

Monthly Update

January 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I thank you for your response to our appeal for support, both financially and prayerfully. Your participation in the ministry of Concerned Methodists is affirmation to us of the part we are having in the renewal effort. The finances enable us to continue publishing our information through The Christian Methodist Newsletter to over 17,000 people in the United States and in 31 foreign countries. Indeed, we believe that it was the influence that overseas delegates had at our general conferences that have enabled us as a church to maintain our stance for traditional family values. In addition to sending data to our financial supporters through the “Monthly Update” that go to people, families, and congregations here in this country, we are able to maintain our website; prepare studies; publish books, and participate in conferences that are important to our renewal efforts for the church. Your payers and financial support are of crucial importance in helping us win the victories we have and, hopefully, will continue to win in 2012.

As we go into this next year we are looking forward to the 2012 General Conference which will be held in Florida. We shall be sending information to delegates, moving ahead with preparations, and monitoring the events at this quadrennial gathering that is so important to worldwide Methodism.

It goes without saying that, despite the fact that everything appears to be calm on the surface, we have concerns about some of the continuing trends in our denomination to: normalize homosexuality, push for “open membership” in the church, secularize the church, and advocate for political causes supportive of a far-left agenda.

If our church leaders and employees would get out of the business of helping the Congress and President run the country and get to what should be our prime mission of winning people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, we would see revival in our once-great denomination. I pray that will happen. Assuredly, we shall not cease our efforts until our church is once again truly serving Jesus Christ. We are encouraged in that there are seeds of revival and renewal. Indeed, I believe that we may very well see a decisive turn-around in our United Methodist Church begin at this next General Conference when it is held April 24-May 4, 2012, in Tampa, Florida. Let us pray that will be the case.

From all of us here, I again say “Thank you” for your response to our annual appeal for support to this ministry. I pray that each of you has a vibrant great new year in the service of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

January 2012 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Everyone who got where he is had to begin where he was. – Pope John Paul II

* * * * *

The Good Stuff

+ *Parents, don't let your babies grow up in front of the TV*

Author Teresa Tomeo sees the common sense in warning from American Academy of Pediatrics

SAN FRANCISCO, Oct. 21, 2011 — Bestselling author Teresa Tomeo sees the common sense in warnings issued earlier this week from the American Academy of Pediatrics that children 2 and younger should not be spending time in front of the TV. "The American Academy of Pediatrics' latest media-policy statement is good common sense," said Tomeo, whose new book is EXTREME MAKEOVER. "Despite what Madison Avenue might be trying to sell parents, there really is no such thing as 'educational TV' or videos for babies and toddlers. Children, especially those under 2, learn much more from real interactions with real people."

In the statement, AAP again encourages parents of babies and toddlers to avoid exposing them to media as much as possible; and it asked parents to avoid placing television sets in children's bedrooms. "It may be convenient to sit little Johnny or Susie down in front of the TV set so Mom or Dad can get some work done or throw in a load of laundry," she added, "but the experts say this is happening far too often and does have a negative impact on their development. Given the questionable content that dominates the culture today, why not help children avoid media dependency?"

In EXTREME MAKEOVER, Tomeo discusses the pervasiveness of media in today's culture and talks about ways that women — and everyone — can make an "extreme media makeover" to rid themselves of the messages and toxic images that bombard them daily, and instead embrace the truth about their human dignity.

To schedule an interview with Tomeo and/or to request a review copy of EXTREME MAKEOVER, contact Tim Lilley (TLilley@MaximusMG.com) or Kevin Wandra (KWandra@MaximusMG.com) of The Maximus Group at 678-990-9032, or at the email addresses above.

+ ***THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION AND RENEWAL IN THE CHURCH***

In the early 1970s Charles Keysor, founder of the Good News movement, sounded an alarm about the future of the newly formed United Methodist Church. Given cause by the Methodist-EUB merger, and riding the crest of the social and religious upheaval of the 1960s, the 1972 General Conference had approved a radical restructuring of the denomination which institutionalized the progressive theology of that day. There were problems in the church before; but the new direction of the church, using Keysor's metaphor, would head the good ship United Methodism toward the rocks of the shore. The church embraced doctrinal pluralism, mandated social engineering by way of quota systems, created independent superboards, supported various forms of liberation theology, exalted the place of social action at the expense of evangelism, and sought to be prophetic by passing resolutions (from no *Book of Resolutions* at that time to a book today of 1,084 pages).

