

Monthly Update

January 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

2014! Where does the time go? When I was a boy, I remembered my mother telling me that the older you get, the faster time goes by. That is so true. It seems as if there is not enough time to do everything that is needed – so that makes it all the more important for us to use the time we do have wisely. “Redeeming the time that the Lord has given us.”

I trust that each of you has had a good Christmas and are looking forward to a new year in 2014. 2013 was interesting; 2014 will prove to be more so, I believe. As I had stated in the December 2013 issue of the Update, we were going to take a moratorium on serious news and offer positive, uplifting reading for you. The January 2014 Update gives you some what we had postponed in our last issue. You will see why we waited to present it.

I do want to thank each of you for your response to our appeal for help, both with your finances and with your prayers. Your participation in both of these areas in the ministry of Concerned Methodists is key to what we do. The finances enable us to continue publishing our information; maintaining our website; preparing studies; publishing books, and participating in conferences important to our operation. Your prayers are of crucial importance in helping us address the issue at hand. Assuredly, we always need them.

This Monthly Update contains more information on what is happening in our society, the homosexual initiatives, and continuing efforts by employees of the United Methodist Church to help our national leadership run the country.

I think that there is little doubt that we continue to have leadership challenges within our Council of Bishops. We must remember to keep them in our prayers – while at the same time challenging positions that we deem to be questionable and actions that do not reflect sound leadership principles. We deal with some of the conflict present in that body.

One of our associates, a United Methodist pastor who has deep insight into the issues facing our church, asked me what I thought of the statement by our Council of Bishops on the issue of some UM pastors performing same-sex “weddings” and publicly advocating in this area. When one goes against the established position of the organization, then he should resign. An Army general could not publicly oppose a war in which the country was involved; this would be insubordination and harmful to his soldiers. Good leadership principles are the same regardless of what type of organization a person represents.

May I again say “Thank you” for your response to our annual appeal for support to this ministry? Please continue to stand with us.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

January 2014 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

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

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The Good Stuff

+ *Can the Connection be Saved? (Part 1) Doctrine*, by Dr. Riley B. Case

We United Methodists have our own family language, insider words and phrases unique to us. One of these is "The Connection," which goes all the way back to John Wesley and was a favorite of Francis Asbury and various leaders since then. It was really a Methodist concept (one of a number of things that got imposed upon former Evangelical United Brethren). It has to do with being in covenant relationships with each other, doing mission together, and sharing some core beliefs and values. Connectionalism is defined in Para. 130 of the Discipline: We are connected by sharing common tradition of faith, including our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules, by sharing together a constitutional polity...by sharing a common mission...and by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our distinctive way of doing things."

Time for a reality check. "The Connection" is not faring well these days. Churches are still paying apportionments, to be sure; boards and agency heads still gather at the "connectional table," to be sure. Bishops' cabinets meet and appointments are made, to be sure. But we have problems, not the least of which is that our membership has declined for over forty years straight. The Council of Bishops appears to be badly divided. Money is not coming in and budgets are being cut. The average age of UM church members is increasing. For all our talk of diversity we are still basically white and middle class. But more importantly, there seems to be a loss of spirit. It just doesn't feel as good as it once did to be identified as United Methodist these days.

We face rebellion, not only against connectionalism, but against the doctrine and discipline of the church. Thirty pastors from Eastern Pennsylvania have pledged together to directly defy our covenant agreements to perform a same sex marriage. A bishop of the church, who once upon a time took vows to uphold the church's doctrine, proclaims his own views about sexuality trump any Bible teaching, all church doctrine, any covenants, and the Discipline, and he will himself perform a same-sex marriage. It's like having the father disown his own family.

Our last General Conference was an unmitigated disaster: attempts to restructure were beaten back; a small group blocked legislation from being conducted; there were demonstrations of persons against their own church and against persons that they presumably are in covenant with and who are supposedly Christian brothers and sisters.

