

Monthly Update

Mid-December 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This January edition of the Monthly Update is being sent to you early for several reasons. It contains a listing of those stores who use “Merry Christmas” such as Wal-Mart during this holiday season. It also lists those who are “politically correct” and refuse to use that term in greeting people. I, for one, refuse to patronize businesses like that. If they do not recognize the holiday that we are celebrating much less the reason being the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, then they don’t need my money.

I had used Wal-Mart as an example of a store that does recognize the name of our Savior. Some years ago while attending a conference held in Rogers, Arkansas on behalf of our ministry Concerned Methodists, I took off an afternoon during the pre-conference period and toured the Wal-Mart Museum that was close by. It told about the life of Sam Walton. I did not know it, but he was a committed Christian. When deciding on whether or not a likely person would make a good store manager, Sam would meet him for lunch. During the ensuing conversation, Sam would find out if the person was a committed Christian who actively participated in his church. If the person wasn’t, then Sam would not give him the position. Is it any wonder that the Wal-Mart .3

chain is one of the largest retailers in the world?

A second reason for sending this out early, is because I will be on travel later this month and early in January to attend a conference right after the first of the year. I want to have our people in Concerned Methodists enjoy their holiday season.

The third reason is because at this time with the “fiscal cliff” in our nation’s budget before us, we have at least one bishop involved in lobbying for the political party that wants to raise taxes but not cut any waste from the budget. Hope Morgan Ward, the newly-assigned bishop in our North Carolina Conference, is not hesitating to leap into this arena. Her prior leadership stirred up controversy in Mississippi and led to the formation of a renewal group in that conference to bring to others her actions and to do what it could for the cause of renewal. So, I would recommend that, as far as this January Update is concerned, you look at the “Naughty or Nice” list that gives those retailers who are not afraid to say “Merry Christmas”; check and see if your bishop is leading a “prayer vigil” or other action to advocate for not cutting back on waste spending – but then to set aside the rest of the “Update” until after the holidays.

We thank you for the support you have provided in response to our appeal. It will help to close the gap in the financial shortfall that we are experiencing at this time. Again, from all of us here at Concerned Methodists, we wish you the very best during this Christmas and throughout the year 2013.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

January 2013 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

May those who love us, love us.
And for those who don't love us, May God turn their hearts.
And if God cannot turn their hearts, May God turn their ankles,
So we may know them by their limping. – Old Irish blessing:
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The Good Stuff. Hispanic Church Offers Model of Growth

Epworth UMC, in Elgin, Ill., outside of Chicago, looks like a typical suburban church. But on Sunday afternoons, the brick and glass vibrate to an infectious rhythm, as an eight-piece orchestra with drums, bongos and congas pumps out praise music with a Latin beat. Four music leaders sway, sing and pray in Spanish as young women twirl banners triumphantly in front of the congregation. Parishioners praise Jesus with wide smiles on their faces, many with their hands raised to heaven, like Pastor Ruben Rivera. This is La Luz de Cristo, a new Hispanic/Latino faith community established two years ago, and the atmosphere is heartfelt and spirit-filled.

Rivera, 47, a native of Mexico, was recruited to be a lay missionary by the Rev. Oscar Carrasco, the Elgin District superintendent, and the Rev. Mario Mayer, pastor of an established Hispanic/Latino congregation, El Mesias. Now a leader of a faith community of 120 to 150 people on most Sundays, Rivera, who works asphalt and concrete construction by day, has seen God turn his life around. "I was addicted to alcohol and drugs for 20 years," he recalled with tears filling his eyes. "I prayed one day for God to free me, and I pledged to serve him for the rest of my life. Now, I'm honoring that promise."

Rivera's training as a lay missionary is through the Conference Academy for Faith Community Development, an ongoing series of monthly meetings created by Carrasco, the district superintendent, and the Rev. J. Martin Lee, director of congregational development and redevelopment for the Northern Illinois Annual Conference.

The conference has started 30 new faith communities under Lee's leadership; since 2003, when the academy first started, nine new Hispanic/Latino communities have been planted.

"In order to rekindle the movement of Methodism, we have to use indigenous lay leadership and not depend on ordained clergy anymore," Lee said. "What we are doing now is passion-driven, not money-driven, because subsidizing the salaries of pastors of small congregations is not working in the Hispanic community."

The academy has trained 100 Latinos and Latinas, 45 of whom are lay missionaries, Lee said. "This is the future of our denomination. Some will go on to a course of study [curriculum for local pastors] and get a local pastor's license from the bishop. But the John Wesley movement was a lay movement, not just clergy, so we're recapturing a passion for the Methodist movement here in Chicago."

