

Monthly Update

May 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” continuing information from across our United Methodist Church – with more examples of the priorities and actions of what our general boards and agencies prioritize along with those of our bishops. Indicative of the depth of our concern about one of the chief problems is the e-mail from “Patty” (not her real name):

“Hi,
My name is Patty and I am...at a United Methodist Church in Illinois. I have been involved in my church since I was a child... My husband and I have been committed to turning our church around for the last 15 years battling everyday for scriptural authority and spiritual growth. Last year...a new minister has taken over. He approached us in a staff meeting one day to say that he felt our church would be facing a spiritual battle over homosexuality. He proceeded to tell us his stance on homosexuality, which is that God created some people that way. He later approached me privately to discuss the matter more, as he thought that my husband and I would create a lot of problems for him considering how conservative we are in approach to biblical truth. I made clear that I believe homosexual relationships are a sin.

He has since filed for a divorce from his wife, and rumors are swirling that he is actually in an inappropriate relationship with another man in our church. Right now I am on a 2½ month leave, having just brought home our ‘new son’. I will be going back to work in about six weeks. You can feel the darkness in our church right now. Many decisions are being made that are not godly. There are so many areas that are struggling with the former being at the top of the list. Praying everyday that things are resolved or revealed to help me in my decision. Before I go back, if nothing has been resolved or revealed, I will be having a meeting with our SPPRC and our minister to try to get to the bottom of this mess, which will probably involve some very point blank questions as to his behavior over the last several months.

I just found your webpage tonight and am so relieved that there is a group of people who are concerned about the state of the United Methodist church. My husband and I were called to our church to serve and fight this battle, but now I am not sure if God is calling us out.

Really, I am not even sure why I am emailing you right now, other than to say how grateful I am that there are still some out there who truly love Christ and want to follow the Bible.

May God bless you!

Sincerely,
Patty”

This is one of the causes that we address. The main reason for our ministry is as we have said so many times before – to serve Him who has called us. Please continue to pray and to stand with us as we “contend for the faith” in this very important battle.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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May 2014 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Anybody who thinks he can be happy and prosperous by letting the Government take care of him
had better take a closer look at the American Indian.

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The Good Stuff.

+ ***Living with Gusto***, by Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house.

It fell and was completely destroyed. – Matthew 7:24-27 CEB

This year, as I watched the NCAA basketball tournament or what many of us refer to as March Madness, one thing stood out very clear to me. The teams that play all out—whether they win or lose—return to the locker room more satisfied with themselves than those that play the game in a timid fashion.

Life is for the living. So, let's build our lives on a foundation that will allow us to live with gusto.

Here are ways we can live with gusto:

1. Develop a self you can respect. Generate a deep sense of responsibility for your thoughts and actions. Set your own internal standards, and cease comparing yourself to others. Life is not a matter of being better than someone else; respect and integrity demand that you be better than you thought you could be!
2. Commit yourself to others. Believe in them; take time to nurture their dreams. Build into the lives of those about you by providing nutrients of gratitude and encouragement; invest time and energy in their aspirations.
3. Turn disappointments into divine appointments. Achievements worth remembering are stained with the blood of diligence and etched with the scars of frustration. The pages of history are filled with the heroic stories of undaunted men and women who triumphed over disabilities and adversities.
4. Enjoy life's process, not merely its rewards—the journey as well as its destination. Our impulsive, impatient society seems hooked on immediacy: one-minute oatmeal, one-hour dry cleaning, instant coffee, and microwave-dinner trays. But to “live with abandon” we must savor the little victories while realizing that life is an endless journey broken into segments of personal fulfillment.
5. Become involved in causes “larger than life.” Choose a challenge bigger than you are, and work at it in pursuit of excellence. Measure success not by what you've done, but what you could and yet shall do.
6. People that live like this can enjoy life and will not have lives that crash when the rains come, the floods rise and the winds blow.

GO FOR THE GUSTO

Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr., President of the General Commission on UM Men
– E-mail received from the General Commission on United Methodist Men; April 14, 2014

+ ***High Tech Conference.*** I don't have an overall disregard for automation. It's just a part of the high tech world in which we live. With that being said, last week I was overwhelmed with forces beyond my control. Those forces were directed at an attempt to accommodate some issues that I would prefer to handle on my own. It began on Monday when I visited a newly constructed building for a medical appointment. The facility was quite impressive adorned with many high tech conveniences that made my visit somewhat adventurous. During this

adventurous visit, I dropped by the rest room. First of all, there was no manual light switch. The light was programmed to turn on automatically. In theory, this seems good except I stood in complete darkness for several seconds (seemed like several hours) after the door closed behind me. The hand soap, water faucet and paper towel dispenser were all automated. I got too much water, not enough soap and found it extremely difficult to activate the towel dispenser. It was not a good idea to visit this space age rest room prior to having my blood pressure checked. It was raining when I left my appointment and guess what – the headlights on my car automatically turned on. I was reminded by a coworker upon arriving at work that my lights were burning in the parking lot. If my car genie can turn the lights on, then why don't they turn them off as well?

A wise friend once pointed out that our life is nothing more than a collection of the decisions we make. A pattern of reckless decisions will constitute a life filled with pain and disappointment. A life based on a pattern of good decisions can be fruitful and rewarding. Having free will can be tricky. With the freedom of decision comes tremendous responsibility and accountability. When our decisions are fruitful, the temptation is to believe that it is due to our own power, talent or genius. However, it is God who blesses our efforts and gives us strength.