Despite all of this, many persons, and especially persons associated with The Confessing Movement [and Concerned Methodists], are still committed to The United Methodist Church. We believe its doctrine. We support its polity. We pursue the church's stated mission. United Methodist ethos as we understand it is what we live and breathe. In other words, we believe in "the connection" and in "connectionalism." It is unfortunate that it appears to be we, and not the leaders of the church, who at the moment seek to defend connectionalism against forces that evidently would be willing to unravel our relationships. We desire unity, common purpose, and commitment to a mission. And we pledge ourselves not to pass resolutions or lead demonstrations or engage in deliberate acts of ecclesiastical disobedience against our own brothers and sisters. We also desire a path that would bring renewal to the church....

The first part of the definition of connectionalism speaks of sharing a common tradition of faith, including our Doctrinal Standards and our General Rules. Perhaps it is time for discussion. Could we agree that in any conversations about unity in the church that we start with John Wesley and Wesleyanism? The most common value that we share is our Wesleyan heritage and our Wesleyan beliefs. There are obviously some different interpretations of Wesley, but could we agree that at least we have Wesley as a starting point for conversation?

What is Wesley's essential message and how does it relate to today?

Can we agree that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he rose again, and that all who believe in him have everlasting life? Can we agree in the primacy of Scripture as interpreted by tradition, reason, and experience? Can we agree on unlimited atonement, that Christ died for all and that all are welcome at the foot of the cross? Can we agree that we are called to holiness and holy living? And for those who have problems with our doctrine, can we talk about this?

Can we also agree that we have neglected our core values and beliefs? At least one seminary is seeking restoration of Wesleyan theology. United Theological Seminary held on October 26 a major conference on "Why United Methodists Must Recover Their Doctrinal Heritage." One of the speakers at that event, Dr. William Abraham of Perkins, has a recent book, *Key United Methodist Beliefs*, co-authored with United's academic dean, Dr. David F. Watson.

Places like Asbury and other non-UM Wesleyan seminaries have a deep commitment to Wesley. St. Paul's seminary identifies itself as rooted in Wesley and the United Methodist traditions. But we might ask whether beyond those places: where does Wesley or our Wesleyan doctrine get any special attention?

Seminaries like Iliff and Boston do not even identify themselves or even mention that they are UM-connected, let alone indicate they are committed to Wesleyanism or even the connection. Local churches who drop "United Methodist" from their sign boards are sometimes criticized. What about colleges and universities and seminaries which are supposedly UM-connected who don't identify themselves as such? Other than taking UM money how are some of these seminaries connected?

Garrett-Evangelical lists a speaker's bureau of faculty members willing to visit local churches and speak on their area of interest and expertise. The topics that the faculty has listed to make presentations reveal much about the focus of at least that seminary. According to the list among other topics five professors will talk on feminist theology, three on lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer and gender issues, one on HIV-AIDS, three on womanist theology, three on liberation theology, six on Black theology or African American Ministries, two on global justice, and one on queer theology. One professor will speak on Wesley. Are these the emphases that will bring renewal to the church? Does this sound like an institution committed to the doctrinal standards and the General Rules?

Let's step up for the connection. Let's be proud of the cross and the flame. Let's sing together "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing my Great Redeemer's praise."

– By Dr. Riley Case, Happenings around the Church, October 29, 2013

+ *Washington Needs An Operation, and The Doctor Is In*

Before this year, most Americans had probably never heard of Dr. Ben Carson. Despite being a world-renowned neurosurgeon whose life story was made into a popular movie starring Cuba Gooding, Jr., Dr. Carson became a household name when he blew the socks off Washington, D.C. with a speech that many called the longest 27 minutes of Barack Obama's presidency. From education to taxes and health care, the famous surgeon spoke from the heart about the problems facing our nation, telling the President what so many voters wish they could: his ideas are failing America. Dr. Carson's keynote speech was so powerful and his solutions so practical that the Wall Street Journal ran an editorial the next day, "Ben Carson for President." He spoke at FRC Action's Values Voter Summit. The legendary doctor conservatives including Senators Ted Cruz (R-Texas), Rand Paul (R-Ky.), and Rick Santorum, Governor Mike Huckabee, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wisc.), Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin, Fox News's Todd Starnes, Star Parker, Josh Duggar, and many others!

