

Monthly Update

June 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is important to recognize the linkages among the component parts of the sexual revolution. Permissive abortion, widespread adultery, easy divorce, radical feminism, and the gay and lesbian movement have not by accident appeared at the same historical moment. They have in common a declared desire for liberation from constraint - especially constraints associated with an allegedly oppressive culture and religious tradition.

– The Ramsey Colloquium¹

It is with some apologies that I am sending this “Monthly Update” to you. As in last month’s issue, it is packed with eight pages of information affecting our United Methodist Church by the actions of some of our leaders and general boards and agencies. I am mindful of the complaint received several years ago that our Updates were too long. The next issue I shortened with a request for comments. The reaction was overwhelming with “send us more information” and that the lady who did not like the length of our monthly newsletters could “read what she wanted and then set the letter aside until she wanted to read more” as the expressed sentiment. However, we do not plan to make these long Updates the norm; it is just that we have so much information we had wanted to share with you at this time that we increased the length and reduced the size of the type in some of the individual reports to include more data.

We often write that two fundamental issues we address are those of homosexuality and abortion (note the quote above). If we lose the battle over the first issue, we will lose the United Methodist Church as far as it’s being a truly Christian denomination and of useful service to Jesus Christ. If we do not succeed in overcoming our church’s and our country’s position on abortion, the killing of the most innocent of God’s children, we risk not only the continued loss of our church’s effective usefulness to the Lord but also seeing our United States of America collapse under the weight of His judgment.

We must have the persistence of a marathon runner against the relentless activism by those who would continue to move our church and our country down the wrong path. Please keep praying for and standing alongside of us as we “contend for the faith” (1 Timothy 1:18b) and “fight the good fight” (Jude 3b). We cannot afford to lose this battle – for our children, country, and Lord.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

1. Reprinted from page 69 of my book *Misguided Shepherds*. The Ramsey Colloquium, as originally quoted in *First Things*, editor: Father Richard John Neuhaus; March, 1994, p. 17. The Ramsey Colloquium is a group of Jewish and Christian theologians, ethicists, philosophers, and scholars who meet periodically to consider questions on morality, religion, and public life. It is named after Paul Ramsey (1913 - 1988), the distinguished Methodist ethicist.

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June 2014 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

You can change your life by changing your heart. – Max Lucado

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The Good Stuff.

+ *Covenant and Schism in the UMC: A Time to Split?* by Dr. Riley Case

[Note: Despite the “hard” implication of the title, this thought-provoking article is presented in “The Good Stuff” section. Dr. Riley Case is a friend and associate in the renewal effort in the United Methodist Church and a person of deep intellect and incisive observations on the situation in our denomination. Here Dr. Case is examining a question that has been quietly considered since before the 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. – AOM]

"Covenant and Schism in the UMC: A Time to Split?" is the title of the featured article in the April 16 issue of *Christian Century*. Though progressive in perspective, the *Christian Century* is a highly respected journal not so intimidated by denominational institutionalism as to gloss over serious problems in the church. The thrust of the article is to the effect that the "divide over homosexuality in the UMC may have grown too wide to bridge."

Let us be thankful for some forthright reporting. Someone (besides the evangelicals) is willing to trouble us with uncomfortable truth. There is no admission of a "divide too wide to bridge" from the Council of Bishops, nor from the general boards and agencies, nor from the annual conferences, nor from the official church media in The United Methodist Church. The mantra that is repeated ad nauseam from progressive bishops and boards and annual conferences is, that if there are tensions in the church: "let us have conversations, dialogues, holy conferencing, and studies," which, it should be noted, almost never admit to the enormity of the problem of dealing with irreconcilable differences, but instead assume that if we better understood each other we would make some adjustments (as in, change our convictions) and live together in unity. There seems no recognition that after a while all of the "holy conferencing" tends not to unite the church but to further divide the church. Sometimes the response after such talks is: Can't we just agree to disagree? That is like counseling an abusive husband and an abused wife to live together in peace without any expectations of changed behavior. The husband continues to be abusing, the wife abused, but they respect their differences. This means the wife continues to be abused. That does not work well in marriage and it does not work well in the church.

The Century article quotes Jack Jackson, professor of mission at Claremont School of Theology who has stated that it may be time for the church to cut its losses and separate. "Every four years we have this vitriolic conversation that has only gotten worse and worse...I think we are stuck. How can we get unstuck? How long can the church in progressive areas hang on and continue to decline? Or would it be better to say, we are brothers and sisters in this Methodist movement, but really we can't live together anymore? Let's bless each other in our different ministries and move on."

