

Monthly Update

February 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the "Monthly Update" continues with information on some of the past actions that a lack of space precluded our printing until now. Since this is "sanctity of human life month" we are presenting information from various aspects of the "life" issues that are foundational to our country. You will recognize one of the names included in two of the inspirational articles.

With the 2012 General Conference looming in the near future, information of interest is included, a cogent perspective is offered by Joe M. Whittemore from the North Georgia Conference. He is highly respected by those who value orthodox Christian values and the heritage of the United Methodist Church.

We believe that you will find them informative and helpful in knowing the myriad of things happening in our United Methodist Church.

I thank the Lord for the opportunities that He presents us! Those of us in Concerned Methodists strive to be obedient to what the Lord has called us to do. We try to do as much as we can as efficiently as possible. We also thank the Lord that the work that needs to be done is too great for the human effort; this forces us to our needs to seek His guidance as to his priorities.

Prayer is so important to all that we do. This is perhaps the most powerful force at our disposal. When we realize that if we have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we have the right to approach God in His name and to give him our requests. As one who studied Physics in college, I appreciate the size of the universe. Well, the God whom we can address is the One who create the universe – and anything that is beyond it. This idea is so gratifying yet at the same time so humbling. We don't understand how prayer works; we just approach it in faith with the confidence it will be answered. This was brought home to me in a dramatic way when over twenty years ago, I was faced with a family member who was in a life and death struggle over illegal drugs. Out of "desperation" I prayed for him on a daily basis, both morning and night. These prayers were answered; from the time I started praying for him, he never "did" the drugs again. And I am talking about heroin and cocaine. God is so good.

Speaking of prayers, we appreciate so much the support you provide – both prayerfully and financially. Please continue to partner with us as we "contend for the faith" that the Lord has entrusted to our care.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

February 2012 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

*We would worry less about what others thought of us
if we realized how seldom they do.*

* * * * *

The Good Stuff

+ Pam's Story

In a recent email, I read about a woman named Pam, who knows the pain of considering abortion. More than 24 years ago, she and her husband Bob were serving as missionaries to the Philippines and praying for a fifth child. Pam contracted amoebic dysentery, an infection of the intestine caused by a parasite found in contaminated food or drink. She went into a coma and was treated with strong antibiotics before they discovered she was pregnant.

Doctors urged her to abort the baby for her own safety and told her that the medicines had caused irreversible damage to her baby. She refused the abortion and cited her Christian faith as the reason for her hope that her son would be born without the devastating disabilities physicians predicted. Pam said the doctors didn't think of it as a life, they thought of it as a mass of fetal tissue.

While pregnant, Pam nearly lost their baby four times but refused to consider abortion. She recalled making a pledge to God with her husband: If you will give us a son, we'll name him Timothy and we'll make him a preacher.

Pam ultimately spent the last two months of her pregnancy in bed and eventually gave birth to a healthy baby boy August 14, 1987. Pam's youngest son is indeed a preacher. He preaches in prisons, makes hospital visits, and serves with his father's ministry in the Philippines. He also plays football. Pam's son is Tim Tebow.

The University of Florida's star quarterback became the first sophomore in history to win college football's highest award, the Heisman Trophy. His current role as quarterback of the Denver Broncos has provided an incredible platform for Christian witness. As a result, he is being called The Mile-High Messiah.

Tim's notoriety and the family's inspiring story have given Pam numerous opportunities to speak on behalf of women's centers across the country. Pam Tebow believes that every little baby you save matters.

"I pray her tribe will increase! May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always!"

– Received by e-mail from an associate of Concerned Methodists.

+ Who among us is this selfless?

Every week, Tebow picks out someone who is suffering, or who is dying, or who is injured. He flies these people and their families to the Broncos game, rents them a car, puts them up in a nice hotel, buys them dinner (usually at a Dave & Buster's), gets them and their families pre-game passes, visits with them just before kickoff (!), gets them 30-yard-line tickets down low, visits with them after the game (sometimes for an hour), and sends them off with a basket of gifts.