Before he made a political splash, Dr. Carson was already a hero to the medical community. The son of a single parent who grew up in inner-city Detroit, Dr. Carson overcame dire poverty thanks to a mother who emphasized the importance of education. He went on to make global headlines with a career that included: the first and only successful separation of craniopagus (Siamese) twins joined at the back of the head in 1987, the first completely successful separation of type-2 vertical craniopagus twins in 1997 in South Africa, and the first successful placement of an intrauterine shunt for a hydrocephalic twin. Dr. Carson holds more than 60 honorary

doctorate degrees and has received literally hundreds of awards and citations.

In 2001, Carson was named by CNN and Time magazine as one of the nation's 20 foremost physicians and scientists. In June, 2008, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George W. Bush, which is the highest civilian honor in the land. Dr. Carson was recognized in November 2008 by U.S. News & World Report and Harvard's Center for Public Leadership, as one of "America's Best Leaders." On February 7, 2009, the award-winning movie based on his memoir, *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*, starring Cuba Gooding, Jr. as Carson, aired on TNT. In June, 2013, after 40 years of medical endeavors, Carson retired and today serves as Professor Emeritus of Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University. In addition to his media appearances, Carson writes a weekly opinion column for the Washington Times. Carson has been married for over 37 years to his wife, Candy, and is the father of three sons.

– E-mail received from FRC Action

+ Dr. Ben Carson's book "*America the Beautiful*" – What is America becoming?"

And what can she be, if we reclaim a vision for the things that made her great in the first place? Now Dr. Ben Carson reveals his vision for retaking America in his New York Times best-seller *America the Beautiful: Rediscovering What Made This Nation Great*. In *America the Beautiful*, Dr. Carson offers Americans a stark alternative to the vision President Barack Obama has put forth. Dr. Carson argues that we must learn from our past in order to chart a better course for our future. Carson uses his own American success story — detailing his ascent from inner-city poverty to international medical and humanitarian acclaim — as the launching point for a journey of rediscovery of the fundamental truths and principles that made America such a great nation.

Written by a man who has experienced America's best and worst firsthand, *America the Beautiful* is at once alarming, convincing, and inspiring. After reading this book, you will find out why Dr. Carson's remarks at the National Prayer Breakfast so angered President Obama and alarmed the national media. In *America the Beautiful* Carson shares his perspectives on our nation's origins, why our Judeo-Christian heritage remains so relevant and needed today, our failing educational system, and the great threat posed by Obama's socialism and healthcare plan. There is much more in this book, including:

Dr. Carson's take on the tea party and why it has emerged as such a force

Why the Republican and Democratic parties have done "consistent" harm to the country

The founders' fear of "abuse of power" and why it's so relevant today

How slavery that occurred over a hundred years ago should not be used "to tip the scales forever"

His 1997 Prayer Breakfast remarks that jolted President Bill Clinton and led to Carson receiving a standing ovation

Why he chose to become a neurosurgeon

The truth about the Bible and its opposition to socialism

His view about Ben Franklin as one of the "wisest" men to have ever lived

The Constitution and moral values: the surprising connection

Why government is the root cause of crises in Greece and Europe . . . and the possibility of such troubles in the U.S.

The new paranoia in America: political correctness

Fixing our healthcare — it's not about more money!

How lawsuits have hurt patient care and Howard Dean's shocking admission about this

Why racism is gradually becoming a "dinosaur" in America

And much, much more!

This is not only Dr. Carson's manifesto — it is an American manifesto of the values that helped make Dr. Carson such a success, the same ones that shaped America's past and can make us great again! *America the Beautiful* calls us all to use our God-given talents to improve our lives, our communities, our nation, and our world.

Dr. Carson has already been talked about as a presidential candidate in 2016 — making his book and vision even more timely and important to read.

Get this book. Read it. Absorb it. And share it! – Betsy

– E-mail received from one of our associates. [Note: I heartily agree. Dr. Carson is an eloquent, skilled surgeon. – AOM]

Of Interest

+ *Neil Alexander, president and publisher* of the UM Publishing House (UMPH) since February 1996, has announced plans to retire by or just after the April 2016 General Conference.