For years evangelicals have been accused of being divisive, disloyal, and wanting to divide the church. Let this truth now be known: it is the progressives who are dividing the church. Evangelicals have supported the doctrine and discipline of the church. Progressives on the other hand speak of "new truth" and of the churches needing to "progress" beyond the Bible, beyond

historic faith, and beyond our United Methodist Discipline. Curiously, they have used the term "Biblical obedience" to mean to declare the Bible wrong, the tradition of the church wrong, the Discipline of the Church wrong and hateful. So the progressive group Love Prevails proclaims it is time to declare the vows of church membership loyalty are null and void. Progressives should no longer uphold The United Methodist Church with "prayers, presence, gifts, and service" because to support The United Methodist Church with prayers is to be complicit with un-Christian and unconscionable practices (a prayer boycott?). This is called "divestment." Evidently some pastors and even bishops have taken the divestment strategy even further since some pastors and bishops believe they no longer are bound by ordination vows or any clergy covenant understandings. Since church teaching is "hateful" and "unjust" they answer to a higher authority, which seems to have a lot to do with personal preferences. Where are the voices who will label this for what it really is: bullying and divisive? Along with "divestment" the Love Prevails group vows to practice "disruption." This was the strategy at the 2012 General Conference at which progressive demonstrators and disrupters were able to shut down the conference for some hours (if time is money the cost was several hundreds of thousands of dollars), kill the voting on further legislation having to do with human sexuality, as well as a lot of other legislation, and kill the Call to Action legislation that promised modest reform in the bureaucracy. When the vote was announced that Call to Action had failed, Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) supporters cheered and gave each other high fives.

Not all progressives advocate disruption, but they seem to respond positively to it. The Connectional Table (CT), the most powerful church agency which exists to coordinate United Methodism's vast maze of bureaucracies, allowed itself to be disrupted and then harangued by Love Prevails in November of 2013, resulting in the promise to re-arrange the agenda to deal with Love Prevails concerns at the CT meeting in April of 2014. It should be mentioned that the Connectional Table has 68 persons either ex officio, staff, or voting members, only ten of which are pastors serving local churches. Most of the rest are bishops or professional bureaucrats or members of various ethnic caucuses (not less than 30% of the members of CT are mandated to be from ethnic/racial groups but Africans don't count). Africa, with nearly 40% of UM members, has 6% of the voting members of CT (49 voting members).

After presentations at the April CT meeting Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the California-Pacific Conference made a motion for CT to petition the 2016 General Conference to remove all language in the Book of Discipline disapproving of homosexual practice. Bishop Carcaño, it will be recalled, is the one who remarked after the 2012 General Conference that the Africans need "to grow up" (a remark so prejudiced that if she had been owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, might have gotten her banned from the league). The motion was later amended but it passed, thus putting the Connectional Table in conflict with the General Conference (to whom it is supposedly accountable).

How do these actions, and others, relate to the *Christian Century* article "Covenant and Schism in the UMC: A Time to Split?" Quite directly it would seem. Every day, it seems, brings developments that seem to belie the claim that United Methodists are a connectional people who are united in a common doctrine and a common moral vision. How long can the church continue down this path?

– Dr. Riley Case; The Confessing Movement. Received by e-mail.

+ ***Packing 1 million meals.....***In early February, the Minnesota Annual Conference launched a hands-on mission project that involved packing 1 million meals through Feed My Starving Children, an Advance Special and a nonprofit that provides life-saving meals to especially needy people all over the world. The conference had hoped to reach the 1 million mark by the end of its annual conference session in May. As of Apr. 24, Minnesota UMs and their families and friends had collectively packed more than 1.2 million meals, with no plans to stop. – As reported in UMNewscope, May 7, 2014

Of Interest

+ ***The Pope and Capitalism.*** Pope Francis, in his apostolic exhortation, levied charges against free market capitalism, denying that “economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world” and concluding that “this opinion ... has never been confirmed by the facts.” He went on to label unfettered capitalism as "a new tyranny." Let’s look at the pope’s tragic vision. First, I acknowledge that capitalism fails miserably when compared with heaven or a utopia. Any earthly system is going to come up short in such a comparison. However, mankind must make choices among alternative economic systems that actually exist on earth. For the common man, capitalism is superior to any system yet devised to deal with his everyday needs and desires. Capitalism is relatively new in human history. Prior to capitalism, the way people amassed great wealth was by looting, plundering and enslaving their fellow man. With the rise of capitalism, it became possible to amass great wealth by serving and pleasing your fellow man. Capitalists seek to discover what people want and produce and market it as efficiently as possible as a means to profit. A couple of examples would be J.D. Rockefeller, whose successful marketing drove kerosene prices down from 58 cents a gallon in 1865 to 7 cents in 1900. Henry Ford became rich by producing cars for the common man. Both Ford’s and Rockefeller’s personal benefits pale in comparison with that received by the common man by having cheaper kerosene and cheaper transportation. There are...thousands of examples of how mankind’s life has been made better by those in...pursuit of profits.

Here's my question to you: Are people who, by their actions, created unprecedented convenience, longer life expectancy and a more pleasant life for the ordinary person -- and became wealthy in the process -- deserving of all the scorn and ridicule heaped upon them by intellectuals, politicians and now the pope? Let’s examine the role of profits but first put it in perspective in terms of magnitude. Between 1960 and 2012, after-tax corporate profit averaged a bit over 6 percent of the gross domestic product, while wages averaged 47 percent of the GDP. Far more important than simple statistics about the magnitude of profits is its role in guiding resources to their highest-valued uses and satisfying people.