In John 3:27 we hear: "A man can only receive what is given to him through heaven." While technology and automation make it easier to process information and make decisions, the end result rests within the confines of the human mind. Studies show we make on average 5000 decisions per day. We can choose to speak truth or spout falsehoods. We can reach out or recoil. We can serve God or serve the world. Wisdom and clarity of thought are essential in our decisions founded upon our understanding of God's will. No decision is wise when made independent of God's will in our life. Once we achieve the character and conviction to make decisions reflective of our relationship with God, the high tech conveniences are just a novelty or in my case last week an entertaining nuisance.

– Charlie Gray, President of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Men; received by e-mail.

+ ***The Gift of your Smile*** – 1 John 4:7-12. The late film director Krzysztof Kieslowski was once interviewing actors for a film. During an interview, a young actress described to him how she'd go out and walk the streets of Paris when she felt sad. As Kieslowski probed further, he learned that 6 years earlier the actress had been close to a breakdown. One day she went out onto the street where she caught sight of the famous French mime artist Marcel Marceau—now a very old man. The actress walked past him, then stopped and turned to give him another glance. Marceau also stopped and turned. He then gave her a big smile lasting several seconds. "He saved me then," the actress said. Kieslowski and the actress pondered whether all the performances Marceau had ever given compared to the fact that he helped save a young actress with his smile. Like that actress, millions in our communities walk through life wondering if they matter to anyone. You can reassure them. The apostle John tells us to put our love into action. What simpler act of love is there than smiling at someone you pass on the street? While others avoid eye contact, showing indifference, you can imitate the God who is love. His giving love is revealed through our loving acts. The gift of your smile shows that you care enough to acknowledge their existence and their great value.

Drive-through restaurants and self-serve checkout lanes go against friendliness. Things like these make it easy to live without looking anyone in the eye. As an act of discipleship, let's go out of our way to meet people and smile at them. You never know—someone in crisis might just taste God's grace because of it.

– Meridian Voysey; received by e-mail.

+ ***SMART FLIGHT ATTENDANT***. A 50-something year old Muslim man arrived at his seat on a crowded flight and immediately didn't want the seat. The seat was next to an elderly white woman reading her Bible. Disgusted, the Muslim man immediately summoned the flight attendant and demanded a new seat. The man said "I cannot sit here next to this infidel."

The flight attendant said "Let me see if I can find another seat."

After checking, the flight attendant returned and stated "There are no more seats in economy, but I will check with the captain and see if there is something in first class." 10 minutes went by and the flight attendant returned

and stated "The captain has confirmed that there are no more seats in economy, but there is one in first class. It is our company policy to never move a person from economy to 1st class, but being that it would be some sort of scandal to force a person to sit next to an UNPLEASANT person, the captain agreed to make the switch to first class." Before the irate Muslim man could say anything, the attendant gestured to the elderly woman and said, "Therefore, ma'am, if you would so kindly retrieve your personal items, we would like to move you to the comfort of first class as the captain doesn't want you to sit next to an unpleasant person."

Passengers in the seats nearby began to applaud while some gave a standing ovation.

– Received by e-mail from a Concerned Methodists associate

Of Interest.

+ 2013: Year of UM Growth, Progress

[Note: One cannot help but observe that in all the talk of church growth and progress in the following analysis, there is no mention of bringing people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Where does evangelism fit into the picture? Also, one cannot help but observe that John Wesley was opposed to the fracturing of the "Methodist Societies" into smaller subgroups based on differences or a perceived self-interest – such as we find in the various ethnic caucus groups. – AOM]

Getting a handle on the organizational health of a large, worldwide denomination is not easy. But key developments in 2013 indicate vigorous responses to the challenges facing The UMC. What's more, the end of the year saw the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) report that worldwide professing membership in The UMC reached a record high of 12.5 million at the end of 2012. "The results for 2012 largely fit within the pattern we already know about, where the primary source for growth in membership is in the Global South. That's both Africa and the Philippines," said Scott Brewer, associate general secretary for connectional relations. In the United States, membership continues its slow steady decline, with GCFA reporting 7,390,691 members at the end of 2012, down from 7,481,383 the year before (a 90,692 loss). That decline of a little more than 1% is representative of the trend in recent years. [as previously published in the February Update] Both globally and in the U.S., the denomination saw better-than-projected growth in church starts. The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) reported the start of 574 worshipping communities in Southeast Asia, Eurasia, Africa and Latin America, beating the original goal of 400 church starts for 2008-2012. GBGM announced a goal of 600 starts for the next quadrennium. Meanwhile, Path 1, the church-starting initiative of the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD), said it has heard from 37 U.S. conferences, reporting a total of 91 church plants so far in 2013. The Western Jurisdiction already has doubled its 2012 total. "While we often hear about the innovative 'out of the box' plant, the majority of new plants are traditional and reaching many new people and making new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," said the Rev. Douglas Ruffle, associate executive director of Path 1.

Don House, a Texas economist who has been in various lay leadership positions in the denomination, praises the emphasis on church starts but argues it won't be enough to reverse declines in the U.S. House announced in 2013 his own plan to recruit about 1,000 churches willing to invest in growth strategies beyond what they now spend. Meanwhile, the official ethnic caucuses of the church, such as Methodists Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans (MARCHA), worked toward strategic plans. A MARCHA meeting in August highlighted the growing Hispanic presence in the U.S. and the need for the church to respond to that reality in a variety of ways. The six national plans for ethnic ministries pushed on as well. For example, Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century released a November report touting its improved financial situation, a new collaborative coaching network and the sustaining of 17 congregation resource centers.

