do otherwise? The Bible teaches us that marriage is a central part of God’s creation covenant. Indeed, the union of husband and wife mirrors the bond between Christ and his church. And so just as Christ was willing, out of love, to give Himself up for the church in a complete sacrifice, we are willing, lovingly, to make whatever sacrifices are required of us for the sake of the inestimable treasure that is marriage.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

+ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. Isaiah 61:1

+ Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. Matthew 22:21

The struggle for religious liberty across the centuries has been long and arduous, but it is not a novel idea or recent development. The nature of religious liberty is grounded in the character of God Himself, the God who is most fully known in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Determined to follow Jesus faithfully in life and death, the early Christians appealed to the manner in which the Incarnation had taken place: "Did God send Christ, as some suppose, as a tyrant brandishing fear and terror? Not so, but in gentleness and meekness..., for compulsion is no attribute of God" (Epistle to Diognetus 7.3-4). Thus the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the example of Christ Himself and in the very dignity of the human person created in the image of God—a dignity, as our founders proclaimed, inherent in every human, and knowable by all in the exercise of right reason.

Christians confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience. Immunity from religious coercion is the cornerstone of an unconstrained conscience. No one should be compelled to embrace any religion against his will, nor should persons of faith be forbidden to worship God according to the dictates of conscience or to express freely and publicly their deeply held religious convictions. What is true for individuals applies to religious communities as well.

It is ironic that those who today assert a right to kill the unborn, aged and disabled and also a right to engage in immoral sexual practices, and even a right to have relationships integrated around these practices be recognized and blessed by law—such persons claiming these "rights" are very often in the vanguard of those who would trample upon the freedom of others to express their religious and moral commitments to the sanctity of life and to the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife.

We see this, for example, in the effort to weaken or eliminate conscience clauses, and therefore to compel pro-life institutions (including religiously affiliated hospitals and clinics), and pro-life physicians, surgeons, nurses, and other health care professionals, to refer for abortions and, in certain cases, even to perform or participate in abortions. We see it in the use of anti-discrimination statutes to force religious institutions, businesses, and service providers of various sorts to comply with activities they judge to be deeply immoral or go out of business. After the judicial imposition of "same-sex marriage" in Massachusetts, for example, Catholic Charities chose with great reluctance to end its century-long work of helping to place orphaned children in good homes rather than comply with a legal mandate that it place children in same-sex households in violation of Catholic moral teaching. In New Jersey, after the establishment of a quasi-marital "civil unions" scheme, a Methodist institution was stripped of its tax exempt status when it declined, as a matter of religious conscience, to permit a facility it owned and operated to be used for ceremonies blessing homosexual unions. In Canada and some European nations, Christian clergy have been prosecuted for preaching Biblical norms against the practice of homosexuality. New hate-crime laws in America raise the specter of the same practice here.

In recent decades a growing body of case law has paralleled the decline in respect for religious values in the media, the academy and political leadership, resulting in restrictions on the free exercise of religion. We view this as an ominous development, not only because of its threat to the individual liberty guaranteed to every person, regardless of his or her faith, but because the trend also threatens the common welfare and the culture of freedom on which our system of republican government is founded. Restrictions on the freedom of conscience or the ability to hire people of one's own faith or conscientious moral convictions for religious institutions, for example, undermines the viability of the intermediate structures of society, the essential buffer against the overweening authority of the state, resulting in the soft despotism Tocqueville so prophetically warned of. Disintegration of civil society is a prelude to tyranny.

As Christians, we take seriously the Biblical admonition to respect and obey those in authority. We believe in law and in the rule of law. We recognize the duty to comply with laws whether we happen to like them or not, unless the laws are

gravely unjust or require those subject to them to do something unjust or otherwise immoral. The biblical purpose of law is to preserve order and serve justice and the common good; yet laws that are unjust—and especially laws that purport to compel citizens to do what is unjust—undermine the common good, rather than serve it.

Going back to the earliest days of the church, Christians have refused to compromise their proclamation of the gospel. In Acts 4, Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching. Their answer was, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes required. There is no more eloquent defense of the rights and duties of religious conscience than the one offered by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Writing from an explicitly Christian perspective, and citing Christian writers such as Augustine and Aquinas, King taught that just laws elevate and ennoble human beings because they are rooted in the moral law whose ultimate source is God Himself. Unjust laws degrade human beings. Inasmuch as they can claim no authority beyond sheer human will, they lack any power to bind in conscience. King's willingness to go to jail, rather than comply with legal injustice, was exemplary and inspiring.