–Tim Weeks, for United Methodist News Service (UMNS), as reported in UMNewscope, October 31, 2012

Of Interest

+ *Naughty or Nice?*

The American Family Association's (AFA's) 2012 listing of top retailers and how they recognize Christmas Color Code:

BLUE: An AFA "5-Star" rated company that promotes and celebrates Christmas on an exceptional basis.

GREEN: Company uses the term "Christmas" on a regular basis, we consider that company Christmas-friendly.

YELLOW: Company refers to "Christmas infrequently, or in a single advertising medium, but not in others.

RED: Company may use "Christmas" sparingly in a single or unique product description, but as a company, does not recognize it.

Based on current advertising, below is a list of companies that avoid, ban, or use the term "Christmas" in their advertising.

Criteria – AFA reviewed up to four areas to determine if a company was "Christmas-friendly" in their advertising: print media (newspaper inserts), broadcast media (radio/television), website and/or personal visits to the store. If a company's ad has references to items associated with Christmas (trees, wreaths, lights, etc.), it was considered as an attempt to reach "Christmas" shoppers. If a company has items associated with Christmas, but did not use the word "Christmas," then the company is considered as censoring "Christmas."

+ *Connectional Table seeks executive secretary*

Dallas — Leadership of the Connectional Table of The United Methodist Church has announced they are now seeking candidates for the position of executive secretary. The Board of Pension and Health Benefits is assisting the Connectional Table with the executive search process.
– UMNS Digest, September 14, 2012

(UM) Bishops

+ *NC groups hold vigil to oppose budget cuts*

Raleigh, N.C. – A bishop in the United Methodist Church in North Carolina will lead a candlelight vigil with people who oppose cuts to Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security and support higher taxes for the wealthy. Bishop Hope Ward will lead the vigil at sunset Monday at the office of Democratic U.S. Sen. Kay Hagan in downtown Raleigh...In addition to the UMC, other organizers of the vigil are the N.C. Justice Center, the N.C. State AFL-CIO and MoveOn.org...The organizers want to show public support to get Hagan and other members of Congress to oppose cuts to entitlement programs and support higher taxes on the wealthy. [Note: This is seen as a political ploy to bring attention to Sen. Kay Hagan and to give her public visibility. Since she is already in the far-left political camp, this is seen as political posturing on the part of Bishop Ward by bringing the Senator into the public eye almost two years before she will stand for re-election. It is equally disappointing that one of our United Methodist bishops would take such a political stand that is so potentially divisive – and damaging to the financial viability of our country. I went to the MoveOn.org website to see what were some of the issues for which they advocate. A summary is contained in the next paragraph. – AOM.]

– The Associated Press ("Starnews Online"); Published: Monday, December 10, 2012 at 4:02 a.m.
<http://www.starnews.com/article/20121210/APN/1212100570>

+ *The group MoveOn.org* [<http://front.moveon.org/category/moveon-original/>]

Has a button on "Occupy Wall Street" in addition to buttons for: 2012 Elections, Adorable, Beautiful, BNF Charts, Civil Liberties, Climate coalition, Comics, Corporate Influence, Democrats, Economic Fairness, Education, Environmental, Eye-Opening, Facebook Status, Global Graphics, Health Care, Immigration, Jobs, LGBTQ Equality, MoveOn.org Civic Action, MoveOn.org Political Action, Occupy Wall Street, Progressive, Racism, Radical Right, Sexy, Shocking, Unions, War on Women, and Youth – among others.

* Page 1 of the series LGBTQ Equality [<http://front.moveon.org/category/lgbtq-equality/>]:

Picture with caption, "Missouri Pastor's Fiery Speech Against Equal Rights For Homosexuals..."

Picture with caption, "Why Gay Men Are Doing You A Favor By Being Attracted To Each Other..."

Picture with caption, "Here's Dear Abby's Advice To A Homophobe"

Picture with caption, "This Dad Struggled With Acceptance Of His Gay Daughter..."

Picture with caption, "WARNING: Don't Look At This Graphic Unless You Can Handle Colorful Language"

Picture with caption, "And The Day Came When A Young Man With Two Moms Spoke At The DNC"

Page 2 of the series LGBTQ Equality [<http://front.moveon.org/category/lgbtq-equality/page/2/>]:

Picture with caption, "Anderson cooper Gay, happy with self"

Picture with caption, "Here's Why Homophobic Chicken Chains Should Never Mess With Miss Piggy"

Picture with caption, "Two Lesbians Went To Talk To Mitt Romney When He Was Governor ..."