Try polling people with a few questions. Ask them what services they are more satisfied with and what they are less satisfied with. On the "more satisfied" list would be profit-making enterprises, such as supermarkets, theaters, clothing stores and computer stores. They’d find less satisfaction with services provided by nonprofit government organizations, such as public schools, post offices and departments of motor vehicles. Profits force entrepreneurs to find ways to please people in the most efficient ways or go out of business. Of course, they can mess up and stay in business if they can get government to bail them out or give them protection against competition. Nonprofits have an easier time of it. Public schools, for example, continue to operate whether they do a good job or not and whether they please parents or not. That’s because politicians

provide their compensation through coercive property taxes. I'm sure that we'd be less satisfied with supermarkets if they, too, had the power to take our money through taxes, as opposed to being forced to find ways to get us to voluntarily give them our earnings.

Arthur C. Brooks, president at the American Enterprise Institute and author of "Who Really Cares," shows that Americans are the most generous people on the face of the earth. In fact, if you look for generosity around the world, you find virtually all of it in countries that are closer to the free market end of the economic spectrum than they are to the socialist or communist end.

Seeing as Pope Francis sees charity as a key part of godliness, he ought to stop demonizing capitalism.

Something to Think About

– Walter E. Williams; January 2, 2014. Dr. Williams is professor of economics at George Mason University

+ ***New Jersey Churches Attacked.*** New Jersey Churches Attacked, Religious Statues Destroyed, Virgin Mary beheaded, Joseph chopped in half Two New Jersey churches have been targeted in vicious anti-Christian attacks mirroring the same attacks and religious statue decapitations in Muslim countries. This is to be expected considering the unbridled hate of Christianity in the Muslim world coupled with the sanctioned scorn of the far left. The Christianophobes hacked off the head of a statue of the Virgin Mary. In addition, the vandals also chopped a statue of Joseph in half. A few hours later, officers were dispatched to St. Francis of Assisi Church at 23 W Chestnut Avenue for the same incident. An investigation revealed statues at this church had been damaged in the same manner as the ones at Sacred Heart Religious Statues. Police in Vineland are searching for the suspects who vandalized statues outside two churches overnight. An investigation revealed that sometime during the night, the suspects had vandalized several religious statues on church property. They are not just statues, but pictures and images of people that should be remembered," parishioner Jose Rodriguez said. For the faithful, it is an emotional attack. "I cannot imagine what is going through the mind of a person that would deliberately go deface statues that are dedicated to our savior," Deacon Richard Sampson of Christ the Good Shepherd said. In September, statues were also vandalized at St. Mary's in Malaga. It is not just violent manner in which these statues were attacked; that these parishes are miles apart that leads Catholics to believe they are being targeted.

[Note: Incidences such as this show an increased hostility to Christianity in this country – a cause for concern. – AOM]

– Received by e-mail. More information at <http://networkedblogs.com/TaZOL>

+ ***GCFA Board Holds Second Quarter Meeting.*** The Board of Directors of the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) held its quarterly meeting in Nashville, May 1–2. Board members heard a report from staff on economic and demographic trends in local churches. Lauren Arieux, statistician and research fellow for GCFA, reported that the average size of congregations in the U.S. is currently 90, less than half the size they were forty years ago. Trends indicate significant erosion in the number of medium-sized churches over the last four decades, she said. The board adopted a resolution to be sent to Bishop Domingos of the West Angola Episcopal area relating to actions of the board of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). The resolution asks Bishop Domingos to provide documentation for the use of funds

for the 2009–2012 African Theological Education Initiative. The board will begin work on the budget process at the next meeting. – Sharon Dean, GCFA,
as reported in UMNewscope, May 14, 2014

+ ***CT to Draft Legislation on Human Sexuality.*** On Apr. 29, the Connectional Table (CT) decided to draft legislation that could change church law “to fully include LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of the church.” The draft would be brought back to the CT at a future meeting for consideration. The decision to draft the legislation came the same day the CT began a series of three public discussions on human sexuality. The dialogue “is an exercise of our responsibility to be a common table for the church and to confer with one another as representatives of the church,” said Dakotas-Minnesota Area Bishop Bruce R. Ough, CT chair, the day before the event. “The Connectional Table believes that we need some specific language to inform the discussion before we can seek effective feedback from the connection and fully discern what our next steps will be,” Ough said after the event, in a press release. “This decision has empowered the CT to begin developing such language, which would be open to debate, amendment, and improvement before any final decision is made on adoption.” The public dialogue was live-streamed on UMC.org and viewed by people in 11 countries. The group plans to host similar dialogues during its next two meetings, concluding at its February 2015 meeting in Liberia. Raleigh (N.C.) Area Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, the chair of the CT’s Human Sexuality Task Force, served as moderator for the morning’s discussion. Los Angeles Area Bishop Minerva Carcaño proposed beginning the process for greater inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals. She did so following the urging of the Rev. Julie Todd, a member of Love Prevails. This unofficial UM group advocates the inclusion of all people in the life of the church. Carcaño said she had not expected to make such a motion at this CT meeting but felt led by the Holy Spirit. What followed was a discussion that lasted nearly two hours and at times included motions to table Carcaño’s motion until the end of the public dialogue. Other members expressed concern that, with the rapid approach of the 2016 General Conference, legislative wording needed to be worked on now. The body would need to approve such legislation before it could be submitted to General Conference. Instructions for submitting petitions to General Conference are available online. The question at the center of the first dialogue on human sexuality: Can The UMC sustain deep disagreements regarding human sexuality and remain in unity? The discussion included clergy and scholars who approached the topic from various theological perspectives. Ough called the panel discussion a historic conversation that attempted to engage the entire church through live streaming and Twitter. San Antonio Area Bishop James E. Dorff opened the discussion with a Bible study on unity. The panelists were retired Bishop Daniel C. Arichea Jr., the Rev. Mark Teasdale and the Rev. Pamela Lightsey.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, May 7, 2014