Keysor was not without hope, however. He observed that in the larger religious scene God was doing a new thing through those committed to a new evangelicalism. Loosed from the limiting features of an earlier fundamentalism the new evangelicalism had spawned the Jesus People, the charismatic movement, a world-wide Pentecostal revival, and a proliferation of new parachurch ministries. The turmoil of the 1960s had been harsh in its criticism of the organized church, but it was the mainline and liberal churches that took most of the hit; less so the evangelical churches. The 1960s were hard on institutions that were characterized by form without substance; and that description fit the mainline churches. Orthodox and evangelical churches, on the other hand, had the substance—the basic salvation message that Christ died on the cross to save humankind of an eternity without God—and those that were able to adapt new forms (as in, for example, music) while keeping intact the historic truths of the faith would thrive.

The hope for United Methodism, Keysor thought, was that the evangelical renewal bringing life to the larger Christian world would also infect United Methodism. Discouraged United Methodists should stay with the denomination because a new day was possible. The key to the new day was in reclaiming Methodism's doctrinal heritage. One of the major differences between spiritual vitality and spiritual barrenness was in faithfulness to the proclamation of the essentials (Wesley's word) of the faith. The Junaluska Affirmation of 1974, which represented an evangelical understanding of our

doctrinal standards, would serve as a rallying point for this evangelical renewal in The United Methodist Church.

A look at The United Methodist Church, American Christianity, and world Christianity forty years later lends itself to the observation that Keysor was a prophet. In the last forty years the most progressive church of all, the United Church of Christ, has lost over one million members, or 50% of its 1969 total. The United Methodists have lost exactly 3,215,789 members, or 30% of its original number in that same period. This averages out to about 154 members per week, or the size of an average congregation. If the more than three million members lost by United Methodists would be gathered into one denomination, it would presently be the 8th largest denomination in America. Meanwhile the Assemblies of God Church has grown by over 400% in the same time period. The Church of the Nazarene has grown by 44%.

The figures for world Christianity are even more dramatic. The church is in decline in areas where the preaching of the evangelical faith has been compromised (as in Europe, Australia, and Canada). It is thriving and growing where the Bible is taken seriously and the gospel is proclaimed without apology (China, South America, and Africa). In terms of American United Methodism, the church is declining or growing pretty much in direct proportion to its theological orientation. It is declining in progressive areas (the west coast and the northeast) but thriving, or at least holding its own in areas with greater evangelical presence (mostly in the south). What is now the California-Pacific Conference claimed 218,000 members in the late 1960s. Today that figure stands at 88,000. The conference, fed by seminaries such as Claremont, which wants to train Muslims as well as Christians, has lost 60% of its membership in the past 40 years. By contrast the North Georgia Conference, which also claimed 218,000 members in the late 1960s, now numbers 321,000 members, a 33% gain. What is the difference between the two conferences? The one quantifiable difference is theology.

The last time a Happenings article made reference to "progressive conferences" and "evangelical conferences," there was some sharp reaction saying that characterizing conferences or churches in this way (theologically) was not helpful and tended to divide rather than unite the church. That kind of reaction, we submit, is at the heart of United Methodism's current malaise. This article would argue that it is precisely the failure to recognize the reality of theological orientation that blinds us from planning strategies or making decisions that could stem not only the hemorrhaging of members but also the loss of influence of the church. Apart from the question as to whether progressive theology or evangelical theology is more attuned with reality, one should at least recognize the statistical fact that progressive churches are declining while evangelical churches are not. And yet when Dr. Fred Miller, a consultant with the research team studying the church for the Call to Action team reported to the bishops, he commented that the findings of his company went beyond the debates between theological liberals and theological conservatives. According to Miller, the research said that theological orientation "doesn't make a difference for having vital congregations."