Home or road, win or lose, hero or goat. Remember one week, when the world was pulling its hair out in the hour after Tebow had stunned the Pittsburgh Steelers with an 80-yard overtime touchdown pass to Demaryius Thomas in the playoffs? And Twitter was exploding with 9,420 tweets about Tebow per second? When an ESPN poll was naming him the most popular athlete in America? Tebow was spending that hour talking to 16-year-old Bailey Knaub about her 73 surgeries so far and what TV shows she likes.

"Here he'd just played the game of his life," recalls Bailey's mother, Kathy, of Loveland, Colo., "and the first thing he does after his press conference is come find Bailey and ask, 'Did you get anything to eat?' He acted like what he'd just done wasn't anything, like it was all about Bailey. "More than that, Tebow kept corralling people into the room for Bailey to meet. Hey, Demaryius, come in here a minute. Hey, Mr. Elway. Hey, Coach Fox. Even though sometimes-fatal Wegener's granulomatosis has left Bailey with only one lung, the attention took her breath away.

"It was the best day of my life," she emailed. "It was a bright star among very gloomy and difficult days. Tim Tebow gave me the greatest gift I could ever imagine. He gave me the strength for the future. I know now that I can face any obstacle placed in front of me. Tim taught me to never give up because at the end of the day, today might seem bleak but it can't rain forever and tomorrow is a new day, with new promises."

Reading the email she sent to Tebow, he was honestly floored. "Why me? Why should I inspire her?" he said. "I just don't feel, I don't know, adequate. Really, hearing her story inspires me."

It's not just NFL defenses that get Tebowed. It's high school girls who don't know whether they'll ever go to a prom.

It's adults who can hardly stand. It's kids who will die soon.

For the game at Buffalo, it was Charlottesville, Va., blue-chip high school QB Jacob Rainey, who lost his leg after a freak tackle in a scrimmage. Tebow threw three interceptions in that Buffalo game and the Broncos were crushed 40-14. "He walked in and took a big sigh and said, 'Well, that didn't go as planned,'" Rainey remembers. "Where I'm from, people wonder how sincere and genuine he is. But I think he's the most genuine person I've ever met." There's not an ounce of artifice or phoniness or Hollywood in this kid Tebow, and I've looked everywhere for it.

Take 9-year-old Zac Taylor, a child who lives in constant pain. Immediately after Tebow shocked the Chicago Bears with a 13-10 comeback win, Tebow spent an hour with Zac and his family. At one point, Zac, who has 10 doctors, asked Tebow whether he has a secret prayer for hospital visits. Tebow whispered it in his ear. And because Tebow still needed to be checked out by the Broncos' team doctor, he took Zac in with him, but only after they had whispered it together.

And it's not always kids. Tom Driscoll, a 55-year-old who is dying of brain cancer at a hospice in Denver, was Tebow's guest for the Cincinnati game. "The doctors took some of my brain," Driscoll says, "so my short-term memory is kind of shot. But that day I'll never forget. Tim is such a good man."

This whole thing makes no football sense, of course. Most NFL players hardly talk to teammates before a game, much less visit with the sick and dying.

Isn't that a huge distraction? "Just the opposite," Tebow says. "It's by far the best thing I do to get myself ready. Here you are, about to play a game that the world says is the most important thing in the world. Win and they praise you. Lose and they crush you. And here I have a chance to talk to the coolest, most courageous people. It puts it all into perspective. The game doesn't really matter. I mean, I'll give 100 percent of my heart to win it, but in the end, the thing I most want to do is not win championships or make a lot of money, it's to invest in people's lives, to make a difference."

The QB who lost his leg, Jacob Rainey? He got his prosthetic leg and wants to play high school football. Tackle football. "Tim told me to keep fighting, no matter what," Rainey says. "I am."

– Received by e-mail from an associate of Concerned Methodists.

Of Interest

+ *Should we turn control of UMC over to the Council of Bishops?*

[The following commentary is by Joe M. Whittemore, a member of the United Methodist Church's Connectional Table.]

