

Monthly Update

November 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” contains the last of the information from the annual conference reports from across our United Methodist Church and other significant actions as well.

I often say that, “We should work as if it is all up to us – and pray as if it is all up to God.” That, assuredly, is true. Despite the disappointment that some of us may feel over the inability of our country’s leadership to get our economic situation in order, we need to remember the source of our foundation is in God. While the Bible is clear that we need to have sound financial practices in our lives, we hope and pray that will come to our country along with competent decisions that reflect Christian values made by our leaders. That is why we need to pray for those in authority over us.

In November we celebrate Thanksgiving Day and think of the original feast held by the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1621. May I offer you something that I do periodically? Do you remember the old song “Count your Blessings?” As the words to the song go,

“Count your many blessings, name them one by one
Count your blessings – see what God has done.”

Some of the ones I have counted are:

1. Life. I have breath in my body.
2. God is in control. I belong to Him.
3. Salvation through having accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.
4. A Bible I can read.
5. I live in the U.S.A.
6. I have the freedom to/of: worship, speech, travel, press – I can publish, own and bear arms, associate with the friends I like....
7. All of my needs are satisfied. God has taken care of them.
8. I own a home.
9. I own a car.
10. I have friends and co-laborers in ministry.
11. I have memories of the good times, especially the kids I’ve worked with and mentored – “my kids” who are like my sons and daughters. They are warm treasures of the heart.
12. I can read.
13. I can write.

Yes, we have plenty of reasons to be thankful to God – don’t you think?

Please continue to pray and stand with us as we contend for the cause of renewal in the United Methodist Church – as the Lord has called us to.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

November 2013 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

The world needs a peace that passes all misunderstanding.

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The Good Stuff

+ Thanksgiving. As a reminder of just some of the reasons to be thankful – from our heritage....

By the mid-17th century, the custom of autumnal Thanksgivings was established throughout New England. The observance of Thanks-giving Festivals spread to other colonies during the American Revolution, and the Continental Congresses, cognizant of the need for a warring country's continuing grateful entreaties to God, proclaimed yearly Thanksgiving Days during the Revolutionary War, from 1777 to 1783. In 1789, among the first official acts of Congress was approving a motion for proclamation of a national day of thanksgiving – again acknowledging the importance of a day for citizens to gather together and give thanks to God for our nation's blessings.

On October 3, 1789, by way of proclamation, George Washington wrote: "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favour... I do recommend and assign [this day of public Thanksgiving], to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country."

It was 155 years later, at the onset of another war to preserve our liberty, that Congress permanently set November's fourth Thursday as our official national Day of Thanksgiving.

– Extracted from the book *Coming Home*.

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For me, I thank God for the young American men and women who are and will continue to be in harm's way protecting our country and the values that we cherished.

– AOM

+ *One in 12 Churches are Signed-Up: Are You?*

For more than a year, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) has been praying for the Church in America to come together and intentionally reach out to those who are far from God. It's a dream that tugs on Mr. Graham's heart daily. The goal of the nationwide Christian outreach, My Hope America with Billy Graham is to come alongside believers and help them share their faith with friends, family and neighbors....pastors across the nation are in agreement, as nearly 22,000 have registered their churches to be involved and more are signing on every day. Based on most estimates, that represents one out of every 12 churches in America.

Sincerely,

Bert Harper, Director of Marriage, Family, and Pastoral
Ministries

Of Interest

+ *INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT*

On May 20, the U.S. State Department released its annual International Religious Freedom Report which describes the status of religious freedom in countries around the world. The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) offers an overview. The annual report to Congress describes the status of religious freedom in each foreign country, government policies violating religious belief and practices of groups, religious denominations and individuals, and U.S. policies to promote religious freedom around the world. "This report shines light on the challenges that people face as they seek nothing more than the basic religious freedom, the right to worship as they wish," said Secretary of State John Kerry. "Its release is a demonstration of the abiding

commitment of the American people and the entire U.S. government to the advancement of freedom of religion worldwide.” The report chronicles discrimination and violence in countries ranging from established democracies to entrenched dictatorships. It documents that governments around the globe continue to detain, imprison, torture and even kill people for their religious beliefs. The report identifies global problems of discrimination and violence against religious groups: Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs.

Kerry called out some troubling trends identified in the report. One is the potential rise of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic rhetoric persists in some Middle Eastern media and... in public discourse in some countries in Europe, especially where anti-Semitic parties have gained seats in parliaments. Violent attacks continue to be committed against Jews in Europe. Kerry announced that he has named Ira Forman as his envoy to combat anti-Semitism. Another troubling trend is increasing use of laws governing blasphemy and apostasy. According to Kerry, these laws violate fundamental freedoms of expression and religion and ought to be repealed.