The statement needs to be challenged. The consulting firms did not even examine the theological orientation of the churches in any meaningful sense (if they did it does not appear in the full report). If there is an identifiable variable that distinguishes growing churches from dying churches other than theological orientation, then let us see the evidence. It is good to talk about passionate worship, involved lay leadership, and children and youth programs as marks of vital congregations, but the important question is, what is the theology that drives passionate worship and involved lay leadership? If, as it has been said, United Methodists don't care or don't know anything about theology, then our situation as a church is even more dire. Then we are truly an institution with all form and no substance.

This brings us back to the statement of the 36 retired bishops who want the church to change its position on the practice of homosexuality. These bishops have the right to make such a statement, of course, but why should anyone listen? Are these not the same bishops who have been in leadership in the church during these last forty years when the church has lost 3.2 million members? The bishops are not calling for the church to stand on the Scriptures and the traditions of the church against the secular culture but for the church to stand with secular culture against the Scriptures and the tradition of the church. Have we not learned anything from these past forty years? The issue is, of course, much larger than homosexuality. It has to do with doctrinal integrity and basic Christian moral standards. Do we sacrifice these for the sake of modernity, or shall we stand firm in the midst of the shifting sands of modernity?

The ...renewal groups believe that there is a basic core of faithful United Methodists who wish to stand firm in the faith once delivered to the saints. We believe the time has come when those who wish to stand firm in the faith should stand up and be counted. It is time to reaffirm our confidence in a gospel that has the power to transform lives.

– By Dr. Riley Case, Happenings Around the Church March 15, 2011. The Confessing Movement.

Of Interest

+ *Mainline Protestants seek reforms, stir anger*

[Editorial Note: We hate to say "I told you so" – but this is one of so many cases when what we have predicted or recommended has proven to be true. Contained in not only this study but also the article addressing changes in the United

Methodist Church are the measures calling for putting priority in serving the local church as the primary focus of ministry. We had first called for this in 2000 in the book *The Church in Bondage*, pages 54-55. What a difference it would have made if the church leadership had paid attention. Let us pray that needed changes will be enacted. – AOM]

A list of the Episcopal Church's 75 commissions, committees, agencies and boards spilled over eight PowerPoint slides during a recent presentation by its new chief operating officer, Bishop Stacy Sauls. By his count, there are also nearly 50 departments and offices in the church's New York headquarters, and 46 committees in its legislative body, the General Convention. Bishop Sauls, who was hired by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori in May, said that he has since learned there are even more offices "that I had never heard of before."

"It has become just byzantine," he said. "The governance structures have grown by accretion, without any strategic plan." Nearly half of the denomination's budget is spent on overhead, according to Bishop Sauls. Meanwhile, Episcopal membership continues to drop, dipping below 2 million in the U.S. for the first time in decades. Donations, too, are down. It is time for change, starting at the top, Bishop Sauls said. "We've been operating in a system where certain expertise resides at the churchwide level and pronouncements get sent down the pipeline," he said. "That model is last century. It's a radically different time now." Mainline Protestants' national offices branch into every field from liturgy to gender equality to disaster relief. But as they seek to halt decades-long declines, a number of denominations are trimming their branches and tending to their roots: local congregations.

Many are moving to decentralize power, shifting resources and responsibilities from national headquarters and elected churchwide assemblies to regional bodies and local leaders. "There used to be a mentality of, as goes the national office, so goes the denomination," said David Roozen, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. "They are finally getting the idea that the future of their denominations are tied to the vitality of their congregations," said Dr. Roozen, co-editor of the 2005 book *Church, Identity and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times*.