Mr. Whittemore, a delegate to the 2012 UM General Conference, has chaired Committee on Episcopacy for the Southeastern Jurisdiction and has served as the Lay Leader of North Georgia Annual Conference.

The United Methodist Church has never been willing to give the Council of Bishops authority to run the church. The job of the Council is to support the Book of Discipline and to carry out the polity and mandates established by the General Conference. And yet the Connectional Table/Interim Operations Team legislation scheduled to be brought before the 2012 General Conference in April amounts to turning the general church over to the bishops. This is exactly the opposite of what needs to be done. Our episcopal leaders should be devoted almost exclusively to their respective annual conferences.

A bad idea resurfaces

Several years ago, the Council of Bishops (COB) proposed that one bishop not be assigned to an episcopal area, but rather be set aside to handle the affairs of the Council, including the evaluation and accountability of individual bishops. The idea did not gain traction before or during the 2008 General Conference. Now, a similar idea has come forward. Affirmation #2 of the Aug. 2, 2011, Interim Operations Team report called for the adoption of performance standards for bishops. Jurisdictional committees on episcopacy would implement annual assessments.

To support this request, the report then called for a bishop without residential assignment to guide the UMC, support and assist residential bishops, and chair the body that could hire and fire a new 15-member board of directors for the church that would control the vast majority of all net assets other than pension funds.

This idea runs counter to the UMC's long-standing unwillingness to "turn things over to the bishops."

Our UM culture is well acknowledged in the operational assessment project done by Apex, which states that "the church has the opportunity to strengthen its existing leadership structures without altering power or authority (emphasis added)... This strengthening could be achieved through renewal of purpose, goals and role clarity, better accountability, courageous leadership and better capabilities to support leadership."

Note that the Apex research called for strengthening "without altering power or authority." However, the final Interim

Operations Team recommendations place power in the hands of a 15-member group (the board of the Center for Connectional Missions and Ministry) subject to considerable influence by the set-side bishop and the Council of Bishops generally.

Further, the Interim Operations Team has called for the Council of Bishops to institute and maintain an effective executive management operating function that strategically and practically aligns the resources of the general church.

In other words, let the COB take over and operate the church, agencies, budgets, everything!

A better approach

A lay executive of the Council of Bishops to facilitate the accountability of individual bishops may be to the benefit of the denomination. An experienced, strong executive who is not clergy may bring a fresh and reasonable approach.

Envision the changes we could quickly experience if that lay executive had the authority to recommend to the College of Bishops and the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy the removal (or placing on leave) of the ineffective or non-responsive episcopal leader as currently provided in paragraphs 16.5, 408.3 (PDF) and 410.1 (PDF) of the Book of Discipline. But to adopt the recommendations of the Interim Operations Team would interpret the Apex research to indicate that the Council of Bishops should have huge political, financial, and organizational power and authority. Such an approach would significantly alter our polity.

Many believe the Council of Bishops already does not function well. Why put more authority there?

With few exceptions our U.S. annual conferences are dying. Perhaps if our bishops were fully focused on their annual conferences, the likelihood of turnaround would be increased. Diluting each bishop's time with additional operational responsibilities for the entire church is folly.

Yes, we desperately require restructure and reorganization of our general church to focus on the development of vital congregations and leadership. The starting place is in devoting all our bishops to the ministry and mission of their own annual conferences, and evaluating in transparent ways the fruits of their ministries.

Let's "set aside" all our United Methodist bishops for their most important ministry, namely, leading their annual conferences and developing vital congregations.

– By Joe M. Whittemore, as it appears on the website MethodistThinker, January 19, 2012; MethodistThinker.com.

This opinion piece was originally published in a different form in the *United Methodist Reporter*.

+ IRD Challenges Religious Left over Support for Wall Street Occupation

"Religious activists who have aligned with the Wall Street Occupation should model mature Christian discernment, not echo angry resentments that dream of a secular utopia." – Mark Tooley, IRD President

Washington, DC—Religious Left voices have praised the far-left Wall Street occupiers whose demands range from cancellation of all debt, open borders, government control of health care, and free college education, among other expansions of Big Government.