Picture with caption, "This 8-Year-Old With Two Moms Wrote An Amazing Letter"

"Remember The Famous WWII Photograph Of A Homecoming Kiss? How Far We've Com ..."

(caption under a picture of two men (one in uniform) kissing in front of an American flag).

Picture of a man with a sign on front saying, "82 years (and 9 months) of being gay..."

<http://front.moveon.org/the-photo-of-a-gay-82-year-old-man-that-makes-us-wish-facebook-had-a-love-button/>

Economic Fairness (read "sharing of income" – or socialism) [<http://front.moveon.org/category/economic-fairness/>]

Picture with caption, "What Happened Behind Closed Doors When MoveOn Met With President Obama"

Picture with caption, "What If We All Stood Up For Kids Rather Than CEOs?"

Picture with caption, "Dear Democrats, Please Stick To These 8 Principles From Robert Reich"

* Immigration (read "illegal immigration") [<http://front.moveon.org/category/immigration/>]

Picture with caption, "A Chilling Clip That Illustrates What Happens When Latinos Don't Vote"

Picture with caption, "Rosie Perez: If Mitt Were A Gay Latina, He'd Have A Great Chance Of Winning ..."

Picture with caption, "Obama Helps 800,000 Kids Caught In Immigration Limbo AND Shuts Down A..."

Picture with caption, "The Secret That Haters Just Don't Get"

Picture with caption, "Immigrants For Sale, And A Sh_t-Ton Of Cash..."

Picture with caption, " Amazingly Moving: 'My Life As An Undocumented Immigrant'"

* MoveOn.org Political Action [<http://front.moveon.org/category/pac/>]

Picture with caption, "WHOA: Romney Backs Candidate Who Says Rape Pregnancies Are Intended By God"

Picture with caption, "President Obama: Mitt Romney's Come Down With A Case Of Romnesia"

Picture with caption, "Legal Analysis Outlines Potential Crime In Mitt Romney's Financial Disclosure ..."

Picture with caption, "What If Every Voter Knew The Truth About About Mitt Romney's 'Job Creation' ..."

+ *Same old, Same old*

[Note: Of interest is an e-mail that was sent to me on April 8, 2011 – over a year ago dealing with this same issue. It appears our denominational officials have a penchant to taking a far-left, fiscally irresponsible side on this issue. The following commentary was written by a friend of mine Mark Tooley, who leads the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Remember, this reflects how the money you put into the offering plate is used through the apportionment. – AOM]

Did you know that church officials, speaking in the name of our churches, are demanding that the U.S. Congress NOT cut federal government spending despite trillion dollar deficits for as far as the eye can see?

Recently, a letter to members of the U.S. Congress opposing "cuts" was signed by the President of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, the Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop, the Presbyterian Church (USA) Stated Clerk, the United Church of Christ President, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Presiding Bishop, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, and...other senior church officials, all claiming to speak for you & your church.

These church officials equate endlessly expanding Big Government with the Kingdom of God. They cited the Good Samaritan story as an argument against federal government cuts. But would the Good Samaritan drive his neighbors and his country into bankruptcy through reckless spending and indifference to the future

Do these church officials favor any cuts in government? Predictably, they cited "unchecked increases in military spending" and "vast tax cuts." But the U.S. military budget accounts for only 20 percent of the federal budget. The ENTIRE defense budget could be eliminated and there would still be a trillion dollar deficit! And as for "vast tax cuts," they are referring to President Obama's agreement with the U.S. Congress to extend the tax cuts of 10 years ago instead of increasing taxes during a recession. How would a huge tax increase affect our economy, especially the unemployed searching for jobs, with unemployment already above 9 percent?

Of course, these church officials are not speaking for the Gospel or our churches. They are acting as apostles for Big Government. Can't our churches do better?

– Mark Tooley, The Institute on Religion and Democracy

(UM) General Board of Discipleship. Discipleship board organizes

Nashville, Tenn. — The UM Board of Discipleship's new, smaller board, has selected Mountain Sky Area Bishop Elaine Stanovsky as president and the Rev. Eric Park, a district superintendent from Western Pennsylvania, as vice president for the coming four years. The board, which was reduced to 23 members from 60 members by the 2012 General Conference, also created a new working structure and meeting schedule.