+ ***Ideology Trumps Dialogue at Connectional Table.*** As you may know, the Connectional Table recently met in Chicago. At the last meeting of the Connectional Table in November 2013, Amy DeLong and her fellow activists at Love Prevails “disrupted” and derailed the proceedings and manipulated the leaders to focus the group’s work on changing the United Methodist position on marriage and sexuality. My colleague, the Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, attended the April 29 Connectional Table meeting. He communicated to me that the Connectional Table disingenuously used the claim of “dialogue” to merely push their agenda. More importantly, the Connectional

Table – meant to coordinate United Methodism's mission, resources, and ministry – voted overwhelmingly to develop legislation that will remove what they claim is "exclusionary language" and insert language of "full inclusion" of LGBTQ people into the Book of Discipline at the 2016 General Conference in Portland.

How could this take place? Although not members of the Connectional Table, activists associated with DeLong set the agenda. They spoke and interacted with the Connectional Table as if they were providing special guidance. For example, the Rev. Julie Todd (an LGBTQ activist wearing a t-shirt that proclaimed: "Radical Sexual Liberationist") berated the group and expressed her outrage at the inaction of the Connectional Table. Immediately after Todd spoke, Bishop Minerva Carcano told the group that she was "led by the Holy Spirit" to make a motion to eliminate the church's "exclusive" language regarding homosexuality. According to Heather Hahn of United Methodist News Service, "What followed was a discussion that lasted nearly two hours and at times included motions to table Carcano's motion until the end of the public dialogue" process was completed in February 2015. The tabling effort failed.

For more than 40 years, United Methodism has prayerfully considered these sensitive and controversial issues. There are no elements of "dialogue" that have not already been explored. When we are called by United Methodist leaders to "dialogue," what we are really being called to do is change our minds. What took place in Chicago was not recognizable as genuine dialogue. It was manipulative and clumsily one-sided. It has now become disingenuous for United Methodist leaders to call for dialogue.

Dr. David Watson, academic dean and professor at United Theological Seminary, questions the integrity of the commitment of the Connectional Table to genuine dialogue after yesterday's startling power play. "Wait a minute," Watson writes. "The decision came the same day as the Connectional Table began their discussion? Doesn't this type of legislation presuppose the outcome of the discussion? If this is how we're going to operate, why even have the discussion at all?" Good question. – By Rob Renfroe. Received by e-mail. Rob Renfroe is the President and Publisher of *Good News*

(UM) Bishops.

+ ***President of the Council of Bishops.*** San Francisco area Bishop Warner Brown began his term as president of the Council of Bishops on May 5. Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of the Germany Episcopal Area has served as president since April 2013. Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr., who has served three terms as the Councils' secretary, was succeeded by Louisiana Area Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey.

– As reported in UMNewscope, May 7, 2014

+ ***UM Leaders in Learning Retreat.*** The residential bishops and general secretaries of The UMC attended a learning retreat May 5–8 at St. Simons Island, Ga., focused on leadership and living into community. The gathering included presentations from Dr. Christine Pohl of Asbury Theological Seminary, the Rev. Laura Jaquith Bartlett of the Oregon-Idaho annual conference, Bishop Robert Schnase (Missouri Area) and others. The attendees spent considerable time in introspection and discussion about their own group dynamics, relationships and effectiveness. Bishop James King of the South Georgia Conference hosted the group on an immersion experience to The Chapel in Brunswick, Ga. to learn about how the conference is using innovative adaptive leadership to revitalize congregations and plant new churches.

In further conversations about the adaptive challenges facing The UMC, the residential bishops noted that Christ calls them to be in union with him, with one another, and with the Church. They recognized that they are called to lead according to the example of Jesus Christ during a challenging time within the church. Disagreements about human sexuality threaten to divide the church; and while there will be differing understandings, the bishops are called to be bishops of the whole church and to lead the church through such challenges. The residential bishops had conversations about how they could carry out The Book of Discipline and lead during this time. The conversation involved listening and forthright discussion in a covenant of grace-filled hospitality and truth telling. No decisions or agreements were reached during these conversations. – Diane Degnan, UM Communications, as reported in UMNewscope, May 14, 2014.