Sojourners chief Jim Wallis has lavished praise during a visit to the occupiers, pacifist activist Shane Claiborne has compared them to St. Francis of Assisi, Massachusetts clergy joined them wearing saintly white robes, and officials of United Methodist Women flocked to the occupiers with their own similar placards urging class warfare.

IRD President Mark Tooley responded:

"The many college age Wall Street occupiers concerned about college debt and real world responsibilities can be possibly excused for youthful naiveté. But middle-aged church activists, some of whom may be trying to relive their street activism of 40 years ago, should show more discernment and wisdom.

"Covetous battle cries for class resentment and even greater coercive wealth redistribution through an ever expanding Big Government do not resemble traditional Christianity.

"Unlike the Religious Left voices who have hailed and even romanticized the Wall Street Occupation, wise religious leaders should call their flocks to the common good. They would know that in a fallen world, no government or system of laws can seize property or massively redistribute income without creating even greater injustice.

"The Scriptures call for believers to put away childish things. Religious activists who have aligned with the Wall Street Occupation should model mature Christian discernment, not echo angry resentments that dream of a secular utopia."

– Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), 1023 15th Street NW, Ste. 601, Washington, DC 20005-2601.

+ *Episcopal Property Ruling a Pyrrhic Victory*

Washington, DC—On January 10, Judge Randy Bellows of the Fairfax County Circuit Court ruled in favor of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia in a lawsuit against parishes that have departed the U.S.-based church. The court ordered that all property subject to its ruling be turned over to the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.

A majority of members in the seven Anglican churches in 2006-2007 voted to sever their ties to the Episcopal Church and the diocese following disputes over the redefinition and reinterpretation of Scripture. They included some of the diocese's largest and fastest growing churches.

The Episcopal Diocese of Virginia has drawn from a line of credit to fund litigation, expecting to sell some properties following a favorable court ruling. According to self-reported statistics, the diocese has lost 26 percent of its attendance in the past decade and has ceased planting new churches, despite significant population growth in Virginia.

The 1.9 million-member Episcopal Church is engaged in ongoing litigation against departing parishes and dioceses across the country. Denominational officials maintain that parishes are not free to depart the church and that internal church rules enacted in the 1970s mandate that all local property is held in trust for the diocese and denomination.

IRD Anglican Action Director Jeff Walton commented:

“Christians can legitimately differ in their conclusions about who lawfully should possess these properties. Over-zealous pursuit of litigation has come at too great a cost, however.

“Sadly, the declining Episcopal Church appears more interested in property than people, and more interested in the recovery of property than in reconciliation.

“The litigation process has been enormously costly to the resources of both sides and has damaged the Episcopal Church’s witness.

“The Episcopal Church should take a long look at its harsh, take-no-prisoners approach to dealing with church property – something that has quickly become one of its hallmarks. The denomination should have allowed the diocese to sit down at the table with the departing congregations and negotiate a fair settlement, as was initially proposed.”

– Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD)

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ *Roe v. Wade Anniversary*

Hundreds of thousands march, rally for life!

Today and over the past week, hundreds of thousands of Americans marched in support of our first right as human beings – the right to life. Marches and rallies for life in Washington, D.C., in state capitals, and in communities across the country commemorated the tremendous loss of innocent life brought about by the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalized abortion. One justice who voted against the ruling called it "an exercise of raw judicial power," in other words, a power grab by the Court.

But the great thing about living in a democracy is we don't have to lie down and accept unjust decisions. So over the years, tens of millions of Americans have risen up to object in our own way: We've marched, we've voted, we've encouraged our elected officials to protect life, and we've joined National Right to Life and built what has been called the greatest movement for human rights in the past century.

And we have made such a difference! Today there are 400,000 fewer abortions annually than there were 20 years ago. One analysis showed that if it weren't for the Right to Life movement, 9 million more unborn babies would have died in the United States alone. And we've saved millions more in other countries.

You can personally make a huge difference for a baby's life by joining this great movement.

The difference we've made for the babies' lives is because of millions of Americans like you.