Another encouraging sign—from both a financial and a humanitarian standpoint—came in October when The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBOPHB) announced crossing an important threshold in providing pensions for clergy and clergy spouses around the world. The Central Conference Pension Initiative reached its \$25 million fundraising goal with a \$217,000 contribution from the General Board of Discipleship

(GBOD) directors. That means, once all pledged contributions are received, the fundraising initiative is complete. The money will provide a foundation for the long-term security for clergy in Africa, Asia and parts of Europe.

Finally, any assessment of the state of the church would be incomplete without a reference to General Conference, the quadrennial church law-making gathering. Plans for General Conference 2016, in Portland, Ore., began this year to gear up in earnest. The Commission on the General Conference set a target of 850 delegates. That's about 15% fewer than participated at General Conference 2012 in Tampa, Fla., a change that should help rein in expenses. With the shifting demographics of the church, the U.S. will see a modest decline in its percentage of delegates from 2012, while the percentage from Africa will rise, again modestly. The Rev. L. Fitzgerald Reist, secretary of the General Conference, announced the delegate allotments in November. The Council of Bishops (COB) got in on the planning, choosing West Ohio Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, a former council president, to deliver the episcopal address in Portland. Looking even farther out, the Commission on the General Conference in November chose Minneapolis as the site for the 2020 General Conference.

– Sam Hodges, UMNS, as published in UMNewscope, January 8, 2014

+ ***Supreme Court Won't Hear Appeal of Episcopal Church Property Dispute.*** Seven years after 15 conservative Virginia congregations made global news by breaking away from the Episcopal Church and refusing to give up tens of millions of dollars in property, the U.S. Supreme Court on Mar. 10 ended the complex legal dispute by declining to take up an appeal by the last remaining plaintiff, reports Michelle Boorstein of the Washington Post. The high court's action leaves the property in Episcopal Church hands.

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, March 26, 2014

+ ***New Group Aims to Find Way to "Live in a Divided Church"***. A new UM group in the United States is forming with the aim to advance "the Kingdom of Christ," despite the denomination's growing divisions over same-sex unions and gay ordination. In practice, founders of the new Wesleyan Covenant Network say they are committed to mutual accountability, evangelism and upholding the UM doctrine, especially the primacy of Scripture in faith and practice. The group first met Jan. 13–14 in Atlanta and drew 125 UMs, mostly clergy, from 15 U.S. states. The Rev. Maxie Dunnam, a longtime UM leader who was one of the founders of the Confessing Movement, is one of the group's founders. "We're really working on how to live in a divided church and be productive and kingdom-minded," he told UM News Service (UMNS). "We're just exploring ways to encourage and equip and support people in doing that." The Wesleyan Covenant Network will not be a political action or lobbying group, Dunnam and other group organizers emphasized. "I have about 25 years left until mandatory retirement age," said the Rev. Bryan Collier, the lead pastor of The Orchard, a multi-campus UM congregation in northern Mississippi, and another group founder. "For 23 years I have been engaged in conversations about renewal and change without much to show for it. I want to spend the next 25 years doing something of eternal significance—focusing on The Kingdom of Christ and letting the effect of that focus 'trickle down' to the denomination if it will." Group members said they plan in some ways to act in parallel to traditional church structures, such as starting new churches where the denomination is not. "We are excited about sharing resources among member churches and are dreaming of new ways to be in partnership in the planting of new churches and in the raising up of new leaders with a distinctly Wesleyan approach to life and ministry," said the Rev. Carolyn Moore, founder and pastor of Mosaic UMC in Evans, Ga. She is also one of the group's organizers. The Rev. Thomas E. Frank, a historian of Methodism and professor at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., sees the new group as part of the growing proliferation of interest groups in the denomination promoting differing theological perspectives. That's in contrast to much of the 20th century, he said, when there was a long-term trend toward church unity that saw the formation of the Methodist Church in 1939 and The UMC in 1968. "My question as a historian is what happened to the mainstream that sought unity and institution building," he asked.

The Wesleyan Covenant Network's charter describes homosexuality as "the presenting divisive issue," but adds that the group sees the division as deeper. "Fundamentally, the issue is the authority of Scripture and the

exclusive claims of the Gospel in tensions with the ideological commitments of multiple groups within the life of the church,” the charter said. Ultimately, Dunnam said, it’s up to bishops and the General Conference to deal with the denomination’s divisions. For now, group members are discussing how they will work together. The Rev. Chappell Temple, a church historian and senior pastor in Lakewood UMC in Houston, said in Atlanta that early Christian orders could serve as model for the new group. He said the rise of monastic and mendicant orders allowed some breathing room for differences of opinion over various questions within the church without formal separation. He sees the same potential the Wesleyan Covenant Network to focus on discipleship and evangelism, while remaining part of the UM fold. – Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, February 5, 2014

+ **UM Situation “Untenable”**. [A sentiment held by many is that,] “[M]any [UM] bishops are unwilling to enforce The Book of Discipline and the covenant we have agreed to live by.” Widespread disregard of that covenant, the will of General Conference, and the Council of Bishops’ promise in 2011 to uphold the Book of Discipline demonstrates the deep division and conflicting worldviews existing within the UMC. “We see the present situation as untenable. We are aware of conversations taking place among leading pastors and other groups around the country to examine what options are available for those of us who are biblical Christians and who have agreed to live by The Book of Discipline. Those options include sweeping reform of the church or the creation of a different kind of future. If we are one church, we cannot act as if we are two. If in reality we are two churches, it may not be wise to pretend any longer that we are one. Many are discussing the wisdom of churches continuing to fund a denomination that is unwilling to live by its policies and whose chief officers do not enforce its beliefs. Some have already curtailed their financial support in protest. Concrete and dramatic actions are likely to come out of those conversations in the next few months. “May God grant us wisdom in finding a way forward that would preserve the church’s commitment to Scripture and UM doctrine. And may we treat one another with grace and respect as we seek to create a faithful future.”