Homosexuality.

+ *Hobby Lobby Supreme Court Case: Kudos to Church Officials Defending Liberty*

[Note: It is disappointing to see that some of our own United Methodist Church employees are yet again on the wrong side of a political and moral issue. This is yet another example of your apportionment dollars at work. – AOM]

"Unlike the religious supporters of Obamacare's coercive HHS abortifacient mandate, they envision a transcendent community of truth, love and beauty." – Mark Tooley, IRD President

Washington, DC--Today the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the Hobby Lobby case against Obamacare's HHS mandate compelling religious employers to subsidize insurance for contraceptives and abortifacients. The owners of Hobby Lobby are Evangelical and object to abortifacients. The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, along with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, which includes the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ (UCC), have endorsed the HHS mandate that requires employers to provide insurance coverage for contraceptives and abortifacients. So too have the UCC's president, the Reformed Church in America's general secretary, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, D.C., the president of Union Seminary, the dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School, and the president of Episcopal Divinity School, plus the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good. In contrast, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, National Association of Evangelicals, Southern Baptist Convention, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, National Religious Broadcasters, and Council for Christian Colleges & Universities have identified the HHS Obamacare mandate as an assault on religious liberty. IRD President Mark Tooley commented: "How sad that some church officials and religious groups are so zealous in their enthusiasm for the Welfare Entitlement State and for the Sexual Revolution that they would have Caesar by force compel religious employers and other persons of conscience to subsidize even abortifacients. Of course, the drugs at issue in the Hobby Lobby case are readily and inexpensively available, yet these religious opponents of religious liberty disingenuously cite 'access' as the issue. These Religious Left advocates don't even bother to examine the ethics of abortifacients from a Christian ethical perspective. Seemingly, for them, the willful autonomous individual, and sexual freedom, trump all other considerations, even the destruction of human life. What other freedoms, religious or otherwise, are these Religious Left figures willing to trample in their pursuit of a new society where religion and conscience are marginalized while the state arbitrarily imposes a radical secularist zeitgeist

shorn of transcendent truth and beauty? Kudos to the Catholic bishops, Orthodox rabbis, Evangelicals, Southern Baptists, Missouri Synod Lutherans, religious broadcasters and Christian schools who affirm liberty of conscience and dignity for all persons."

– Jeff Walton, The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IIRD), Washington, DC. March 25, 2014.

+ **Hobby Lobby.** Let Hobby Lobby CEO David Green know you appreciate his company's commitment to the true meaning of Easter

Each Easter and Christmas, CEO David Green and Hobby Lobby place full-page ads in newspapers they regularly advertise in. He has been doing this since 1997. These ads have a single purpose - to spread the good news of Christ! These ads cost Mr. Green's company hundreds of thousands of dollars. Such devotion to the gospel message is worthy of your support of his company. For those who have a Hobby Lobby nearby, be sure to watch your local newspaper for the full-page ad this Sunday! I would be grateful if you would consider the following suggestions:

1. Send emails to Hobby Lobby CEO David Green, thanking him for his company's dedication to spreading the Good News of Christ!

2. Pray for Mr. Green and his company as they await the Supreme Court's decision regarding whether the religious owners of a family business, or their closely held, for-profit corporation, have free exercise rights that are violated by Obamacare's requirement that they include abortion inducing contraceptives in their employee health insurance coverage.

– E-mail received from the American Family Association (AFA); April 18, 2014.

+ **World Vision's Teeter-Totter.** *Prominent Christian charity wrestles over... gays.* Below are the subject lines from 2 recent e-mails World Vision has sent me: • 140 Syrian children report. How you can help. And • Be there from the beginning and help a child.

Perhaps you got those emails, too. World Vision may be the largest evangelical aid group in the world. Its website has 63 country profiles spanning five continents, mostly developing countries. But it also helps nations like New Zealand after natural disasters. It serves people in need around the United States – 2.3 million in 2012. And, World Vision is known across the globe for its child sponsorship program, which blesses more than four million children each year. Most important of all, World Vision seeks to be “motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ [to] serve alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God’s unconditional love for all people.” It began in 1950, and it has separate divisions in various countries. Late in March, World Vision U.S. President Richard Stearns announced that the U.S. arm would begin hiring professing Christians in legal, same-sex marriages. After two days of backlash from Christians across the nation, Stearns and Jim Bere, board chairman of World Vision U.S., issued a retraction statement and apology, which included the following: “We made a change to our conduct policy that was not consistent with our Statement of Faith and our commitment to the sanctity of marriage. We are brokenhearted over the pain and confusion we have caused many of our friends, who saw this decision as a reversal of our strong commitment to Biblical authority.”