Sincerely,
Carol Tobias,
President

– News release by the National Right to Life (NRL), www.nrlc.org, January 10, 2012; Jessica Rodgers, (202) 626-8825

+ *Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals allows Texas Sonogram Law to go into effect*

"Life offers no guarantees, but abortion offers no chances."

WASHINGTON – ...a three-judge panel of the Fifth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals lifted the preliminary injunction on the

Texas Sonogram Law on the grounds that the plaintiff did not have a likelihood of winning their argument. The Texas Sonogram Law, that was passed last year with the support of National Right to Life's affiliate, Texas Right to Life, ensures that abortionists display an ultrasound image of the unborn child for the mother to view before an abortion decision. Abortionists are further required to allow mothers to hear the child's heartbeat, and provide information about the development of the unborn baby.

"This breakthrough decision from the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recognizes, in the words of the Court, 'the physicians obligations to display the sonogram images' of the unborn child before an abortion," said Mary Spaulding Balch, J.D., director of state legislation for NRL. "In practice, an ultrasound law that does not require the ultrasound to be displayed can become almost meaningless because virtually every abortion facility will slip a waiver form into the stack of papers mothers are asked to sign."

In addition to Texas, both North Carolina and Oklahoma have also passed measures requiring an abortionist display an ultrasound image of the unborn child before an abortion. Both laws have been challenged.

Writing the decision for the court, Chief Judge Edith Jones clearly laid out the responsibility of the abortion provider:

"The woman seeking an abortion may elect not to receive these images, sounds, or explanations. This election does not obviate the physician's obligations to display the sonogram images or make audible the heart auscultation; the woman may simply choose not to look or listen."

Added Balch, "We commend the work of Texas Right to Life for their hard work in ensuring that the abortionist must display the ultrasound image of the unborn child for the mother. Today, their tireless efforts have paid off..."

– Jacki Ragan, Director, State Organizational Development Department, National Right to Life Committee, Inc.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society. Agency Applauds Deportation Policy Change

The General Board of Church and Society sent a statement to the White House applauding the Department of Homeland Security's decision to enable some undocumented immigrant children and spouses to reunite with their U.S.-citizen family members. Considering the "record numbers of deportations by the Obama administration," the agency said in a Jan. 11 statement, "we hope this change in policy will finally make it easier for thousands of American families with mixed immigration status to remain permanently together." – UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, January 25th.

(UM) General Conference 2012. Expectations Build for 2012 General Conference

Every four years UMs develop high expectations that delegates to the top legislative body of the denomination will set policies and approve resolutions to address specific challenges in the church and society. Those expectations are building as the 988 delegates and 4,000 volunteers and observers prepare for the 2012 General Conference, meeting April 24–May 4 in Tampa, Florida.

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, January 25th.

(UM) Judicial Council. Officiating at civil union

The 2011 clergy session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference adopted a resolution regarding a "suggested maximum penalty" for any clergy member charged, tried and convicted of officiating at a same-sex civil union ceremony.

The suggested penalty was "suspension of said convicted minister from the exercise of pastoral office for a period of 24 consecutive hours." The Book of Discipline states, "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."

In Decision 1201, the Judicial Council declared the resolution "null, void and of no effect." The Discipline makes clear, the decision said, "that only a trial court has the power to set a penalty in a church trial which results in a conviction." The trial court can consider "the full legislated range of options" when determining that penalty. Those options include revoking the minister's ordination, suspending the minister from exercising the functions of office or imposing a lesser penalty, according to the Discipline.

Any effort by an annual conference, "even by means of a suggestion," to modify or limit penalties intrudes upon the authority of the Discipline and alters legislative action by General Conference, the court said. In a concurring opinion, Judicial Council member Jon R. Gray noted that the Northern Illinois resolution "and others of similar ilk are worthy of Macbeth's commentary: full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." For an annual conference to offer an opinion about a standard or customary penalty or suggest a maximum penalty related to a church trial "is wholly inappropriate," he wrote.

– By Linda Bloom, New York (UMNS), November 2011.