[Note: One principle that we have supported since the beginning of our ministry is that UM laypeople have the right to let their giving “speak” for them – that if UM employees are unable or unwilling to function adhering our orthodox Christian doctrine, then the laity have the right to direct their money into those channels that do SO, whether inside or outside of the UMC. They have a right to expect that their money given to the Lord not be used to support un-Christian practices and priorities. – AOM]

– Good News, as reported in UMNewScope, April 9, 2014

+ **Housing Accommodations for General Conference**. The Commission on General Conference has selected Connections Housing as the official accommodations partner for the May 10–20, 2016 General Conference in Portland, Ore., and the May 5–15, 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis. Connections Housing will manage all aspects of accommodations, including leading and organizing hotel relationships, negotiations and contracting. Connections Housing will take reservations via their call center and through a custom-designed website using secure Passkey technology, the largest processor of online group hotel reservations in the world. “We encourage non-delegation groups to also contact Connections Housing for help with their hotel blocks in Portland and Minneapolis,” said Sara Hotchkiss, business manager of The General Conference. Connections Housing has established hotel industry relationships in both Portland and Minneapolis. The group has been a full-service meetings management and housing service provider since 1986. For more information about Connections Housing, (go to ww.connectionshousing.com or contact the UM Connections Housing representative Jon Mitchell whose contact information is: (jon@connectionshousing.com; 404-876-5555).

– Natalie Bannon, Commission on General Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, January 29, 2014

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ **Does Abortion lead to Suicide?** Evidence in Two Cases. Two high profile cases of suicide broke [recently] and the reports in both cases referenced abortion as having been a major factor in the subsequent depression that tragically ultimately led to suicide," reports LifeNews.com. "The first tragic suicide was that of an Australian model and TV star Charlotte Dawson, after a long battle with depression, originally triggered by an abortion back in 1999. According to news stories, it was decided that Dawson should abort her first child with Olympic swimmer husband Scott Miller because her due date coincided with the 2000 summer Olympics and (because) Miller was so focused on his own pursuits that a child was not welcome in the picture at the time. Dawson says they planned to try to have children later, but the marriage broke up shortly afterwards and she ultimately died without living children.

The second case reported in the Daily Mail relates to an Oxford student who committed suicide following the break up of her relationship with her boyfriend. The report however cites the torment she suffered following an abortion. A 'talented and gifted' Oxford University student hanged herself after her boyfriend of 11 months ended their relationship. Charlotte Coursier was struggling to cope with a 'campaign of harassment' inflicted on her by a college lecturer, as well as the torment of having aborted a pregnancy. An inquest heard how Miss Coursier was found dead at home by her housemates in June last year.

[Dr. Chaps' comment: We already know abortion is deadly to children, but now we see the harmful emotional effects on women.]

– Chaplain Klingenschmidt, PhD

+ **Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.** Supreme Court Inaction Does Not Deter Sen. Graham's Efforts to Pass the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act in the Senate. On January 13, the U.S. Supreme Court decided not to hear an appeal in the case of an Arizona abortion ban that was struck down as unconstitutional by the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals last year. Pro-abortion advocates seized on the Court's inaction, and the 9th Circuit's decision regarding the Arizona law, to attack the proposed federal Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (S.1670), which has been introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC).

– National Right to Life, 512 10th St., NW, Washington, District of Columbia 20004

+ **Be informed: What Girl Scouts USA does with their cookie 'dough' January 28, 2014.** As Girl Scouts USA begins its annual cookie sale, I am asking you to consider what the organization supports with all that dough. Christy Volanski is the mother of two former Girl Scouts who created the website Speak Now Girl Scouts to expose the link between the group and the Planned Parenthood abortion business. Recently, Christy wrote a very telling article for LifeNews, What Every Pro-Lifer Needs to Know About The Girl Scouts' Link to Planned Parenthood. As Christy clearly outlines in her article, "GSUSA will try to assure you that all the proceeds from cookie sales stay local to benefit girls in their community." What they fail to mention is that GSUSA makes millions of dollars each year through licensing fees paid by the baker. It's money like this that goes to promote the Girl Scout's partnership with Planned Parenthood. Just this month, the Girl Scouts came under fire for tweeting a link to a news story and video that praises pro-abortion Texas state senator Wendy Davis (D-Texas.)

It's hard to say no to those little girls in the green and brown sashes, but buying Girl Scout cookies serves only to further facilitate a very liberal pro-abortion agenda. When they knock on your door, just say, "No, thank you." No explanation is needed.

– Sincerely, Tim Wildmon, President, American Family Association. Received by e-mail.

(UM) Bishops.

[Note: What is happening in the next report is one of our bishops advocating on the side of forcing privately-owned businesses to cater to and serve people involved in practices that violate their Christian consciences – such as the photographer who was forced to do a “homosexual wedding” much against his will, and the baker

forced to bake a “wedding cake” to celebrate a homosexual service. This bill (H.B. 2453) would have protected the freedom of people to not be forced to do these things. – AOM]

Kansas Senate President Susan Wagle, UM Bishop Scott Jones of Great Plains Annual Conference suggests that state House Bill 2453 be killed, as to not legitimize discrimination against gay and lesbian individuals. The bill seeks to allow public or private employees to refuse service based on religious views about marriage. In a statement to the clergy of the Great Plains Conference, the bishop outlined the “fundamental values and commitments” of The UMC, including unity, doctrine, mission, discipline, episcopacy, itinerancy and clergy holiness and competence. From this foundation, he shared his intention to protect diversity, unity and the “integrity of our connectional covenant by enforcing the boundaries.” The bishop was clear that this will include suspensions and trial by a jury of peers for clergy who violate those boundaries.