– As published in *UMNewScope*, Vol. 41, Issue 44; November 6, 2013.

+ *Groups Approve Budget-building Guidelines*

Members of the Connectional Table (CT) and the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) established

principles that will guide preparation of general church apportionment proposals to the 2016 General Conference. Meeting Nov. 20 in joint session, the two bodies unanimously agreed that the total budget figure for 2017–2020 will be based on financial projections from the Economic Advisory Committee. That committee is made up of eight to 10 economists. In previous years, that committee has proposed high, medium and low figures. This quadrennium only one figure will be considered. That group also will provide the anticipated collection rate from local churches during that four-year period. Past receipts have been about 88% of the goal amounts. In the 2008–2012 quadrennium, the apportioned total was \$640 million; that amount was lowered to \$604 million during the current four-year period, which ends in 2016. A review of the past 20 years of World Service Fund allocations to the general agencies that receive them found that the percentage amount allotted to each agency has not changed significantly.

Therefore, the budget arms of the two groups proposed that the baseline percentage for the 2017–2020 period be the same as the present quadrennium. Percentages may be adjusted based on specific missional outcomes in annual conferences and local congregations. The CT is assessing ministries in the four areas of focus, vital congregations and the worldwide nature of the church. The two groups also will survey bishops, general agencies and annual conference leaders to receive responses to a proposal whereby conferences would receive a higher total apportionment but be able to retain part of the total. The model would be similar to how the Ministerial Education Fund operates. At present, conferences retain 25% of the total receipts to that fund. The proposal's goal is to provide a holistic view of the cost of ministry outside the walls of a local church.

In April 2015, the CT and GCFA will meet to approve programs and budget proposals for the 2016 General Conference, which will have final say on the denomination-wide budget. About 2.5 cents out of every dollar given to local churches is used to support general church ministries.

– Rich Peck for United Methodist News Service (UMNS), as published in *UMNewscope*, December 4, 2013

+ *Religious leaders warn against food stamp cuts*. If Congress drastically cuts the federal food stamp program, religious institutions will not be able to fill the gap for hungry families. That was the message delivered by religious leaders from southeastern states who participated in an Oct. 30 media briefing. The leaders expressed their concerns the same day as the first public meeting of the Congressional farm bill conference committee in Washington. The U.S. House version of the farm bill would cut the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the nation's primary food assistance program, by \$39 billion. In addition, on Nov. 1, the benefits of all 48 million people in the SNAP program were cut across the board, for an average of 8%, said James Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center in Washington. Every southeastern state exceeds the U.S. national child poverty rate of 22.6%, according to the action center's latest analysis. The SNAP caseload in eight southeastern states has increased 65.9% over the past five years. Religious leaders criticized the assumption of some federal lawmakers that faith communities can pick up the cost of cuts to SNAP. [Note: That should be the ministry of the church! We have lost sight of who we are! – AOM]

(UM) Bishops

+ *Bishops Speak Out on Same-sex Wedding*

Retired Bishop Melvin Talbert and Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, episcopal leader of the North Alabama Annual Conference, have released statements about a pending wedding between two gay men. Bishop Talbert will officiate at the Oct. 26 wedding in Birmingham. Wallace-Padgett asked Talbert not to officiate because the wedding violates the Book of Discipline.

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 41 / October 16, 2013

+ *Houston clergy urge defeat of immigration bill*

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie of the Texas Annual Conference joined other faith leaders Oct. 23 for a news conference during which they issued a statement urging lawmakers to reject federal immigration legislation that would toughen penalties.

– UMNS, as published in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 44; November 6, 2013.