(UM) Women/Women's Issues

+ Deaconess Appointed to Homosexual Advocacy Group

The Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner is now under the full direction of the Women's Division, as a result of the Division's reorganization with the General Board of Global Ministries. Deaconesses (laywomen) and home missionaries (laymen) are commissioned by the UMC for a life-time relationship to full-time ministries. The program is financed through UMW giving.

Deaconesses have been serving the Methodist church since 1888 and reflect a rich and vital ministry to the denomination. In 2009, Rachel Harvey was appointed by the Northern Illinois Annual Conference as Associate Executive Director of the Reconciling Ministries Network, an advocacy group that "mobilizes United Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities to transform the church and world into the full expression of Christ's inclusive love". Harvey was commissioned at the 2010 UMW Assembly in St. Louis. On the UMW website, the announcement of Harvey's appointment is posted under the title "Radical Welcome". See the article [HERE](#).

Reconciling Ministry Network is gearing up for 2012 General Conference by partnering with a national campaign called "Believe Out Loud" to increase their voice and visibility within the UMC. The organization has continued to keep their agenda front and center by trying to alter the UMC's long-held stance on homosexual practice being incompatible with Christian teaching. Many churches advertise themselves as "Reconciling Congregations" although this designation is in clear violation of the Discipline of the UMC and has been affirmed by the Judicial Council.

Commissioning a deaconess to this position clearly shows the Women's Division's support of the radical agenda of the Reconciling Ministry Network. It will be interesting to see how the deaconess program progresses under the sole authority of the Division.

– March 2011 Renew Newsletter, The RENEW Network, P.O.Box 16055, Augusta, GA 30919. www.renewnetwork.org

+ UMW Delegation at United Nations

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), an annual gathering of thousands of feminists advocacy groups and NGOs was held at the United Nations this month. Many of the side events and meetings take place at the Church Center for the United Nations, a large building that sits right across the street from the UN.

Although the theme of this year's meeting was the promotion of education, science, and technology to help uplift women and girls around the world, there managed to be the usual promotion of "comprehensive sex education" and "sexual and reproductive rights" (i.e. access to abortion, contraceptives, and sex education for adolescents). The Women's Division aligns itself with many of the radical causes and groups that attempt to interject this agenda into UN documents and treaties, resulting in societal and cultural impacts that have actually proven detrimental to the betterment of women and children.

One big difference this year was the influence of a strong pro-family coalition team put together by Family Watch International. This delegation had some major victories in stopping many of the radical initiatives being promoted.

– March 2011 Renew Newsletter, The RENEW Network, P.O.Box 16055, Augusta, GA 30919. www.renewnetwork.org

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You don't get much done by starting tomorrow.

Global Outlook

Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

– Matthew 7:12

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+ Uganda. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is not Christian

Washington, DC—Guerilla fighters accused of atrocities in northern Uganda and South Sudan are not a legitimate Christian group, according to an official with the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD). The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operates in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and the Central African Republic. Raids by the group on remote locations forcibly take food, money, or people who are subsequently enslaved.

Faith J.H. McDonnell is co-author with Grace Akallo of "Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children," which tells the true story of child abduction and forced conscription into the LRA. Churches and aid organizations have worked to alleviate suffering caused by LRA attacks on villages. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has essentially named the LRA's detainment of children as trafficking.

IRD Religious Liberty Program Director Faith J.H. McDonnell commented:

"The LRA has been a destabilizing influence across a swath of central Africa for years, leaving abduction, rape, maiming, and murder of civilians, including children, in their bloody wake. Whatever political goals they may have originally espoused, they now exist to perpetuate their own power.

"Christians and people of good will across the political spectrum have labored for years to heal central Africa from the damage

inflicted by the LRA. Recent statements that this is a Christian group are woefully misinformed.

"The LRA rebels are notorious for kidnapping children and forcing them to become rebel fighters or concubines. Their legacy has been over a half-million people in Uganda displaced by the fighting and living in temporary camps."

– By Faith J.H. McDonnell, IRD, 1023 15th Street NW, Ste. 601, Washington, DC 20005-2601.

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Character, like the oak tree, does not spring up like a mushroom.