But the moves have prompted protests from some longtime members who worry that lay voices will be muted and long traditions of democratic decision-making will be jettisoned in favor of expediency. Dr. Roozen said mainline Protestants lag behind secular companies and entrepreneurial evangelicals in trading top-heavy bureaucracies for flat and fluid networks. Recently, though, they have been catching up:

- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved a plan in August that prioritizes congregational growth and moves Churchwide Assemblies from every two years to every three.
- The Presbyterian Church (USA) enacted a less regulatory and more flexible form of government in July. • A proposal authored by Bishop Sauls and approved thus far by 17 Episcopal dioceses would appoint a special commission to study restructuring. The proposal will be debated at the 2012 General Convention. Bishop Sauls also has suggested that the triennial conventions are too expensive and should meet less often.
- Leaders in the United Methodist Church are pushing a major restructuring plan that would consolidate 10 churchwide agencies into five. The agencies would be run by a 15-member board of directors, itself overseen by a 45-member advisory panel.

United Methodist Bishop John Hopkins, who chairs a panel advocating for change, said the denomination's 13 agencies, publishing house and pension board collectively have 550 board members who meet just a few times each year. That's a recipe for stagnation, he said. The proposed changes would streamline the denomination and make it more responsive to local congregations, some of which view the national agencies as out of touch, according to Bishop Hopkins, "We've got to flatten the church a ... bit to make sure this perceived distance is reduced," Bishop Hopkins said.

The UMC's Council of Bishops overwhelmingly approved the plan, and voted to redirect \$60 million in church funds to develop young leaders and congregations. The bishops, however, do not have a vote at next year's General Conference, where the restructuring will be debated. And some United Methodists are already lining up in opposition. In a joint statement, leaders of five racial and ethnic groups called the plan "oligarchic" and said it "will exclude the participation of racial/ethnic persons." And the Methodist Federation for Social Action is pushing an alternative plan that would create four ministry "centers," each with its own 33-member board.

"Our process will be more inclusive of folks who are not white," said Tracy Merrick, the MFSA's national treasurer. The Episcopal plan also has its critics. Bonnie Anderson, president of the House of Deputies and the church's top lay leader, accused Bishop Sauls of mounting an "end run" around a committee that had already been studying restructuring. Ms. Anderson also doubted the need for a special commission to restructure the church. Her House of Deputies and the House of Bishops have already demonstrated the ability to make major decisions—to allow gay bishops, for example—at

recent General Conventions, according to Ms. Anderson.

“To think that we couldn’t decide ways to restructure the church is a bit naive,” she said. Ms. Anderson agreed, however, that the Episcopal Church needs to change. “I believe that we need more resources and authority at the local level,” she said. “The days of the big corporate front office, if not gone already, are dwindling pretty fast.”

– By Daniel Burke, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), December 19, 2011.

+ *Episcopal Church Drops Below Two Million Members*

Washington, DC—Once a flagship denomination of American mainline Protestantism, the U.S.-based Episcopal Church has for the first time in decades reported membership below two million. Self-reported statistics provided by the denomination this month show that the church has dropped from 2,006,343 members in 2009 to 1,951,907 in 2010, the most recent reporting year. The loss of 54,436 members increases the annual rate of decline from 2 percent to 3 percent, outpacing the most recently reported declines in most other mainline churches. The church’s 10-year change in active members has dropped 16 percent.

A branch of the otherwise fast-growing 80 million member worldwide Anglican Communion, the third largest family of Christian churches globally, the Episcopal Church had also seen a steady decrease in the number of parishes, losing or closing over 100 in 2010, as well as a drop in attendance from 682,963 in 2009 to 657,831 in 2010, a 4 percent drop. Fifty-four percent of all U.S. Episcopal Churches suffered attendance loss over the prior year. Over the last decade, attendance was down 23 percent.

The denomination, which once claimed over 3.5 million members as recently as the mid-1960s, has lost over 40 percent of membership even while the U.S. population grew by over 50 percent.

A statistical summary provided by the Episcopal Church can be viewed at:

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Domestic_FAST_FACTS_Trends_2006-2010.pdf

Jeff Walton, spokesman for IRD’s Anglican Action Program, commented:

“The drop below 2 million members is noteworthy, but the precipitous drop in attendance is even more dramatic, boding poorly for the Episcopal Church’s future. Almost one-quarter of Episcopalians who were in the pews in 2000 have vanished. Departures to other churches have fueled Episcopal decline, as have decreasing baptisms and its graying population. These statistics contrast sharply with more theologically conservative Anglican churches in the global south, many of which are witnessing skyrocketing numbers.