Because we honor justice and the common good, we will not comply with any edict that purports to compel our institutions to participate in abortions, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide and euthanasia, or any other anti-life act; nor will we bend to any rule purporting to force us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality and immorality and marriage and the family. We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God's.

Is this a declaration with which you agree, and that you would like to support with your signature? If so, please "sign" the Declaration. By doing so, you'll be joining the hundreds of thousands of others who believe as you do about taking a stand for their faith.

DRAFTING COMMITTEE

- + Robert George, Professor, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University
- + Timothy George, Professor, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University
- + Chuck Colson, Founder, the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview (Lansdowne, VA)

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In response to the rhetorical question, "Why should I sign the Manhattan Declaration?" – one person responded:

- + Because it is Important for the Church. The central concerns of the Manhattan Declaration – Life, Marriage and Liberty – have been treasured and defended by biblically guided churches throughout history and across traditions. The Manhattan Declaration courageously addresses these vital issues of our day with principles that are consistent with the best values of the historic church. Also, it helps today's church speak with a new tone of respectful compassion in the national discourse.
- + Because it is Important for the Nation. The Manhattan Declaration is a statement of principles, not a political action plan. The Declaration's aim is to alert secular leaders and other influences of our culture that Christians of many different traditions are already united in fundamental convictions regarding biblical morality and conscience. We are deeply concerned about legislative and judicial actions that: deny value to the innocent, weak and aged; dismantle historic protections and definitions for families, children and marriage; and, impose legal strictures contrary to the constitutional freedoms long provided for people and institutions of faith in America. The Declaration reminds the nation as well as the church that the Christian conscience is bound to Christ. We cannot love him or our nation well if we refuse to address challenges to morality and liberty that we believe will unravel the social fabric that protects all her citizens.

Excerpted and edited from "Why I Signed the Manhattan Declaration"

Bryan Chapell, President, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

Of Interest

"Plan B at a Glance" [we in Concerned Methodists prefer this to the proposed legislation from the Connectional Table.] This alternative is being developed through participation from persons of numerous annual conferences, jurisdictions and around the church. The basic elements are representative governance, protection of The UMC balance of powers structure, shared responsibility on a global basis, and supporting the local church and connectional opportunities to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The research done under contract with the CTA Steering Team indicated that lay leadership in our denomination should be encouraged. In reality, the IOT/CT structure takes away the possibility of enhanced lay leadership (and the leadership of pastors as well). Persons with expertise (both laity and clergy) in all areas of the church's mission and ministry are present in our churches.

Participation by representatives of local churches is critical to ownership in decisions made and in ministries offered.

– Information found at website: <http://umcplanb.org/?p=391>

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Compare proposed legislation from the Connectional Table and UMC Plan B.

Connectional Table Legislation

* Eliminates General Council on Finance and Administration, General Board of Discipleship, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Communications and General Board of Church and Society

* Places all agencies except Pensions and Publishing under a 15-member board

* The Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry, with a 15-member board, controls current agency functions through Office of Shared Services, Office of Congregational Development, Office of Leadership Excellence, Office of Missional Engagement and Office of Justice and Reconciliation.

* Transfers General Conference directed agency mandates and all authority to determine agency activities to the 15-member board

Connectional Table Legislation - CCMM

* 15-member board not selected by jurisdictional and central conferences

* No inclusiveness requirements

Connectional Table Legislation - GCSO

* General Council chaired by set-aside bishop, appointed by Council of Bishops.

* 28 members selected by jurisdictions and central conferences.

* 5 bishops selected by Council of Bishops (including set-aside bishop)

* 5 members selected from Racial ethnic caucuses

* 3 members are selected from Advisory Committee on Ministries with Young People

* 4 members with voice only are selected from General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, United Methodist Publishing House, United Methodist Men and United Methodist Women.

* **45 Total Members**

Connectional Table Legislation

* 15-member board of the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry has budget and governance authority.

* The historical balance of power would be lost through the provisions that place direct and indirect approval authority in the Council of Bishops for budget reallocation.

Connectional Table Legislation

* Places all assets of agencies under the control of 15 people.

* Is subject to common liability risks.

UMC Plan B

* Retain General Council on Finance and Administration, General Board of Discipleship, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, General Board of Global Ministries and General Board of Church and Society with direct reporting relationship to General Conference and oversight and evaluation by the Connectional Table.

* General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, United Methodist Publishing House, United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men report to General Conference.

* General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns and Committee of Faith and Order come under the Council of Bishops.

General Commission on Religion and Race and General Commission on the Status and Role of Women become offices of General Board of Church and Society.

* General Commission on Archives and History becomes an office of General Council on Finance and Administration.