– UMNS Daily Digest, October 3, 2012

Homosexuality. Boycott The Home Depot

Over one-half million people have signed a pledge to boycott The Home Depot until it agrees to remain neutral in the culture and political war over homosexual marriage. As a financial backer, The Home Depot has stated it "is proud to support" the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) effort to force the legalization of homosexual marriage across America. In a February 17, 2011 announcement, HRC notes that it most recently:

- Helped gather support for marriage equality bill in Maryland;
- Sponsored Marriage Equality Day in Albany, New York;
- Pushed for final passage of Hawaii civil unions bill;
- Stood up to Christian-owned Chick-fil-A for supporting a traditional marriage seminar;
- Fought a constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex couples from marrying in Wyoming

The Home Depot's support made all of these things possible. That's because The Home Depot is taking profits made from your purchases to push the homosexual agenda.

Sincerely,

Tim Wildmon, President

(UM) Men. Bishop Swanson to lead men's commission

Nashville, Tenn. — The 20-member Commission on United Methodist Men has elected Mississippi Area Bishop James Swanson as president, and Pittsburgh Area Bishop Thomas Bickerton as vice president. The United Methodist agency

responsible for ministry to men met Sept. 5-9 to elect officers for the 2013-2016 quadrennium and set plans for a 2013 national gathering. [Nolte: This is seen as a very positive move. – AOM] – UMNS Digest, September 12, 2012

(UM) Women/Women's Issues *United Methodist Women counters "hate" speech*

New York — United Methodist Women was part of a coalition of community and faith-based organizations that gathered at the steps of city hall in Manhattan Sept. 25 and UMW unveiled an ad countering the anti-Muslim "hate" speech of another ad posted in 10 New York City subway stations. [Note: One can only wonder if these folks know what they are doing. If in fact there are Muslims who are trying to kill all non-Muslims, it is not "hate speech" to tell others about their intentions. Indeed, as one who has done research into this subject and read in the Koran, it would appear that those who are termed "radical Muslims" are simply those who read – and take – the Koran seriously. – AOM]

– UMNS Digest, October 3, 2012

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Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence.
~ George Washington

Global Outlook

It is neither wealth nor splendor, but tranquility and occupation which give happiness. ~Thomas Jefferson

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Israel.

+ *Jewish groups pull out of interfaith dialogue*

Washington — Mainstream Jewish establishment groups have upped the ante in a battle with Christian churches that was sparked by a mild letter calling on Congress to investigate whether military aid to Israel violates U.S. law. Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, is among the 14 Christian leaders who endorsed the letter. [Note: We as a denomination come down on the wrong side of this when we take a position harmful to Israel. The Arabic "Palestinians" perpetrate violence against the Jews. Further clarification is given in the next article from The Institute on Religion and Democracy. – AOM]

– UMNS Digest, October 25, 2012

+ *Jewish Groups Withdraw from Roundtable after Mainline Protestants Ask Congress to Investigate Israel*

"These denominations have a history of being anti-Israel in their pronouncements over the past three decades."

– Mark Tooley, IRD President

Washington, DC—Several major Jewish organizations have cancelled participation in the next meeting of a Christian-Jewish Roundtable after the Christian groups sent a letter to the U.S. Congress. The letter asks Congress to re-evaluate U.S. military aid to Israel. The withdrawing groups include the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and Conservative and Reform Jewish movements. Jewish groups feel the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Council of Bishops and the National Council of Churches are blaming Israel exclusively for the absence of peace in the Middle East. Notably, the U.S.-based Episcopal Church, also a member of the interfaith roundtable, declined to sign the letter to Congress. IRD President Mark Tooley commented: "In effect these Mainline Protestant groups are questioning U.S. military aid to Israel and urging investigation of ostensible Israeli human rights violations. The Jewish groups understandably believe this as a very biased and unjust stance and are calling into question whether or not they can continue to be interfaith partners with these churches.

"These denominations have a history of being anti-Israel in their pronouncements over the past three decades.

"It is unlikely that the elites of these denominations are going to shift course in terms of their anti-Israel stance. Fortunately, these church officials do not speak for most of their members."

– Received by e-mail from the Institute on Religion and Democracy; www.TheIRD.org

Uganda.

+ Prayer for his country by President Museveni:

"We confess these sins, which have greatly hampered our national cohesion and delayed our political, social and economic transformation. We confess sins of idolatry and witchcraft which are rampant in our land. We confess sins of shedding innocent blood, sins of political hypocrisy, dishonesty, intrigue and betrayal," Museveni said.

"Forgive us of sins of pride, tribalism and sectarianism; sins of laziness, indifference and irresponsibility; sins of corruption and bribery that have eroded our national resources; sins of sexual immorality, drunkenness and debauchery;

sins of unforgiveness, bitterness, hatred and revenge; sins of injustice, oppression and exploitation; sins of rebellion, insubordination, strife and conflict,” Museveni prayed.