“Despite all its liberal cheerleading about inclusiveness, the Episcopal Church is a dwindling, nearly all white, increasingly gray-headed denomination with a grim future, absent divine intervention.”

– By Jeff Walton, IRD, 1023 15th Street NW, Ste. 601, Washington, DC 20005-2601

+ *2011 church restructure plan headed to vote*

When General Conference meets in 2012, the denomination’s top lawmaking body will consider legislation to consolidate nine of the denomination’s 13 general agencies into a new United Methodist Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. A 15-member board of directors would govern the center. That board would be accountable to a 45-member advisory board called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight, which would replace the Connectional Table that currently coordinates the denomination’s mission, ministries and resources. Under the legislation, the center’s board would be in place and have its first meeting by July 31, 2012. This restructuring proposal took shape in 2011 as part of the Call to Action process, which aims to foster more vital congregations. The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table initiated the Call to Action process “to reorder the life of the church” two years ago in the wake of four decades of declining U.S. membership and the 2008 global economic crisis. The reorganization plan originated with the Interim Operations Team, eight laity and clergy working with denominational leaders to implement the Call to Action recommendations. The Interim Operations Team has been meeting since February.

The Connectional Table refined and endorsed the team’s recommendations in July. In August, using email, Connectional Table members voted 26 to eight to send the drafted legislation to General Conference. Nine members abstained. In November, the Council of Bishops voted overwhelmingly by a show of hands to endorse the proposed restructuring. Bishops do not vote at General Conference. However, there are no limits on conversations with delegates and other church members outside the sessions.

The proposed changes would help general agencies work more effectively with annual conferences to support and grow vital congregations, said Neil M. Alexander and Illinois Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer. Alexander, president and

publisher of the United Methodist Publishing House, and Palmer have led the Interim Operations Team.

However, some United Methodists are already voicing concerns about the plan. Leaders of five groups that represent the denomination's ethnic constituencies caution that the proposed restructuring "minimizes and will exclude the participation of racial/ethnic persons, and works against the principle of inclusiveness that we see as one of the important values our church has to offer." Some General Conference delegates from the Northeastern Jurisdiction also have said they find the legislation "troubling."

Members of the denomination's unofficial caucuses also are weighing in on the proposed restructuring. Good News, an evangelical group, sees the proposal as a move "in the right direction," said the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, the group's vice president and general manager. Meanwhile, the Methodist Federation for Social Action, a progressive group, has submitted legislation for an alternative reorganization that would preserve agencies dedicated to monitoring race and gender discrimination.

Almost everyone agrees the denomination needs to change. But it's up to General Conference to decide what that change will look like when it convenes April 24-May 4, 2012, in Tampa, Fla.

Other possible changes.

The Council of Bishops and Connectional Table also have endorsed these proposals before General Conference:

- + A measure that would allow the Council of Bishops to elect one of its own to a full-time, four-year position as president without the usual responsibilities of overseeing a geographic area.
- + Folding the denomination's ecumenical agency, the United Methodist Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, and its work into the Council of Bishops.
- + A proposal to make United Methodist Women a separate agency rather than part of Board of Global Ministries.
- + Eliminating "security of appointment" for elders in good standing, allowing elders who do not receive appointments to be in transitional leave status.

– A UMNS Report by Heather Hahn*; December 16, 2011. *Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for UMNS.

(UM) Bishops

+ ***Bishop Sues Alabama*** [Political Activism- Is it any wonder we continue in decline?]