- * United Methodist Communications has direct oversight in the Connectional Table.
- * Shared services may include accounting and reporting, legal, travel, human resources, investing, insurance, real-estate management, IT and database management.

UMC Plan B - Provisions

- * No additional layer of bureaucracy

UMC Plan B - Structure

- * Connectional Table chair elected by members.
- * 23 members selected by jurisdictions and central conferences.
- * 1 Bishop selected by the Council of Bishops plus 5 agency presidents (usually bishops).
- * 30 percent inclusiveness requirement, as outlined in the Book of Discipline, is maintained.
- * 10 percent youth requirement, as outlined in the Book of Discipline, is maintained.
- * Central conference representation proportionally based on membership
- * 4 non-voting associated voices
- * **33 Total Members**

UMC Plan B - Best Financial Practices

- * Joint responsibilities with General Council on Finance and Administration to set budgets and apportionments.
- * Professional management oversight to be managed by Connectional Table Chief Coordinating Officer.
- * Maintain coordination and evaluation of agencies and allocation of contingency funds.

UMC Plan B - Risk Management

- * Keeps assets in separate entities, trusts and designated funds.
- * Reduces risks of church-wide liability.
 - As previously stated, we unhesitatingly support the Plan B over the original report coming from the Connectional Table

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ Texas Jumps on the Planned Parenthood Banned Wagon

Texas is going ahead with its secession plan--from Planned Parenthood. Late last year, the state quit its partnership with the abortion tycoons, dropping Planned Parenthood from its lucrative contract under Texas's Women's Health Program. Attorney General Greg Abbott and state legislators were adamant that health providers who offered abortions had no business participating in the program. With \$16 million up for grabs, leaders passed an outright ban on Planned Parenthood, ending its eligibility for the state's Medicaid funding. That didn't sit well with the Obama administration, which swooped into Texas and demanded the state reconsider. When it wouldn't, officials with Health and Human Services (HHS) threatened to cut off federal Medicaid funding completely. But Texas didn't blink. Last Thursday, state Commissioner Tom Sueds signed the rule into law--calling HHS's bluff and putting Planned Parenthood clinics on the road to extinction in the Lone Star State. "Under federal law, states administer Medicaid and have the right to set the criteria for providers in the program. That is what Texas is doing," said spokeswoman Stephanie Goodman. "We have a state law that [Attorney General Abbott] says is constitutional, and it clearly bans abortion providers from taking part in the Women's Health Program. We can't violate a perfectly valid state law just to appease Washington."

Already, the policy is having a domino effect on the state's network of Planned Parenthood offices. So far, 12 clinics have closed and others--like this Odessa branch--waited for Thursday's decision before choosing to shut its doors for good. Could the evidence be any clearer? Despite what Planned Parenthood says about segregated funds and the prohibitions on financing abortions, our tax dollars are what keeps these clinics afloat. Without them, Planned Parenthood withers on the vine. That's why it's so important to reevaluate our priorities as a society and invest in health providers that don't engage in abortion--or fraud, for that matter. Apparently, the same network of clinics that Texas defunded is being sued by a former employee for a massive government billing scam. According to the suit, Planned Parenthood has swindled money out of the federal government for years for services it never provided. Karen Reynolds, the whistleblower, claims this--along with falsifying patient records--was standard practice in all 12 Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast locations across Texas and Louisiana. Who can blame Texas for wanting to be rid of a potentially criminal contractor?

HHS is trying to paint Texas's decision as extremist, but I think it's clear who the real extremists are. After all, the Obama administration would rather deny health care to poor women than hurt its relationship with an organization that

could be extorting it!

– Received by e-mail; Family Research Council Action; February 27, 2012.

(UM) Bishops

+ *Fifty-five Bishops Endorse UM Global AIDS Fund*

Fifty-five UM Bishops have endorsed the 20/20: Visioning an AIDS-Free World initiative by lending their personal and financial support. This effort by the UM Global AIDS Fund Committee seeks to mobilize the denomination to raise \$5 million for HIV and AIDS education, prevention, care, and treatment around the world. [Note: This reflects how your apportionment dollars are being used. One can only wonder how much of their own money they are donating to this worthwhile cause. – AOM] – UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, January 25, 2012

(UM) General Board of Global Ministries. *Delegation to China*

Because of the major denominational meetings and episcopal elections scheduled in 2012, the Council of Bishops has decided to postpone a planned Feb. 24–Mar. 4 delegation to China. Instead, an advance team from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) will make the trip to meet with officials of the China Christian Council, Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Amity Foundation in preparation for a future delegation visit in 2013. [Note: This is of questionable value. The “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” is known as a front for the Chinese government and used as an “official church-approved agency. Since the Chinese government adheres to atheistic communism, this provides a “higher authority” to any church subscribing to Christian beliefs. It would thus neutralize any effective valid Christian message bringing others to a life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ. – AOM]