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, February 26, 2014

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS).

+ Staff-Dominated and Well-Funded, UMC’s Lobby Office Continues without Winkler

The United Methodist Church’s controversial D.C. lobby office is now adjusting to life without its longtime CEO, Jim Winkler. Since 2000, Winkler chose to run the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) in an extremely divisive, politically partisan way while frequently violating clear church rules against such offering-plate-funded agencies opposing our denomination’s biblical position on sexual morality. Anyone who cares about the integrity and public witness of the United Methodist Church should take some time to review some of the lobby’s “greatest hits” as well as more systemic problems under Winkler...Winkler has recently left to become President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. [There are...] challenges [with] Winkler’s replacement, the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, faces in earning back the trust of non-liberal United Methodists. (Her outspoken liberalism stance resulted in the last General Conference replacing her on the UMC Judicial Council.) In any case, the GBCS’s last board of directors meeting under Winkler’s leadership, held last fall in suburban Maryland, offered a view of the agency’s ongoing institutional trajectories as it moves forward without him. The four-day meeting opened with a worship service which included, among other things, a brief shout-out to the “LGBT” cause as well as an odd statement about how “God has a body” represented by the Earth. The latter appeared to have more in common with New Age pantheism than with the foundational Christian doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

Global Church. Out of necessity, the GBCS is increasingly addressing is our denomination’s global nature. For example, there was some discussion of the terrible civil war raging in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, home to hundreds of thousands of members, and recent physical violence in Zimbabwe between two United Methodist congregations who are loyal to rival political parties. However, the 63-member board includes only three (less than five percent) African United Methodists, despite sub-Saharan Africa now being home to nearly 40 percent of the world’s United Methodists. Bishop Christian Alsted (Northern Europe) shared an update on how he is working with General Conference Secretary Fitzgerald Reist to chair a task force to working over several years to thoroughly revise the UMC Social Principles to make them more theological and global. Other GBCS directors on this task force are Randall Miller of the California-Nevada Conference (a gay activist, recently the CEO of the main LGBTQ protest caucus in the UMC), Chelsea Calderon (NM) & Jefferson Knight (Liberia).

Winkler-ized Staff Dominance. Winkler shared that he personally had “hired nearly all” of the GBCS’s continuing staffers, raising serious questions about how much difference his departure will make. No informed person honestly disputes that the monolithically liberal GBCS senior staff have enjoyed little to no effective accountability as they have abused their positions to promote their personal pet political agendas, even when these agendas are directly contrary to the mandate the church has given them (and paid them to do) of promoting

the UMC's official social teachings. For example, Winkler made a special point of praising the work of staffer Katey Zeh, Director of the GBCS's Healthy Families, Healthy Planet Initiative. Zeh has described her personal UMC affiliation as a means for her to fight the UMC's biblical position on sexual morality, which she calls "institutionalized heterosexism." A zealous champion of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (which opposes any legal restriction or even moral disapproval of the violence of abortion), Zeh has taken her abortion-supportive zeal to the point of tweeting appeals to raise money to help directly pay for abortions. Winkler noted that her work to influence the UMC and use our church's name to promote her agendas was partially funded by the U.N. Foundation of agnostic mogul Ted Turner. Part of the problem is not only is the board of directors geographically skewed, but the U.S. (i.e., main) portion, overall, has long been heavily "stacked" with individuals whose liberal theology and leftist politics are rather unrepresentative of the denomination as a whole. But even aside from that, the GBCS staffers are rather bold in seeking to corral rather than follow the board. After several directors spoke against a controversial statement on North Korea, staffers Liberato Bautista and Mark Harrison defended it, helping ensure the narrow vote to endorse it.

At one point, staffer Bill Mefford approvingly plugged the passion of some directors for "marriage equality" (i.e., redefining marriage to include same-sex couples), prompting director Chris Pierson of Northern Illinois to use the group prayer time to promote direct opposition to the UMC Social Principles on this matter. In smaller meeting among non-American directors, Christie and Bautista seemed eager to repeatedly inject their own priorities and agendas, especially pacifism and the concern expressed by overseas UMC leaders over global warming (the latter of which appeared to resonate more with the overseas directors). It is worth noting that the absolutist pacifism reflexively touted by the GBCS staff does not stem from any principled opposition to violence, as demonstrated by their simultaneous strong support for abortion. One of the directors noted the difficulties in talking about homosexual practice in a global church whose members live in cultures ranging from those in which it is taboo and illegal to European nations in which marriage has been redefined in both the state and the established church so that non-government-sponsored churches (like the UMC) are facing the threat of eventual government coercion. In response, Christie urged promotion of such common values as hospitality, respect, and human dignity. Notably, he did not cite such values are holy living, sexual self-control, religious liberty, or basing one's morality on Scripture rather than one's surrounding culture.

A striking example of how the GBCS's self-perpetuating leadership manipulates the larger board of directors to which the agency is nominally accountable was seen during a meeting of the "Peace with Justice / International Issues" committee. The discussion of Iran was dominated by an official from the politically left-of-center Connect U.S. Fund, brought in from outside the church ostensibly to portray an overview of the factual reality of the situation. What he actually offered was a very opinionated, extended verbal editorial arguing that Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, is a generally trustworthy, well-intentioned moderate reformer and that the U.S. should take a softer stance towards the Islamic theocracy. In typical GBCS style, contrary expert perspectives were excluded from the discussion.