+ *Statement of the Council of Bishops*

[Note: This is extremely problematic. Instead of dealing decisively with an issue whose morality is addressed clearly in the Bible and supported by secular socio-medical-psychological data, the Council of Bishops is waffling. In actuality, they are for the most part covertly lending tacit support to these actions. What does the Bible say about a “trumpet not giving a clear call...”? If they had learned that a UM pastor had become a life member of the Ku Klux Klan, there would be no hesitation in demanding that he immediately surrender his credentials. This is a deep-seated problem. – AOM]

On October 26, 2013, retired Bishop Melvin Talbert conducted a ceremony celebrating the marriage of a samegender couple in Center Point, Alabama. Prior to October 26, 2013 Bishop Talbert advised Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, resident bishop of the North Alabama Conference, of his intention. Bishop Wallace-Padgett requested that Bishop Talbert not perform the ceremony in the area in which she serves. After conversation with Bishop Wallace-Padgett, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, president of the Council of Bishops, engaged the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops in a discussion about the proposed action. On October 21, 2013, the Executive Committee issued a statement requesting Bishop Talbert not to perform the ceremony in Bishop Wallace-Padgett’s area. They said, in part,

“The bishops of the church are bound together in a covenant and all ordained elders are committed to uphold the Book of Discipline. ‘Conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies’ are chargeable offenses in The United Methodist Church” (§2702.1.b).

The actions of Bishop Talbert raise considerable concerns and have stimulated much conversation, reflection, and prayer among the members of the Council of Bishops. The Council recognizes the deep divisions and pain in our church over these issues. United Methodists are not of one mind, and followers of Christ and people of conscience hold conflicting views. These issues require continuing honest and respectful conversation as well as prayer throughout the church.

The purpose of the Council of Bishops is to lead the church in its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. To that end, bishops are also required to “uphold the discipline and order of the Church . . . [and to share] with other bishops in the oversight of the whole church” (§403.1.f) When there are violations of the Book of Discipline, a response is required. However, the General Conference has given the Council of Bishops limited authority for the task of holding one another accountable. Such authority and accountability resides in the College of Bishops and the Jurisdiction or Central Conference Committees on Episcopacy (§413 and §403.1.f).

Therefore, the Council of Bishops, after much prayer and conversation, takes the following actions:

We acknowledge that we, the Council of Bishops, and the Church are not of one mind in

matters of human sexuality; pain exists throughout the connection, including persons who support Bishop Talbert's actions and persons who object to them. We express our pastoral concern and care for all people.

We affirm the October 21, 2013 action of the Executive Committee which requested that Bishop Talbert not conduct a ceremony celebrating the marriage of a same-gender couple in the North Alabama area.

We respectfully request that Bishop Wenner, President of the Council of Bishops, and Bishop Wallace-Padgett, Resident Bishop of the North Alabama Conference, address the action of Bishop Talbert and file a complaint under the provisions of Paragraph 413 for undermining the ministry of a colleague (§2702.1.f) and conducting a ceremony to celebrate the marriage of a same-gender couple (§2702.1.b) within the bounds of the North Alabama Conference.

We recommend that the Executive Committee initiate a task force to lead honest and respectful conversations regarding human sexuality, race and gender in a world-wide perspective in our shared commitment to clear theological understanding of the mission and polity of The United Methodist Church.

As a Council of Bishops, we affirm the theological task articulated in the Book of Discipline (§105, p. 87). "United Methodists as a diverse people continue to strive for consensus in understanding the gospel. In our diversity, we are held together by a shared inheritance and a common desire to participate in the creative and redemptive activity of God. Our task is to articulate a vision in a way that will draw us together as a people in mission. . . . We proceed with our theological task, trusting that the Spirit will grant us wisdom to continue our journey with the whole people of God."

– As published in UMNewscope, November 20, 2013

+ *Mixed Reaction to Requested Complaint against Bishop*

[Note: This is extremely problematic, again, as exemplified by this article and others following. There should be clear, decisive action addressing this problem. Unresolved sin is like a virus – if not eliminated, it tends to spread. – AOM]

The Council of Bishops' call for a complaint to be filed against one of its own is prompting mixed reactions from UMs across the theological spectrum – including from the bishops themselves. On Nov. 15, the council "respectfully" requested a formal complaint be filed against retired Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, who officiated at a same-sex union on Oct. 26 despite church law. The council's statement specifically urged the complaint be filed by Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, the council's president, and Birmingham Area Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, who oversees the North Alabama Annual Conference where the ceremony took place.