– GBCS, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013. See also:
<<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/>>

+ *YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS INCREASING IN FAITH FORMATION*

Popular rhetoric may claim youth and young adults are disappearing from the church. But actual numbers reported by UM congregations show participation by those age groups in ongoing faith formation activities is increasing. More people in both age groups-12-18 for youth and 19-30 for young adults-participated in Christian formation groups and other small group ministries each year since collection of the specific data began in 2009, said Michael Ratliff, head of Young People's Ministries at the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD).

The data, which come from the membership and participation reports that local churches submit each year to their annual conferences, says the number of youth participating in Christian formation groups and other small group ministries totaled 420,907 in 2009, and then increased by 3.4% to 435,377 in 2010 and by 1.2% to 440,584 in 2011. The growth for young adults was similar: 188,151 in 2009, increasing by 2.5% to 192,936 in 2010, and by 1.9% to 196,589 in 2011. In the most recent survey results available, almost one-third of the 32,000 reporting churches in 2011 identified no youth involvement. Possible reasons could be that many UM congregations are aging, or churches might not recognize that they have youth ministry even if they do not have a traditional youth group, Ratliff said.

– GBOD, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 26 / July 3, 2013

+ *CONFERENCES VOTE ON DIVESTMENT*

Four UM annual (regional) conferences-New England, Minnesota, Pacific Northwest and Upper New York-voted in June to divest or have their funds divested from companies involved with Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, says Kairos

Response, an advocacy group. The West Ohio, New York, Northern Illinois, California-Nevada and California-Pacific conferences already had taken similar action. The companies targeted in the recent resolutions included Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, Hewlett Packard and, in one case, General Electric. [Note: Again, it would seem that this reflects a one-sided view of the situation – and not realistic for Israel's right to defend itself and to exist as a country. – AOM]

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 26 / July 3, 2013

+ *UMCOR*

The Rev. Jack Amick of the Detroit Annual Conference has been hired to lead international disaster-response efforts through the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) beginning July 1.

– As reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013

+ RELIEF KITS NEEDED

Recent emergencies in the United States and overseas are exhausting the UMCOR's supply of relief kits: cleaning buckets to layette kits, school kits, and more. – UMCOR, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013

+ The Mission Society

The Mission Society, which deploys missionaries globally in a variety of Christian ministries, has announced the retirement of its president Dick McClain. – As reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013

+ UM REPORTER TO CONTINUE AS DIGITAL RESOURCE

CircuitWriter Media LLC announced June 5 that it has entered into an agreement with UMR Communications Inc. to purchase the rights and digital assets of the UM Reporter with the intention of continuing the work of the Reporter on the Internet and through other digital means. Under the plan, The UM Reporter and The MethoBlog will become divisions of CircuitWriter Media LLC, and will continue to operate with different functions.

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 24 / June 19, 2013

(UM) Bishops A CALL FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION ON THE KOREAN PENINSULA

[Note: It would seem that some among our bishops should have a reality-check. When the most repressive government in the world has refused to compromise with the least call for modification of its dictatorial policies, it would seem that one could recognize that until there is a change in the government, very little compromise would be possible. – AOM]

UM Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Wisconsin Annual Conference chaired the Ecumenical Korea Peace Conference in

Atlanta, Ga. May 15-17, building on the theme “Embrace Peace; Pursue It: From Armistice to Just Peace in Korea.” More than 130 participants representing 10 denominations and including 22 delegates from South Korea worshiped and prayed, engaged in workshops, and came together for three days to develop an ecumenical “Call for Peace and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula.” – Melissa Hinnen, GBGM, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013

Homosexuality. Polling Trends on Same-Sex Marriage

News reports for several years have trumpeted rising poll numbers in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage. About six months ago, the poll numbers purportedly crossed the line to majority support. A recent study by Rice University calls those results into question. The study is unique because it asked the question of the same people, six years apart. Over 1,300 people were asked in 2006 and again in 2012 their level of agreement with this statement: "The only legal marriage should be between one man and one woman."

There was no statistically significant change in opinion from 2006 to 2012. In 2006, 57 percent agreed with the statement, and in 2012, 53 percent agreed with the statement (within the margin of error of the poll). In 2006, 31 percent disagreed with the statement, while in 2012, 33 percent disagreed with the statement. On its face, this poll shows that a majority of Americans favor the traditional definition of marriage, while only about a third favor changing that definition.