[Note: After their initial decision, I don't trust the integrity of this organization, their leadership, nor the sincerity of their retraction. There are other ministries with a more proven record of integrity such as Compassion International. – AOM]

– Nikolas Grosfield, The Presidential Prayer Team, PO Box 69010, Oro Valley, AZ 85737-0009,
April 11 - 18, 2014

+ **Gay scout leader.** Rainier Beach UMC (Seattle, Wash) will continue holding regular meetings with 15 youth ...despite an April 21 statement from Boy Scouts of America Inc., revoking the church's charter because they have a gay scout leader. [Note: This is a local church supporting homosexuality. – AOM] – As reported in UMNewscope, April 30, 2014

(UM) Judicial Council.

+ **Methodists Give Benefits to Homosexuals.** Although same-sex couples who are a part of the United Methodist denomination cannot marry in a United Methodist Church, they can, however, receive benefits if one on the spouses works in one of the denomination's thirteen general agencies. The decision was made last week during the UMC's Judicial Council in Little Rock, Arkansas. This decision comes after a decision made in October by the church's General Council on Finance and Administration, which made the definition of "spouse" include same-sex spouses and partners as well. The decision does not distribute benefits to same-sex spouses who work for the church's general agencies in states that prohibit same-sex marriage. Reverend Tom Lambrecht of Good News, a Methodist ministry, expressed his opinion of the decision, "It adopts a policy that contradicts church teaching on the definition of marriage, not only violating the beliefs and values of church members (not to mention Scripture) but creating confusion by sending a mixed message about what United Methodists believe." – The Rev. Jeff long; received by e-mail; "Return America"; returnamerica.org

+ **Judicial Council Holds Spring Session in Little Rock, Ark.** The Judicial Council held its spring session Apr. 23–26 in Little Rock, Ark. Two Judicial Council lay members, Beth Capen and Ruben T. Reyes, were unable to be present at the Little Rock meeting. Participating instead were two elected lay alternates, Sandra Lutz of Canton, Ohio, and Randall Miller of Oakland, Calif.

In Decision 1264, the Judicial Council ruled that the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) determination "that the use of general agency funds to subsidize premium costs for employees and their same-gendered spouses enrolled in the General Agencies Welfare Benefits Program" did not violate church law. GCFA Board of Directors voted Oct. 21, 2013, to expand the definition of spouse in the General Agencies Welfare Benefits Program to include same-gender spouses recognized by a state as being legally married to the employee and civil partners who had state recognition for being the legal partner of an employee. At that time, Bishop Michael J. Coyner, the finance agency's president, explained the action was taken "to make policy decisions that stay in conformity with both civil and church law." The board also requested "a declaratory decision" from the Judicial Council on whether the policy would violate ¶806.9 in The Book of Discipline.

After an October 2013 ruling by the Judicial Council, San Antonio Area Bishop James Dorff issued a decision about whether a candidate who happens to be a lesbian could be discontinued as a certified clergy candidate without an interview and examination by the conference's board of

ordained ministry. In Decision 1263, the council affirmed Dorff's decision to retain a candidate, noting that the issue was one of process and that the "sexual orientation and practices of the candidate are irrelevant for determining the matter."

The Judicial Council modified a decision of law by Phoenix Area Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata, upholding the "Marriage Equality Resolution" passed by the Desert Southwest Annual Conference in June 2013. The resolution's statement of facts deplors that denial of "full access" to the rights and privileges of The UMC is causing "deep spiritual harm to our LGBT brothers and sisters." The first "resolved" section of the resolution, which calls upon the conference and its churches to make a public statement supporting marriage equality, does not violate church law, the council ruled in Decision 1262, because it is "a legitimate appeal as an aspiration in form and content." However, the council found the resolution's second "resolved" section, to be "null, void and of no effect" because it encourages a violation of church law by declaring support to clergy engaged in specific chargeable offenses: "conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies where it is civically legal to do so." The council ruled the third "resolved section" to be "within Church law to the extent that its definition of supporting someone 'spiritually, emotionally and prayerfully' is understood not to ignore, negate or violate church law."

[Note: See the title of the preceding article on this subject. That gives the truth of this action. The following article by Don Wildmon gives what can be done by laypeople. This is article is of interest because it shows the slippery slope of our denominational agencies and leaders taking the church down the road to normalization of homosexuality. – AOM]

– Linda Bloom, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope,
May 7, 2014

+ ***This issue is destroying the United Methodist Church..*** If you are not a United Methodist, please pass this email to your United Methodist friends. One way of responding to this act is to withhold funds. Learn where your local church funds are going. Study where your local funds are being spent. Will some be negatively affected? Yes. But the church will be more negatively affected if we continue down the road we are currently traveling.

One thing is for sure. Those pushing same sex marriage are committed to their cause. Are we?

[Note: This is one action that we in Concerned Methodists have long advocated. There is no reason to support with your giving to God's work actions by UM employees – whether clergy or laity – that are ungodly and harmful to our United Methodist Church and to society as a whole. In addition, we consider that continued action supporting this cause reflects incompetent leadership because no sound leader who wants the good of his organization should willingly hurt it. – AOM]

– (UM Pastor) Donald E. Wildmonn, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of the AFA Website:
<http://www.afa.net>

(UM) Men. The GCUMM has established the Susanna Wesley Award to celebrate and acknowledge women who have contributed their unique skill and ability in service to the church. It recognizes those women in our lives who have shown us by word and example what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ.
– Ed Enstine; NEJ President

(UM) Women/Women's Issues.