Next, the president dedicated Uganda to God. “We want to dedicate this nation to you so that you will be our God and guide. We want Uganda to be known as a nation that fears God and as a nation whose foundations are firmly rooted in righteousness and justice to fulfill what the Bible says in Psalm 33:12: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. A people you have chosen as your own,” Museveni prayed.

– Received by e-mail. <http://www.wnd.com/2012/11/ugandan-president-repents-of-personal-national-sins/>

+ GCFA Suspends Funding for East Africa Annual Conference

[Note: We wish that such diligence to investigate wrongdoing had been exercised in the past regarding the expenditures of some of the general boards and agencies to include that of the General Board of Global Ministries itself. – AOM]

The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) recommends that the general agencies, annual conferences and local churches of The UMC withhold funding to the East Africa Annual Conference and related organizations until further notice, or until they can determine accountability for the funds being used to support the designated purpose. Pursuant to ¶ 806 of the 2008 Book of Discipline, GCFA is accountable to The UMC through the General Conference in all matters relating to the receiving, disbursing, and reporting of the general funds of the Church, and agencies receiving such funds are fiscally accountable to the council. The Committee on Audit and Review, following consultation with representatives of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), reported to the full GCFA council that the East Africa Annual Conference has failed for several years to provide complete and accurate financial audits of general Church funds it has received. Until the East Africa Annual Conference can provide satisfactory explanations of how those funds were spent, funding from GCFA, GBGM, and other general Church entities will not be forwarded to that annual conference or related organizations. In addition to full support of GBGM's decisions, the board of directors of GCFA approved the filing of a formal complaint against Bishop Daniel Wandabula with the College of Bishops governing the East Africa Annual Conference due to concerns about the use and accountability of funds for various ministries in that conference. Other responses, including possible legal actions, are also under consideration by the board.

In a statement about the actions of GCFA, Bishop Michael Coyner, president of the board of directors, stated, "Our UMC structures are based upon trust, and whenever there are any concerns about trust-including financial trust-those concerns must be dealt with seriously, prayerfully, and thoroughly. The actions of GCFA reflect our fiduciary responsibility for the whole church as we work to protect, defend, and strengthen the trust our UM people have in their churches, conferences, agencies, and projects. We take these actions in concert with other entities within the Church to assure the funds are being used for the work for which they were intended."

Moses Kumar, general secretary and treasurer stated "The actions taken by GCFA, in consultation with GBGM and in conversation with other general agencies and churches throughout the UM connection, are being taken to help all of our members feel confident that faithful ministries will continue to be funded properly and can be supported by the Church."

– GCFA, as reported in UMNewscope, October 3, 2012

+ Bishop Daniel Wandabula Responds to GCFA Action

Kampala, Uganda — Bishop Daniel Wandabula, who leads the East Africa Annual Conference, says he blames the decisions of UM agencies to withhold funds from his conference on a campaign "of malice, mud-slinging, character lynching and insurrection." He indicated that the problems in Uganda stem from "insurrectionists" in Uganda who "are trying to overthrow the bishop after trying to blackmail him." He said, "The ripple effect of the suspension [of funds] will be in the whole conference. This is most unfair and unfortunate for the other countries in the EAAC, which do not have this infighting." He said the beneficiaries of UM projects in the East Africa Annual Conference are the ones suffering. The East Africa Annual Conference includes Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and the new nation of South Sudan. The conference office is in Kampala, Uganda.

Wandabula complained to the Ugandan police on Oct. 21, 2009, when the anonymous "Journey Jonah" sent an email to the bishop demanding \$300,000. Attached to the email was a document, labeled "report," which contained allegations against the bishop. On Aug. 30, 2011, "Journey Jonah" sent a report with further allegations against Wandabula to the Council of Bishops and several executives at the General Board of Global Ministries but did not supply documentation or a name and full contact information.

In September 2011, the Ugandan police arrested three UMs in Uganda and charged them with sending "Journey Jonah's" emails to Bishop Wandabula. To date, the three have appeared in court some 20 times. But each time, individuals the court deemed important to the case were missing, and the trial has been rescheduled. A new magistrate has been assigned to the case. She told the court on Oct. 3 that she needs more time to review the specifics of the case. The next hearing was scheduled Nov. 16.

Indiana Area Bishop Michael J. Coyner, president of the General Council on Finance and Administration board, said the agency's Audit and Review Committee "studied the situation very thoroughly and made their recommendations on the basis of finances not on the basis of any internal politics of the [East Africa Annual Conference]."

– Rich Peck for UMNS, Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, October 10, 2012

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An investment in knowledge pays the best interest. ~Benjamin Franklin