What is more intriguing, however, is to see how many people changed their minds over the six years. Of those who agreed with the traditional definition of legal marriage in 2006, one-quarter moved away from that opinion in 2012. At the same time, of those who disagreed with the traditional definition of marriage in 2006, 40 percent moved away from that opinion in 2012. The more who moved away from favoring legal same-sex marriage were

offset by undecided persons who shifted to favor same-sex marriage, so that the overall percentages remained about the same.

These results belie the pervasive media storyline that people are overwhelmingly changing their opinion to favor legalizing same-sex marriage. In fact, if I did my math correctly, almost as many people switched from pro-gay marriage to pro-traditional marriage as went the other way.

My takeaways:

1. Many people are still changing their minds on the advisability of legalizing same-sex marriage. The debate is not over in this country.
2. It is profitable for Christians to make the arguments in favor of traditional male-female monogamous marriage in a winsome way, since even those who at one time favored same-sex marriage are open to reconsidering their viewpoint.
3. Support for same-sex marriage is not as strong in the U.S. as some polls make it out to be. We should not look at it as a foregone conclusion that it will become legal in every state soon.
4. Regardless of our opinion about legalizing same-sex marriage, we should be reaching out with love and respect to our gay and lesbian neighbors, coworkers, and family members. They are people whom God loves infinitely, and we have an opportunity to help introduce them to Jesus and nurture their growth as a disciple. The last thing we should be doing is bashing, insulting, or disrespecting anybody, including gays and lesbians. To do so is to fail to reflect the love of Christ for them.

– By The Rev. Thomas A. Lambrecht, as published in *Perspective*, 9/6/13.

(UM) Men

+ *Border Crossings*

Dr. Gregory Jones, former dean of Duke Divinity School, introduced the concept of "border crossings." In a lecture to a learning group, Greg told us that border crossings occur when people get outside of their normal routine, their educational disciplines, their ethnic group, and their comfort zone where they live on auto pilot.

Living in the familiar is comfortable, but it also prevents us from experiencing new adventures, discovering new worlds, and seeing new possibilities. It hinders us from exciting and meaningful conversations. When we cross borders, our imagination is stimulated and our creative juices begin flowing. Border crossings cause us to listen closer and listening to the unfamiliar enhances our imagination. Jesus was great at this. Most of his illustrations were about people in occupations other than his, such as farmers, builders, shepherds, and government officials.

I introduce this concept to suggest that those of us involved in ministry with men might need to experience some border crossings if we want our imagination to be stimulated and if we want the Holy Spirit to initiate and sustain growth and transformation in men. Imagine what might happen if we decided to just get out and walk through the community that surrounds the building where we gather to worship. Would our eyes see that which was never noticed before? What would we smell? What sounds would we hear? And maybe the most haunting question of all, "Would we see the Risen Christ beckoning us to join Him in a ministry opportunity we never noticed, smelled or heard a sound from previously?"

Imagine what might happen if men began to talk about how their secular work abilities and skills could be employed to bless others and even more how they might pool those abilities together to bless even more people.

Imagine what might happen as men learn how their gifts might be enhanced by working with others whose gifts differ from theirs but because we follow the Risen Christ we freely release our gifts to be employed by God to bless God's world. Maybe the conversation would move from the default mindset of "Ain't it awful here at our church" to "My God, I didn't realize the enormous assets we have available!"

If renewal is to break out for men who feel depressed and powerless in our churches and if new men are to embrace the Risen Christ we need to experience border crossings.

Border crossings may help us move away from the routine to new practices that move us and others closer to

God.

God is creating new possibilities. We need to become more intentional about discovering God's purposes and allow them to bloom and even explode within us as we cross borders.

Blessings,

Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr.

– By Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr., as published in a bimonthly e-mail letter from agency officers and staff to leaders of United Methodist Men; October 14, 2013. Bishop Swanson is the President of the General Commission on UM Men

+ ***Your mess can become your message*** by Dan Ramsey

“Hello my Friends,

I like the conversation Bob Benson recounts in his book, *See You at the House*, about his friend who'd had a heart attack. For a while it seemed his friend wouldn't make it. But he recovered.

Months later Bob asked him, "How did you like your heart attack?"

"It scared me to death, almost."

"Would you do it again?"

"No!"

"Would you recommend it?" Bob asked.

"Definitely not."

Then Bob asked him, "Does your life mean more to you now than it did before?"

"Well, yes."