Financial Strength. Perhaps the most surprising part of the meeting was how, for all of the financial and membership decline cutting ministries and programming elsewhere in the UMC, the GBCS is sitting pretty atop a heap of money. The trustees report noted that the GBCS's endowment had recovered from the crash of 2008 and was now about \$16 million. That report also noted that the Methodist Building right next to the U.S. Supreme Court (the source of great rental income) was the agency's biggest asset. We have commented earlier on the financial scandal of how the GBCS staff for years misused building-related funds restricted for temperance and alcohol problems to instead pay for general expenses and then got a court order (initially opposed by the D.C. Attorney General's office) to retroactively invalidate a 1965 restriction of these funds. The GBCS projected spending a total of \$6.1 million in 2013 and then raising its annual expenditures to \$7.2 million in 2014. Between \$2.1 and \$2.3 million of this comes annually from apportionments skimmed from the offering plates of local United Methodist congregations.

At one point it was dubiously suggested that the GBCS staff were making a huge financial sacrifice by not working elsewhere. But according to the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) report to the 2012 General Conference, the base salary for GBCS's five senior staffers at that time ranged from \$103,500 to \$130,600, before benefits. Where else could you earn enough to be in the top one-tenth of one percent of the richest people in the world while enjoying as little real accountability as the GBCS staff enjoy and openly vilifying many of the very people who pay your salary? The GBCS staff's zeal for policies of raising other people's tax burdens made it seem a bit odd when the financial discussion turned to how the GBCS structures its own compensation packages to limit how much taxes they personally pay.

Other Matters. In other business, the GBCS directors:

- Watched an odd short film called "Redemption of the Prosecutor," which apparently seeks to build support for giving teenage felons a second chance after fifteen years of imprisonment. Jointly produced by the GBCS and a similar office of the United Church of Christ (UCC), it tells the story of a former state Assistant Attorney General who felt motivated by his Christian faith to regret dehumanizing those he prosecuted for violent crimes and so eventually quit his job. It also offers a sympathetic view of Cyntoia Brown, a young woman serving a life sentence for fatally shooting a man in what the film portrays as self-defense. "Redemption" offers no sympathy for Brown's victim, seems more concerned with pointing viewers to the goodness of Brown than the goodness of the Savior, and offers no clear presentation of the Gospel beyond some vague suggestions that Christians cannot faithfully work as prosecutors.
- Had some very brief, one-sided talk characterizing voter-identification requirements in North Carolina as "suppressing people's rights," and ignoring the fact that such provisions are supported by 72% of North Carolinians, including a majority of African Americans.
- Without dissent, the directors signed the GBCS up to join the U.S. Climate Action Network, with the only discussion being about the nominal membership fee. Regardless of the cause, it was striking to see the absolute lack of discussion, questioning, or desire for full consideration before directors rushed to give the church's name and resources for the unrestricted use by a secular political activist group.

Winkler memorably closed his final General Secretary's Address by sharing that when he first became the GBCS General Secretary, Bishop James Matthews gave him a little toy rhinoceros, telling him, "in your work, you need to have a thick hide, and a sharp horn on the end doesn't hurt either!" Winkler proceeded to dramatically pass on the rhinoceros to Henry-Crowe.

Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe now has a choice to make. Will she follow Winkler's example and the rest of the staff's habits of remaining callously indifferent to the pain and heartfelt concerns of countless faithful Christians within and beyond the UMC, and then turn a metaphorical weapon of violent going against those same disciples? Or is Henry-Crowe interested in leading the GBCS in a genuinely new direction – in sincerity and substance rather than just window-dressing and lip-service – of advancing rather than shattering church unity within and beyond the UMC, of having the integrity to follow the GBCS's own rules, and of defending the teachings of the church rather than the personal agendas of the staff? Even when this would mean opposing years of the GBCS's own institutional momentum, the clear eagerness of much of the board and staff to continue its ongoing course, and her own well-known liberal track record?

The ball is now in her court.
Methodists' associate.

– UMAAction. Received by E-mail from a Concerned

+ **GBCS Board Meeting – other news.** During its spring meeting in Chevy Chase, Md., the GBCS...issued a call for human rights for all people, urged a boycott of SodaStream and awarded more than \$150,000 in grants to UM-related ministries. GBCS's board consists of UMs from around the world. They issued a statement affirming human rights for all people. Legislative actions that discriminate, abuse and commit violence against persons on

the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression violate human rights and should be condemned, according to the statement.

Grants were approved in three categories: Human Relations Day, \$63,020 for four ministries; Peace with Justice, \$49,315 for 14 programs; and Ethnic Local Church, \$40,000 for two ministries. The first two are associated with Special Sundays with offerings. The Finance Committee reported that revenue from investments and rentals in the UM Building were \$1.2 million higher than projected for 2013. About \$250,000 of that revenue went to capital improvements. The remainder was allotted to agency reserves. These had been used in recent years to seed a new grassroots organizing effort. The committee also reported that about \$300,000 of those funds were returned to the reserves as well. Board task forces on Native American Ministries and Central Conferences requested time at the fall meeting to present issues important to their constituents. Both requests were approved. Action related to the name of the Washington National Football League team is under consideration as part of that time. The Central Conference task force will use climate justice as a case study on the global nature of the church.