– As reported in UMNewScope, January 11, 2012

(UM) General Conference 2012. COMMENTARY: General Conference again unfair in delegate allotment

By Robert Sparkman, March 19, 2012

At the 1996 General Conference, our church became aware of a problem with the selection of delegates. People realized that areas of our church which had grown (or maintained membership) were acutely under-represented. For example, a delegate from the Western Jurisdiction represented 5,000 members, a delegate from the South Central Jurisdiction represented 10,000 members and a delegate from the Southeastern Jurisdiction represented 13,000 church members. The growing central conferences of Africa were especially unfairly hit by the delegation selection formula.

At the 2000 General Conference, the church decided that proportional representation was the standard. This meant that the number of delegates to General Conference from each area should be proportional to the number of church members and ministers. This was simple and fair.

In 2004, boards, agencies and commissions were also made proportional in representation for U.S. Jurisdictions. In 2008, fair representation was affirmed and the language was editorially “cleaned up” for all relevant Book of Discipline paragraphs.

These three General Conferences affirmed this principle: representation should be proportional to the number of members and ministers within each area. The movement began to be called “fair representation” since the principle of proportionality was deemed to be “fair.” The reason for this change was not simply to avoid sectional resentment. The reason was not solely to maintain a strong connection by ensuring that each area would feel that decisions were legitimate. It was not simply to avoid disenfranchising people in the growing areas.

The primary reason was vision.

We needed to represent more fairly and strongly the vision of the growing and vital areas of the church. Each General Conference of the last three has affirmed that we need to hear the voices of Africa and the growing conferences of the United States. Delegates in 2004 and 2008 seemed excited to be listening to these areas for a vision of growth, vitality, hope and effective ministry.

But in the last few years the whole system has become unbalanced once more. Areas which have grown are again under-represented. Some of the growing conferences have had their delegations reduced. Whenever an area is under-represented it threatens the legitimacy and support of the connection.

One solution to the new imbalance could be to re-examine our policy on provisional and very small annual conferences. By Book of Discipline definition a provisional annual conference “is a conference that because of its limited membership, does not qualify for annual conference status.” It can be set up with a minimum of 10 clergy members and with no

minimum number of church members. Each of these provisional conferences automatically receives two delegates to General Conference! These provisional conferences sometimes become very small annual conferences— which have fewer members than many local churches in other areas.

One provisional conference has 933 members, another 343, another 330! Twenty-nine provisional and annual conferences have fewer than 5,000 members. These are really the size of local churches and districts, and bishops have between 4 and 10 of these provisional and small annual conferences. They are tremendously over-represented. Europe and the Philippines have 1.7 percent of the membership but 9.2 percent of delegates because of the automatic two delegates per provisional and annual conference.

Whenever one area is overrepresented, another is underrepresented. It hurts another part of the church and this unfairness diminishes the whole body. Delegates and board members should flow quickly to the areas of forward-looking vision for the church. The two delegate minimum should be applied to episcopal areas and missionary conferences, and not to the provisional and tiny annual conferences. (There are provisional conferences which receive two delegates based on membership, and they would not be affected by any changes.)

To restore fairness in representation, legislation has been proposed which would apportion an automatic allotment of two delegates to the episcopal areas and missionary conferences. The provisional and very small annual conferences would not have an automatic two delegates, but would be represented through the episcopal area. If this proposal passes, many delegates to general conference would be re-allocated, some to growing areas. The provisional and small annual conferences of the Philippines and Europe would be represented by their episcopal areas and they would continue to be somewhat over-represented. When any of these provisional or small annual conferences received enough members, then they would receive two delegates.

The changes in the Discipline would be relatively simple, except one constitutional amendment would have to be passed. When one provisional conference with 367 members has two delegates to general conference, another conference is unfairly under-represented. Someone is disenfranchised who has worked hard and found a way to bring new people to faith and the church. To be fair to the whole church, provisional and small annual conferences should be represented by their episcopal areas until they are large enough to receive delegates based on membership.

Regional resentment, or the desire for more votes, are not the reasons for this change. The reason for change is to refine the vision of the church—a vision for revitalization. We must hear clearly the voices of hope and the future.

– E-mail received from one of our research associates. The Rev. Sparkman is pastor of First UMC in Hartselle, Ala., and a North Alabama Conference delegate to the 2012 General Conference.

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If the Arabs put down their weapons today, there would be no more violence.

If the Jews put down their weapons today, there would be no more Israel.

– Benjamin Netanyahu