"You and your wife always had a beautiful marriage, but are you closer now than ever?"

"Yes."

"Do you have a new compassion for people—a deeper understanding and sympathy?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you know the Lord in a richer fellowship than you'd ever realized?"

"Yes."

Then Bob said, "So, how'd you like your heart attack?"

Deuteronomy 11:2 reminds us to remember what you've learned about the Lord through your experience with Him. Do that, my friend, and your mess will become your message!

This is close to my heart lately. Things are different for me. I know the Lord in a richer manner.

Fellowship is something we all share from time to time. We are so busy in all of the many ministry opportunities that are before us, we many times wonder which one to try first. Let's attempt to focus on a goal of communicating with all or even one local church to:

Learn about their ministry,

Learn about their successes or failures,

Learn about those persons in ministry at that church and the people they touch, and bring that knowledge to share

from the local church to the commission.

I would be proud if we could reach every local church. It is a lofty goal.

Each conference (UMM) president, jurisdictional president, or UM Man has the potential to move us to a better knowledge of the blessings God gives us. Such actions could lead us to a richer fellowship than we could ever imagine.

We can learn a lot if we reach out to the local churches.

It is fall; my heart is that all of you enjoy our Risen Savior. Share him with someone.

Thinking of you!!

Dan Ramsey, president, National Association of Conference Presidents

– Dan Ramsey; taken From Max Lucado's daily message "Your mess can be your message".

(UM) Women/Women's Issues The *General Commission on the Status and Role of Women*

[Note: The 2012 General Conference came within a hair's breadth of eliminating this organization. When you read this, can see why the move was almost successful. All too often we in the United Methodist Church "major in minors" when prioritizing what we do. This is a waste of the expenditure of apportionment money. – AOM]

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) has updated its logo to adopt a new look. The traditional logo, in use since the agency's beginnings, had a look that was iconic in those early days of the modern U.S. feminist movement. It featured a woman's symbol superimposed on a blocky cross, both in white relief on a background

of purple, a traditional color of the woman's movement dating back to the suffragists. The new GCSRW symbol retains the color and a block-style cross but also uses a circle and another cross to suggest the woman's symbol incorporated into it. It's a cleaner, fresher look that honors the agency's historical mission. "We at the General Commission see our mission for the full participation and inclusion of all women in the life of the church as alive and deeply needed by the church," said General Secretary Dawn Wiggins Hare. Our board and staff recognize that we have an incredible heritage and with that comes the responsibility of carrying the mission of the GCSRW forward," she said. "In addition to the symbolism that our new logo brings, we are hopeful that the very fact of its renewal gives hope to the women and men of the UMC that our mission will continue to be identified as a core value of the church."

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013

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There are far better things ahead than any we leave behind. – C.S. Lewis

Global Outlook

Whoso neglects learning in his youth loses the past and is dead to the future. – Euripides

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European Union (EU). EU LEADERS MEET CHURCH AND FAITH LEADERS

Germany Area Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, president of the Council of Bishops, was among 18 religious leaders who met with the top leaders of the European Union (EU). At the invitation of the EU president, the group of high-level Christian,

Jewish, Muslim and Hindu leaders from across the continent met May 30 in Brussels for talks on European citizenship issues. Bishop Wenner extended greetings of the Council of Bishops to the EU leaders. José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, underlined how these summits reflect the efforts being made in Europe to further a sense of community. She highlighted the focus of the Social Creed of The UMC on the rights and dignity of all persons. She said that churches and faith communities, together with politicians, must work to help all members of society make their

voices as citizens heard. This is especially true for minorities, such as the Roma people and migrants who see themselves as Europeans, despite many difficulties. "The poor are the most seriously affected by the crises. Please do all you can to strengthen the weakest," Wenner urged the EU leadership.

The high-level meeting of religious leaders was the ninth in the series of meetings launched by President Barroso in 2005. The topic of this year's meeting was the question how to intensify the dialogue with citizens and societal organizations on the future of Europe and about the fundamental, individual and collective rights that are

guaranteed by European citizenship. The contribution of the representatives of churches and religious communities fed into the broader, ongoing Europe-wide debate among citizens, businesses, civil society and government organizations, in the context of the European Year of Citizens 2013.

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 24 / June 19, 2013

The National Council of Churches.

The National Council of Churches is seeking candidates for general secretary/president in the 63-year-old ecumenical organization.