The board approved GBCS becoming a member of Creation Justice Ministries, which works through education, training and public witness to protect God’s people and planet, and Publish What You Pay, a global network of civil society organizations calling for an open and accountable extractive sector so oil, gas and mining revenues improve the lives of people in resource-rich countries. The directors also began work on petitions to be presented to the 2016 General Conference. – Wayne Rhodes, GBCS, as reported in UMNewScope, March 26, 2014

+ **GBCS Sets 2014 Legislative Priorities.** The GBCS has set its 2014 legislative priorities for the U.S. Congress. The priorities include several issues in the headlines recently, such as immigration reform and health security.... The 2014 legislative priorities are: promote health security; prevent and curb addiction; support just, humane immigration reform; end mass incarceration in the U.S.; raise the minimum wage; combat income and wealth inequality; support clean air for communities; reform Toxic Substances Control Act; reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act; support diplomacy over war with Iran; overcome global poverty, hunger and conflict; stop sex/labor trafficking; protect access to family planning; support global maternal health; fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis.

UM Support for the Affordable Care Act: In support of the Affordable Care Act, Katey Zeh told a rally outside the Supreme Court building in Washington, DC: “As a Christian, I reject this use of my faith as a weapon when the core message of Christianity is the commandment to love and care for one another.” The Supreme Court heard arguments on a case as to whether a private company can get out of a federal law by citing the religious beliefs of its shareholders. Hobby Lobby Stores, a Christian-owned crafts supply chain, and Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp., owned by Mennonites, are challenging the Affordable Care Act provision that for-profit companies must include all Food & Drug Administration-approved contraceptives in their health-insurance plans.

[Note: Again, here is a GBCS staffer advocating on the side of forcing privately-owned businesses to cater to and serve people involved in practices that violate their Christian consciences and thereby denying them their 1st Amendment rights. – AOM]

– GBCS, as reported in UMNewScope, April 2, 2014

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Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak; not to act is to act.

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Global Outlook

Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.

Africa. UM Leaders Address Laws Targeting Gays

[Note: Observe the skewed reasoning of some of our UM leaders. The Africans have a solid biblical view of the practice of homosexuality that is, thankfully, also reflected in the Book of Discipline. Yet, the reasoning here is against that view. – AOM]

Leaders of two general agencies, Global Ministries (GBGM) and Church and Society (GBCS), have issued statements critical of countries enacting laws that target homosexuals. “This kind of legislation predictably is leading to increased marginalization, harassment, and exploitation in our global civil society,” said the GBGM statement, issued by Raleigh (N.C.) Area Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, the agency board’s president, and Thomas Kemper, its top executive, on Feb. 28. “Whatever our understanding of sexual orientation, the criminalization of homosexuality is not compatible with the UM Social Principles including the one that states that basic rights and civil liberties are ‘due all persons . . . regardless of sexual orientation.’” GBCS, which advocates for the denomination’s Social Principles, issued a similar statement: “Legislation that denies the human rights of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender is being deliberated and enacted in states of the United States and countries around the world. Such legislative actions that discriminate, abuse and commit violence against persons on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression violate human rights and should be condemned. Religious and cultural traditions do not excuse any form of discrimination, abuse and violence.” Kemper and Ward said the denomination also has “a strong insistence on the fundamental rights and sacred worth of all people in all places,” and called on UMs to advocate for “full human and civil rights in their respective countries and on the international level,” and to pray for victims of repression.

The statement by Ward and Kemper specifically mentioned Uganda, Nigeria, Russia and India. Meanwhile, Bishop Daniel Wandabula, leader of the East Africa Episcopal Area, including Uganda, issued his own statement complaining of an imbalance of attention to issues: “So many women and children have suffered rape, so many displaced, so many have lost their lives and so many are starving in refugee camps and yet almost all the emails in my inbox this week are focused on a single issue namely, the plight of the homosexual community,” Wandabula wrote Mar. 1. “Painful as it is, this issue is leaving so many, equally important issues in the shadows.” Wandabula’s statement did not address the recently passed Uganda law specifically but did call for unity and reconciliation: “No matter how we understand the issue of homosexuality, God calls us to love all of God’s people,” he said. “We cannot claim to be Christians if we harm others by our words or actions, regardless of how they perceive the issue.”
– Sam Hodges, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, March 12, 2014

Israel and the Middle East.

[Note: The duplicity and one-sidedness here is obvious. Israel has a right to exist free of attacks and danger. For the Palestinians to not recognize the nation of Israel as a Jewish state shows their unwavering desire for Israel’s destruction. – AOM]

Over 60 rockets as well as mortar rounds were fired from the Gaza Strip Wednesday at southern Israeli towns. Hours later the IDF fired tank shells at what it termed “terror targets” in the Strip. Islamic Jihad claimed it fired 90 rockets. Arab foreign ministers this week rejected Israel’s demands that the Palestinians recognize it as a Jewish state, saying such a move would undermine the rights of Palestinian refugees. This is a set-back to the U.S. peace initiative. Pray for the peace of Israel and Jerusalem. (Psalm 12:26)

– The Presidential Prayer Team, PO Box 69010, Oro Valley, AZ 85737-0009, March 13 - 19, 2014

World Council of Churches (WCC). WCC 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea

UMs were among the 1,000 official delegates and also were present as visitors and staff at the Oct. 30–Nov. 8 World Council of Churches 10th Assembly in Busan. The theme of the assembly, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace,” according to the WCC, was inspired by the diversity of Asian contexts and by a growing sense of urgency to care for life and seek justice. The fact that the theme is a prayer “is a very hopeful sign that the member churches of the WCC are deeply committed to discerning the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their midst as we convene in Busan,” said the Rev. Stephen J. Sidorak Jr., top executive of the Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships (OCUIR), who served as an adviser to the UM delegation. Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, ecumenical officer for the Council of Bishops, led the delegation. Three UMs are part of the newly elected Central Committee of the World Council of Churches: Swenson; Cynthia Kent, chairwoman of the Native American International Caucus and a member of the Southern Ute tribe; and Chicago Area Bishop Sally Dyck. Swenson was elected vice moderator for the committee. UM representation on the committee has dropped from five to three. The Rev. Larry Pickens, one of the UM central committee members elected in 2006, acknowledged the difficulties of reaching agreement about representation for the 345 WCC member churches. “The processes of central committee elections are very complicated and involve regional, gender and other balances which impact the total picture of those who ultimately serve,” he explained.