Many of the bishops sent out copies of the statement to the areas they oversee, and some added their own thoughts in pastoral letters. "I affirm this statement, and I do ask for the people of Holston Conference to be in prayer for all who are hurt," said Bishop Mary Virginia Taylor, who leads the Holston Annual Conference that includes UMs in Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia. Greater Northwest Area Bishop Grant Hagiya offered a different message, showing that the bishops are in many ways as divided as the denomination they lead on how best to minister with gay and lesbian individuals. Hagiya commended the council's commitment to address the topic of human sexuality in a task force. And, Mike Taylor, he asked for prayer. "However, I do not support the actions suggested in response to Bishop Talbert, and stood outside the majority vote of the Council because of this," he said. "I will address my personal opinions and concerns in a deeper way in the near future." Chicago Area Bishop Sally Dyck, who leads the Northern Illinois Conference, issued a statement on Nov. 20, encouraging UMs to be welcoming and discouraging formal complaints as a way forward. She added that she planned to hold open gatherings in the conference to discuss how to reframe the conversation, based on Acts 15. Good News released a response applauding the bishops' recommendation. "We view the statement as an implied rebuke of Bishop Talbert's actions," Good News said. "The fact that the Council requested that complaints be filed against Bishop Talbert . . . is very significant. It is virtually unprecedented for a bishop to file a complaint against another bishop."

Bishops and advocacy groups are not the only UMs speaking out. Among those responding publicly to the council's statement were Bobby Prince and Joe Openshaw, the couple whose union Talbert celebrated. Prince and Openshaw took issue not only with the council's recommended sanction against Talbert but with the fact the council did not use their names. "We are two men who are loved by the people at Discovery UMC (in Hoover, Ala.), but are pushed aside by the UMC," the couple wrote in a Nov. 16 letter to the Council of Bishops. The Methodist Federation for Social Action, a progressive group that advocates for fuller inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals, issued a response to the Council of Bishops statement. Mountain Sky Area Bishop Elaine Stanovsky is the president of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops and will receive any complaint filed against Talbert. Like other bishops, Stanovsky also sent out a statement to her area (Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone conferences) on the council's actions.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as published in UMNewscope, November 27, 2013

+ *Bishops Called to Embrace "Team Spirit"*

[Note: This is yet another example of giving publicity to this problem and laying the ground work to support it. – AOM]

As they met in Lake Junaluska, active and retired UM bishops clearly are not of one mind regarding human sexuality and other issues the denomination faces. But bishops need to talk and listen to one another "in an attitude of team spirit," Germany Area Bishop Rosemarie Wenner said in her presidential address to the Council. She said the bishops need to bring their disagreements to the table, all voices must be heard and they must search for compromise. The leading question has to be missional, she said, and address how not to hinder the Holy Spirit from saving human beings. Finally, she said, the bishops will have to recognize that conflicts are an ongoing reality in the church. "Because the church of Jesus Christ is composed of many diverse people, unity is not a static agreement, but a constant move, where we engage with one another in discerning God's will for all," she said. Wenner said the bishops must speak publicly and lead: "We have to avoid, however, that through our speeches we multiply the anxiety and even the fights many groups in the church are living in. . . ."

– As published in UMNewscope, November 20, 2013

Homosexuality.

+ *Disruption Prompts Church Leaders to Address Sexuality Issues*

[Note: This is still another example of not addressing this problem aggressively and shows a lack of leadership at its highest levels. Those who were disrupting the meeting should have been summarily arrested, evicted, and put out of the meeting so that these leaders could have conducted the business of the church. We should not give a forum to continue the advocacy supporting this issue. Later in this and the next issues of the Update, you will see other articles giving further platforms to publicize this area to gain wider acceptance. This reflects a deep problem in our leadership. – AOM]