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A World Council of Churches. CHRISTIAN SUPPORT IN MIDDLE EAST NEEDED

[Note: This reflects a lack of understanding of the history of the region and of the irreconcilable differences between Islamic and Christian beliefs. The influence of the WCC has declined drastically over the past sixty years; with an examination of this statement, it is easy to see. This too is a waste of the expenditure of apportionment money. – AOM]

A World Council of Churches conference has issued a joint statement affirming-peace/middle-east-peace/statement-on-christian-presence-and-witness-in-the-middle-east calling on churches and ecumenical groups to commit themselves to prayer and action to support the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East. The conference, held May 21-25 in Beirut, Lebanon, was organized by the WCC and the Middle East Council of Churches. The statement was an outcome of discussions engaging more than a hundred church leaders and representatives of the ecumenical organizations in the Arab world. The statement acknowledged the deep-rooted history of Christian presence in the region, efforts for peace in the Israel Palestine conflict, political solutions towards conflict in Syria, and political stability in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, calling the churches to act in unity to address challenges posed by unprecedented political, cultural and historical convulsions in the region. In this context, the statement called the churches to “continue to be involved in the building of democratic civil societies, based on the rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights, including religious freedom.”

“This is [the] time for such action, for a new vision of Christian cooperation in the region, for recommitment to Christian Muslim engagement, for engagement with Jewish partners also working for peace and justice, expressing our Christian vocations by working together to express mutual support and solidarity,” read the statement. It continued to say that these actions “may help to stem the flow of Christians from the region and to eliminate the barriers to full and meaningful lives for Christians in the countries of the Middle East. In the Middle East, Christians understand that 'only united can we flourish; divided we perish'.”

At the conference, another statement was released expressing concern over the recent kidnapping of two Syrian Orthodox bishops from Aleppo, Syria in April. It reads in part, “We pray and hope that their speedy release will strengthen the inter-religious relations and trust that have been built up over centuries in a region that has been and still is an example of diversity and living together in mutual respect.”

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, Vol. 41, Issue 23 / June 12, 2013

Annual Conference Report

East Africa and Burundi Annual Conferences. The 23rd session of the Burundi and East Africa Annual Conferences was held Aug. 21–24 in Migori, Kenya under the theme “Developing Servant Leaders for Building the Church of Jesus Christ.” Bishop Daniel Wandabula’s welcoming address stressed the importance of vibrant, growing, fruitful congregations, radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, local and international risk-taking mission and extravagant generosity to improve the work of God within and beyond the two conferences. The bishop told the delegates that the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) and General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) have filed a complaint against him; the complaint is in

the supervisory response period. He said that he has done nothing wrong and is ready to go through the process as stipulated in the Book of Discipline. He thanked the church members for their continued prayers and support during the process.

During the opening session, delegates were treated to vibrant worship and a sermon by guest speaker the Rev. Elisha Odero. This 23rd session featured three more guest speakers: Bishop David Thagana from Gospel Outreach Assembly, the Rev. Elisha Odero and the Rev. Charles Otigo.

Resolutions passed include working to help Rwanda become a provisional conference by 2016, Kenya/Ethiopia an annual conference by 2016, Burundi Conference an episcopal area by 2016 and to add three districts in Kenya. Apportionments will be distributed as follows: 60% retained at the local church to contribute to pastor salaries and pensions, 25% forwarded to the district, 8% forwarded to the national chapter, 7% forwarded to the annual conference. All paid staff will be pensionable; 5% of monthly wages will be sent to the Pensions and Health Benefits conference bank account. The conference will establish a bridge partnership between Kenya and the North Georgia Annual Conference. Congregations will be self-governing, self-propagating and self-supporting. All levels of the church should act as role models of servant leadership, maintain periodic auditable accounts and set strategic plans for church development. The UM Bible College will be revived by January 2014, through an Educational Task Force. Students will pay fees not lower than \$100 per two-week semester. The task force will formulate a workable curriculum that should include English as the official language and Kiswahili or other national languages. The Board of Ordained Ministry will be incorporated at all levels of the church from district to the annual conference. Vetting of ordination candidates should be consistent with the current Book of Discipline, with considerations relevant to certain disadvantaged communities applied to suit the East African context. Membership rolls and statistics will be maintained at all levels of the church. The committee on episcopacy will deepen its relationship with the bishop, spiritually and socially.

Membership in the East Africa Annual Conference is 158,363, with 270 congregations in 27 districts served by 270 clergy. Membership in the Burundi Annual Conference is 242,502 with 248 congregations in 12 districts served by 248 clergy.

– Carol Alois Ososo, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 40 / October 9, 2013
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A friend in need is a friend indeed. – American folk saying