United Methodist Bishop Will Willimon of the North Alabama Conference has joined Catholic and Episcopal leaders of Alabama in filing a federal lawsuit to stop enforcement of the state's new immigration law. The suit says the bishops fear that under the law administering sacraments to illegal immigrants may be a criminal act

– By The Confessing Movement E-Newsletter, September 2011

+ ***FIRST THINGS RESPONDS TO THE 36 RETIRED BISHOPS***

The editors of First Things magazine (May 2011 issue) responded to the Statement of Counsel issued recently by 36 retired bishops of The United Methodist Church. The bishops stated that "When the Church has a position (on the practice of homosexuality) that many people do not hold, and those people are in leadership or desire to be in leadership, they have to make compromises with their own integrity." The Statement also said that "bishops are being drained of energy because of a stance that contradicts their convictions."

Here is First Things' reaction to those quotations: "It's a standard line for the moral innovators in the mainline churches that they must change their church's teachings for evangelistic reasons. We might remark that changing the teaching on this matter hasn't turned the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians into models of church growth."

"It speaks well of them (the 36 bishops) that they find their differences with their church so difficult. And we have a way to energize those poor drained bishops, and it'll be a lot easier than trying to change a church so stuck in its old ways. They can find a new church. It does take a degree of narcissism to think that the church, which has the approval of a continuing majority of its members, must change its beliefs to accommodate you."

From FIRST THINGS, May 2011 issue; By Dr. Bill Bouknight; The Confessing Movement, July 2011 E-Newsletter

(UM) General Board of Church and Society *Methodist Official Arrested*

On July 28 Jim Winkler, top executive of the United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society, was arrested along with ten other religious leaders for participating in an illegal "pray-in" demonstration under the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. They were charged with unlawful conduct and his court date was set for September 7. The group was protesting the recent agreement worked out between President Obama and Congressional leaders to raise the nation's debt

ceiling while reducing the \$14 trillion national debt. In an interview with Sam Hodges of the UM Reporter, Winkler stated that his protest was against cuts in governmental programs such as Head Start, aid to developing nations, law enforcement, heating assistance for the poor, and education and juvenile justice.

Winkler was not asked if Scripture mandates that such needs be met by governments or by churches and individuals.

Winkler has been arrested on previous occasions, protesting such causes as the nuclear arms race, the invasion of Iraq, and cuts in governmental programs for poor and needy people.

He stated that he went into the protest knowing that he would probably be arrested. While he did not get advance approval of his Board for this action, he did confer with the president of the Board.

– By The Confessing Movement E-Newsletter, September 2011

(UM) Women/Women's Issues

+ *Women's Division Directors "Occupy Wall Street"*

On Sunday, Oct. 9, during the Women's Division annual fall board meeting, a group of directors headed down to Wall Street to show their support for the "occupiers". Their public show of solidarity was expressed through signs with scripture, slogans and a brief interview. With net assets of 60 million dollars and a stock portfolio that would marvel any Fortune 500 company, it seems ironic that the leaders of United Methodist Women would be outraged at the very entity that provides such fruitful returns on their investment dollars. The generous annual giving of United Methodist Women combined with the financial prowess of the Women's Division has enabled the organization to become the most wealthy within the church. They receive no apportionment monies from the general church budget.

With a declining membership and aging demographic, the organization will rely heavily on their financial portfolio of stocks, properties, and endowment funds.

At General Conference 2012, the Women's Division will introduce legislation that would structurally separate the organization from the General Board of Global Ministries and become a free-standing agency within the UMC.

The Women's Division directors join a growing list of religious leftists participating in the loosely defined movement, including Jim Wallis of Sojourners and Shane Claiborne, who has compared the "occupiers" to St. Francis of Assisi.

Signs carried by the directors included quotes taken from the 2008 Book of Resolutions #4056 on Greed:

"Reduce concentration of wealth in the hands of a few."

"Eliminate government support programs for the wealthy at the expense of the rest of us."

"There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but there is not enough for everyone's greed."--Gandhi

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

+ *UMW Membership Continues To Plummet*

New church statistics released from the General Council on Finance and Administration reveal another substantial annual loss of membership in United Methodist Women, the only officially recognized women's ministry program in the UMC. In 2009 (statistics run one year behind), UMW experienced a loss of over 45,000 members and 488 local units, bringing the total membership below the 600,000 level. (The Women's Division, the leadership of UMW, regularly reports their membership at 800,000.) This pattern of membership loss has been consistent over several decades.