+ ***Women's Commission Taking Pulse of Denomination.*** The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) is talking with women and men across The UMC to gauge the progress of its work for “full and equal responsibility and participation of women in the total life and mission of the Church.”

[Note: GCSRW is an agency almost eliminated at the 2012 Tampa General Conference – and should have been. – AOM] – Susan Keaton, UMConnections.org , as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 41, Issue 40 / October 9, 2013

+ **Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton** delivered a keynote address Apr. 26 at UM Women's (UMW) Assembly at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville, Ky. The event, which ran Apr. 25–27, focus[ed] on ordinary women organizing to make needed changes in their communities, states, nation and world to improve life for women, children and youth. “Secretary Clinton is a lifelong UM and a longtime advocate for women, children and youth,” said Harriett Jane Olson, chief executive of UMW. “It was almost 20 years ago when she electrified the participants at the 4th United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing by her declaration that women's rights are human rights. She carried that theme with her in her address to the UM General Conference in 1996 and in her focus on women's leadership development throughout her service as Secretary of State....” Assembly will also include more than 75 workshops on spiritual growth, leadership development and justice action; a march in solidarity with Louisville organizations working on economic justice; and a pre-event “Ubuntu Day of Service” with local groups serving the Louisville area on April 24.

– UMW, as reported in UMNewScope, March 12, 2014

+ ***UM Women Pray, March, Celebrate at Assembly 2014.*** More than 7,000 women—from as close as down the street to as far away as Japan—merged in the hallways of the Kentucky Convention Center in Louisville Apr. 25–27 for the 2014 UM Women (UMW) Assembly. The assembly is a quadrennial gathering, offering opportunities for study, worship, fellowship and social action. Veteran participants said fellowship is always the highlight of every assembly. The theme of the three-day event was “Make It Happen.” Participants heard about needs around the world and talked about ways to address them. They worshiped, marched for economic justice and heard a special challenge from Hillary Rodham Clinton, who addressed the gathering. “We need to wake up our world to what can and should be done,” Clinton said. “UMW has a great tradition of rolling up our sleeves and taking the social gospel into the world.” Donna Akuamoah, UMW executive for international ministries, and Shannon Trilli, director of global health for the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR), announced a joint initiative on maternal health. Participants learned that a quarter of a million women around the world die each year during pregnancy and childbirth because they lack access to proper health facilities or to health workers, or even because they have no say in their own reproductive health, Akuamoah said. UM Bill McKibben, founder of the global climate change movement 350.org, spoke via video conference at one of three town-hall meetings. Saru Jayaraman, author of *Behind the Kitchen Door*, asked the women during her town hall meeting, “Do you eat ethically?” Jayaraman, co-founder and co-director of ROCUNITED (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United), told heartbreaking stories about the abuse suffered by the people who serve as waiters, cooks and kitchen staff. She asked the

participants to become educated about the restaurants they frequent and to ask owners and managers if they are paying their workers a livable wage, giving them paid sick leave and opportunities to be promoted to higher paying jobs. Megan Waddle, Rebecca Procter, Ariel Murphy and Lyda Barr led a discussion on “Charting a New Course: Letting Younger Women Lead,” at the first town hall meeting of the assembly. Young women and mentors celebrated two years of organizing for mission in their conferences at a pre-Assembly reunion of UMW’s 2012 “Limitless: Redefine Tomorrow” participants. The reunion was an opportunity for the women to reflect on their experiences, successes, challenges and to explore ways to move forward in introducing yet another generation to UMW. It was also an opportunity to affirm themselves as UMW leaders.

— Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope, May 7, 2014

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Sin should be dealt with honestly and quickly. We should sweep it out of our lives. – Dr Robert Jeffers 3/20/14

Global Outlook

We can do no great things. Only small things with great love. – Mother Teresa

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Iran. *More Muslims May Be Coming To Christ in Iran Than Anywhere Else.* Open Doors USA has ranked Iran number 9 on its list of 50 countries where persecution of Christians for religious reasons is most severe. The Institute on Religion and Democracy recently spoke with officials of the ministry who say despite intense persecution, many more Muslims are coming to Christ at an increasing rate. “Rafin and Nader, young converts from Muslim backgrounds are proof of that,” Jerry Dykstra, media relations director with Open Doors told the IRD. “They are not alone. “Many Persians are coming to Christ, he added. “Many are young college students, and even some of their teachers are asking for Bibles! Dykstra tells the IRD the Iranian regime considers anyone converting to Christ apostates- a crime which is punishable by death. Dykstra says almost all Christian activity is illegal. According to Open Doors the harsh treatment of Christians by the regime is only fueling the flames of church growth. Open Doors tells the IRD the house church movement has increased rapidly since 2010. Christians working inside Iran have told Open Doors the regime tries to destroy those who reach out to converts and seekers by monitoring worship services, arresting converts, banning Farsi language services and closing some churches. Open Doors has gathered information indicating attacks against Christian communities have increased and the prohibition of house church activities is enforced very closely.