The Connectional Table (CT) suspended business Nov. 19 for conversation around inclusiveness after a disruption by Love Prevails, a group advocating inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people in the life of The UMC. The disruption began in the morning session, as Love Prevails member Julie Todd, a New England Annual Conference pastor, walked among the meeting tables, singing the names of people who lost their clergy credentials, abandoned plans to go into UM ministry or left the church because of The UMC's position on homosexuality. When the CT members began reciting together the covenant under which they would conduct their business, Todd's voice rose in competition. "Stop, stop, we've got to stop!" said table member Cynthia Kent. "I'm embarrassed. Were we not talking about peacemaking just yesterday?" Kent asked the group. "We're not acting right here. . . . Somebody's got to talk to somebody." After Kent's statement and an emotional appeal by table member Fred Brewington, Bishop Bruce Ough, chairperson, called for a break. He and members of the CT met with the handful of Love Prevails members, and when the meeting reconvened, the CT approved changing its agenda to create time for Christian conferencing on the issue.

The 59-member CT brings together leaders from around the church to coordinate the mission, ministries and resources of the denomination. Love Prevails is the action arm of Kairos CoMotion, an unofficial UM group founded by the Rev. Amy DeLong of Wisconsin. Opening the floor for discussion, Ough said, “The issues of homosexuality and same-gender marriage are issues that we cannot dodge as a denomination. . . . We are not all of one mind, and I don’t think we know what the mind of Christ is on this either.” Other issues also must be addressed involving people on the margins, people of color, persons who are poor, Ough said. “There are many places where we have not created the settings where we can listen deeply and profoundly enough” and get a “sense of what God is calling us to do.”

North Carolina Bishop Hope Morgan Ward said her episcopal area is in its 17th year of dialogue around this issue. In June 2012, the conference approved a resolution encouraging the church to change its language. She requested that the group consider working with other partners in crafting better language than what the church now uses. “All I can say is thank you for having this conversation because it allows youth to see that people can change and people can have conversations and people can compromise,” said Kevin Saucedo, a youth representative on the table, who identified himself as gay. Thomas Kemper, top staff executive of the General Board of Global Ministries, said the Connectional Table needs to find a way to build relationships and open a conversation “with our brothers and sisters in Africa.” Several members noted the challenge of addressing same-gender issues in Africa. Bishop Patrick Streiff said the people of the Central and Southern Europe Episcopal Area are of different minds on this issue. “How can we live together with different views? It’s not a question of who wins and who loses.” In the small-group conversation right after the Love Prevails demonstration, the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, said the issue underlies all of the other issues that the Connectional Table is facing. It’s not just an issue for the U.S. church, she said. “It’s underneath the surface of the global church.”

– Rich Peck for UMNS, Tim Tanton, UMNS, as published in UMNewscope, November 27, 2013

+ *Frank Asks Bishops to “Stop the Trials”*

In a Nov. 12 open letter to the Council of Bishops, the Rev. Thomas E. Frank, an expert on UM polity, urges the Council, for the sake of church unity, to stop church trials of elders accused of violating the denomination’s stance on homosexuality. [Note: “the Rev. Frank, an expert”??? I would question that. – AOM] His letter says, in part:

“I ask you, for the sake of the unity of the church, to stop the trials. We need to engage our differences through ‘Christian conversation’ within our conferences and particularly within our orders of elders. Church trials are ‘an expedient of last resort’ and are not the way forward. . . . “Nothing in the Book of Discipline requires that you refer complaints to counsel for the church and subsequent trial. You have discretion as the chief pastors of the church over the manner, purpose and conduct of any supervisory response and just resolution under ‘fair process.’ . . .

“Our church is desperately in need of open conversation on these pastoral issues. We are retreating into our various camps and avoiding the hard work of engaging each other’s views. You as a Council and as individual bishops can set a new tone in which we can speak together openly and honestly, without fear of retribution. As Wesley’s Large Minutes began, ‘It is desired, that all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that every person speak freely whatever is in his heart.’ This is the collective spirit in which the Holy Spirit is welcomed, and the conversation flourishes. Please lead us in that spirit.”

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner indicated that the bishops considered Frank’s letter and other reaction in the deliberations at Lake Junaluska that led to their joint statement. – UMNS, as published in UMNewscope, November 20, 2013

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A friend in need is a friend indeed. – American folk saying