The UMC Book of Discipline (the official law of the church) requires that every local church "shall" have a UMW group. For twenty years, RENEW and the women of the UMC have tried to have the language changed to read that every local church "may" have a UMW, leaving open the option for other women's ministry programs. Our efforts have not been successful as of yet due to intense pressure from the Women's Division. We will continue to work towards this goal at General Conference 2012, praying that finally women in the UMC will have the freedom to pursue God's calling...

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

* * * * *

Doubt can only be removed by action. – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Global Outlook

A mother is not a person to lean on but a person to make leaning unnecessary. – Dorothy C. Fisher

* * * * *

Iran. The Power of Forgiveness

In August, 2011, Iranian state television broadcast a powerful scene from an operating room of a hospital. A woman named Ameneh had a chance to enforce the Sharia law of an eye for an eye. Back in 2004 she had rejected a marriage

proposal from a man named Majid. In anger he had poured acid on her face, permanently blinding her. Now the state was allowing her to exact revenge. Majid was on his knees waiting for Armeneh to pour acid on his eyes. Instead, at the last minute, she forgave him. Majid wept and said that Ameneh was "very generous."

Had she poured the acid on him, no one would have noticed. Sharia law would have been fulfilled. But the power of her forgiveness was picked up by my newspapers around the world. All sensed that Ameneh had applied a divine standard. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person (Matt. 5:38-39)." "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...(Luke 6:27)" "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matt. 6:14)."

– By The Confessing Movement E-Newsletter, September 2011

+ **North Korea.**

+ ***Will Kim Jong-Il Death Herald More or Less Repression for North Korea's Christians?***

Washington, DC—North Korean Dictator Kim Jong-Il's death has prompted instability in Asian markets and concerns about how a power transfer to a young, untested leader could destabilize the region. The reclusive communist nation's vulnerable Christian population may also be entering a period of uncertainty, resulting in either more harsh repression or a new period of relative tolerance.

The officially atheist state counts few Christians publically. Defectors tell of a persecuted yet enduring house church movement, the size of which is impossible to ascertain. Since 2001, the U.S. State Department report on global religious freedom has named North Korea among the worst offenders for limits on religious expression. U.S. officials believe North Korea's regime has sentenced between 150,000 and 200,000 people to political prison camps solely for reasons of religious practice.

North Korea has a vibrant Christian past: the capital of Pyongyang was once known as the "Jerusalem of the East" for being the fastest-growing Christian community in East Asia during the early 20th century.

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

"Sadly, succession periods between dictators and their children rarely result in true reforms, despite initial hopes. Witness Syria's Bashar al-Assad: a mild-mannered and western-trained ophthalmologist who revealed himself fully capable of the same brutality as his late father.

"Rather than hoping for the best, western church groups should not be silent about North Korea's various aggressions. Making absurd excuses for North Korea's inhuman persecution of Christians or pretending that a handful of government-run show churches in Pyongyang constitute any kind of religious freedom does not serve fellow believers.

"Our times are in God's hands. The time of Kim Jong-Il's merciless persecution of North Korean Christians and irrationally brutal treatment of all of North Korea's citizens has been ended by God.

"...pray for the Christians of North Korea, who are among the world's most persecuted Christian believers."

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

+ ***The Most Viciously Anti-christian Country***

According to the World Watch List, that dubious distinction belongs to North Korea. When the North Korean police discovered a secret house church, for example, 3 members were immediately sentenced to death and the other twenty sent to labor camps. Nevertheless, Christianity is growing slowly in North Korea. The Catholic news service Agenzia Fides estimates that 400,000 North Koreans (2% of the population) are secretly Christian. 50,000 of them are suffering in the country's hellish labor camps.

Rounding out World Watch List's worst five countries are Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Somalia.

From FIRST THINGS, June/July 2011 issue; As Reported in The Confessing Movement, July 2011 E-Newsletter

* * * * *

The greatest barrier to success is the fear of failure. – Sven Goran Eriksson