Vahid Hakkani is a Christian prisoner in Iran. In March of last year he developed a severe digestive problem that developed into severe internal bleeding. He underwent surgery. Morning Star News now reports Hakkani is now on a hunger strike. He says he’ll continue the strike indefinitely in order to protest the rejection of his appeal for conditional release. Mohabat News reports if prisoners serve half of their sentence, Iranian law allows for their conditional release. Iranian authorities continue to hold Hakkani and three other Christians. All of them were arrested in a raid on a house church in February 2012. They received sentences of three months and eight years in jail for their Christian activities. Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports four Iranian Christians were arrested in October of last year and sentenced to 80 lashes on charges of drinking wine during a communion service. They were also charged with being in possession of a receiver

and satellite antenna. CSW officials say the sentences were carried out in November, and one of the Christians was whipped with “extreme violence.” Iranian-American pastor Saeed Abedini is a former Muslim who converted to Christianity in 2000. He has been detained in Iran since the summer of 2012. He was sentenced to eight years in prison for planting house churches in Iran. The sentence was upheld on appeal in August. The IRD previously reported that Abedini had been in Iran at the invitation of the government to help build orphanages. In November of 2013, he was transferred to a very tough prison, where inmate deaths occur frequently. President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry have both called for Iranian officials to release Abedini. Naghmeh Abedini, the wife of Pastor Saeed Abedini recently spoke to International Christian Concern about her husband’s ordeal. “The Lord has counted our family worthy enough to send Saeed to a dark place that he would be able to share with people who are in complete despair.” She has told ICC that while in prison, her husband has seen so many give their hearts to Christ. The New York Times reports Iranian officials are continuing their attempts to harass the Alborz Province house-church movement. On March 5, officials of the Central Prison in Karaj searched the cell of a leader of the house-church movement, seizing his Bible, Christian books and other literature in his cell. Open Doors estimates Iran has 370,000 “new Christians from a Muslim background.” The organization says many Iranians have become Christians because of Christian television programming from other nations. Refugees from Iran say that Christians have boldly begun discussing their faith with Muslim neighbors. Mohabat News reports, as a result of this boldness, the fear of the spread of Christianity among the younger generation has caused the regime to use every possible strategy to crack down on Christians and to prevent its growth among the youth and Iranian families.

– By Dennis Crowley (@TheIRD); April 11, 2014. E-mail received from The Institute on Religion and Democracy.

The Middle East. More than 180 Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox leaders, including two UM bishops, a seminary president and prominent pastor, joined May 7 in a Pledge of Solidarity and Call to Action, which calls for an end to the silence over persecuted Christian communities in Egypt, Iraq and Syria. – As reported in UMNewscope, May 14, 2014.

Nigeria. Bishop John Wesley Yohanna of the Nigeria Episcopal Area, and Thomas Kemper, chief executive of the Gneral Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), expressed concern for the more than 200 teenage girls taken from the government secondary school in Chibok, Nigeria more than three weeks ago by armed men in uniform. They asked for prayers for the students and their families. – As reported in UMNewscope, May 14, 2014.

Sudan. A World Council of Churches ecumenical delegation visiting South Sudan expressed solidarity with local churches, advocated for a cease-fire, urged progress in the ongoing peace talks and encouraged support to humanitarian initiatives in the country.

– As reported in UMNewscope, May 14, 2014.

Annual Conference Reports

Ukraine and Moldova Provisional Annual Conference. Members of the Ukraine and Moldova Annual Conference meeting Apr. 25–27 in Uzhorod, Western Ukraine celebrated their 125th anniversary and continued efforts to plant new churches, strengthen existing congregations, serve the poor and work for peace and justice. The assembly transferred Crimea churches to the South Russia Annual Conference. While the political situation in Ukraine remains uncertain, pastors and lay leaders gathered to pray and encourage one another in faith. “We do not know what tomorrow will bring,” said some of them. The UMC in Ukraine and Moldova continues its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. “125 Years of Spirit’s Movement. Keeping Traditions and Transforming the Future” was the theme of this year’s annual conference, which reflects the anniversary of The UMC in Eurasia and the Festival celebration planned for August. The Holy Spirit continues to move us to pay special attention to ministry with children in Ukraine and Moldova. The conference created a day of young people’s ministry in the church calendar and raised funds, prayed for two churches in Crimea and negotiated their transfer to the South Russia Annual Conference, celebrated strong examples of church’s self-sufficiency in Lugansk and Kiev, ordained and commissioned elders, and expressed gratitude to GBGM missionaries for their mission work in Ukraine. “I thank sisters and brothers in Eurasia and all over the world who pray for peace and unity in Ukraine, and I thank God for our UM people who faithfully continue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of conflict and uncertainty. We all turn to Jesus the Creator of true peace,” said Bishop Eduard Khegay.

– Ukraine and Moldova Provisional Annual Conference,
as reported in UMNewscope, May 14, 014

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It is easier to get older than it is to get wiser.