[Note: Again, this is one of two problematic groups that use money from good-hearted United Methodist laypeople to promote a left-wing agenda at the international level. This and the National Council of Churches have long outlived their usefulness and have in recent years been kept alive by money from UM laity. – AOM]

– Gladys Mangiduyos, Philippines Central Conference and Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), as published in UMNewscope, November 13, 2013.

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Annual Conference Reports

Bulgaria–Romania Provisional Annual Conference. This year’s gathering of Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference took place from Mar. 21–23 in Varna, Bulgaria. The ties between the representatives from Romania and Bulgaria have already grown stronger. While no one among the UMs could translate from Bulgarian to Romanian (or vice versa), all Romanian delegates speak English. Therefore the conference was held bilingually (Bulgarian and English). In his report on the development of the church in Bulgaria, Superintendent Daniel Topalski focused on several concerns and offered challenges to address them: the passive church (challenge: to empower lay people in their development and in taking over responsibilities); the silent church (challenge: to rediscover the fire of a personal faith and to share faith); the aging church (challenge: to reach and involve a younger generation with its specific talents). Topalski also built on his report of last year, in which he had spoken about the chances to rediscover and to consciously live the UM identity. The report was followed by an animated discussion, which revealed some of the rudiments of change in the local churches. There is a real intention for increased mutual support and cooperation. The Local Pastors Course of Study is now in its third and final year. Its helpful combination of electronic distance learning and block seminars is based on the experiences and methods of the “Methodist e-Academy.” And since the teachers of this Course of Study are the ordained elders of the annual conference, a sustainable pastoral community has developed. It is a joyful reality that there are regularly applicants for the ordained ministry, although the salaries are only slightly higher than the statutory minimum wage. In spite of the difficult economic situation and a constant brain drain, local giving is increasing each year. This does not change the reality that The UMC in Bulgaria will, for many years, continue to rely on financial support from abroad in order to cover pastors’ salaries and expenses for the various ministries. The next gathering of Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Annual Conference will take place from Apr. 2–4, 2015, in Shumen, Bulgaria.

– Office of Bishop Dr. Patrick Streiff, Zurich, as reported in UMNewScope, April 9, 2014

Serbia-Macedonia Provisional Annual Conference. “Be Holy!” was the theme of this year’s meeting of the Serbia-Macedonia Provisional Annual Conference, which took place Apr. 3–6 in Kisač, Serbia. In spite of 100 years of ministry, the conference retains its provisional status because it does not meet the requirement of at least 35 ordained elders to establish an Annual Conference of The UMC. The Serbia district consists of 14 local churches with nine ordained elders (two of them retired), two probationary pastors and three local pastors. The Macedonia district consists of 12 local churches with three ordained elders (two of them retired but still active), one probationary pastor and four local pastors (two of them retired but still active). Superintendent Wilfried Nausner, who is responsible for the work in Macedonia, also oversees the new mission work in Albania. In Albania, there are three UM churches. Two of them are developing very well, while the third is decreasing in numbers because many people are migrating elsewhere for jobs and a better future. The general economic situation in all three countries is more than difficult. Many church members have no significant income. Therefore, local giving covers only a small part of the salaries and other expenses, even though pastors’ salaries are very low, 240 EUR/month. However, the fact that the percentage of self-financing is increasing is an encouraging sign of hope. District Superintendent Wilfried Nausner raised one significant objective: “It is our priority to train church leaders who are able to empower others to take mature, wise and scriptural decisions, which serve the common good rather than self-interest. The point is to encourage new people to take responsibility for our church.” Against the background of this report, it was a special joy to hear that, after many years without new candidates for the ministry, a young person from Macedonia will start an internship year in order to explore his call to the ministry. A second objective relates to The UMC in Albania. The growing work in this secularized country is not connected to any of the seven annual conferences in Central and Southern Europe. And although the time of ethnic conflicts both between Serbs and Albanians as well as between Macedonians and Albanians ended only 15 years ago, the pastors suggested openly that The UMC in Albania should become part of the Serbia- Macedonia Provisional Annual Conference. The increasingly sustainable relations seem to open a door to a structural change, which could not have been enacted from the top. District Superintendent Ana Palik-Kunčak also raised the subject of mission, inviting members to visit all local churches to explore encouraging examples of witness and service: a kindergarten, English courses, a sewing project, special choirs, a ministry with drug addicts, a ministry with children, etc. She particularly underlined the importance of the emk-spielmobil (a mission tool of The UMC in Germany with a huge variety of outdoor games), which is attracting hundreds of children and parents each year, and which will again come to Serbia next summer.

– Esther Steiger, Switzerland, and Pastor Ralf Schweinsberg, Germany, as reported in UMNewscope, April 23, 2014.

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Progressive Liberalism: ideas so good they have to be mandated