

# Monthly Update

October 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I am going to stop promising that I will “return” the length of the Monthly Update to the seven-page format. It seems that there is more and more important information that I need to share with you. The only thing I would advise is what some supporters conveyed to the lady who complained about the length, “Just lay aside your copy of the Monthly Update after you’ve read enough. When you want to read more, go back to it later.” The general consensus was for as complete as possible a picture of what is happening.

This edition contains both issues in our church and also out in the world. The effects of ISIS on countries around the world threaten a vital part of our globe – the Persian Gulf. Much of the world depends on oil, and more so in Europe than the United States.

I have included a special section dealing with issues of especial importance to our United Methodist Church that will be addressed at General Conference 2016 to be held in Portland, Oregon. I had raised issues stemming from a recent meeting held by our North Carolina Conference Annual Conference delegation, of which I am a member. These have to do with the organization of the worldwide Methodist Church – and also possibly the future viability of our denomination. Our delegation leader had responded:

It is important to note that the 2012 General Conference in a majority vote gave a mandate to The Commission on General Conference and The Connectional Table to engage the Annual Conferences in conversations on the “Worldwide Nature of the Church” and then to bring back recommendations based on those conversations to the 2016 General Conference. Our delegation meeting on August 28 was a part of this mandated process. All Annual Conference conversations and any subsequent legislation that may be generated based on those conversations will be a direct result of “our own actions” at the 2012 General Conference.

I included in this section two analyses by Dr. Riley Case that gave a brief description of the prevailing plans to address the question of “Where do we go from here?” as a denomination. Then he offered his analysis of each one and its viability. As a conclusion he laid out what he considered as the best way forward. I agree with his conclusions. They provide the best, most viable way for us to reset the course of our church that would have the best chance of its growing – much less to hope for its survival.

I cannot say enough how much I appreciate your partnering with us, in not only your prayers and finances but also in your notes of encouragement. I cherish equally the kind words sent by the “little old ladies” who are widowed and living on fixed incomes to the “crusty” Marine Gunny Sergeant who sends a positive note along with his financial gift to us. All of these encourage us as we “contend for the faith” as the Lord has called us.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris  
Executive Director

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## October 2014 Update

### **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

It is he, Jesus Christ, the true life who gives hope and purpose to our earthly existence.

~ The late John Paul II, at Regis University, 1993

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#### **The Good Stuff. *InterVarsity Will 'Reinvent' Student Ministry on California State Campuses***

*Christian fellowship finds silver lining in being booted from America's largest university system.*

*InterVarsity students at Sonoma State University display new outreach method.*

In response to being derecognized by America's largest university system, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship announced today that it is "developing a new style of campus ministry" that doesn't "rely on established campus structures." The new methods will "prove considerably more costly" for the student ministry's 23 chapters on 19 campuses of California State University (CSU).

But InterVarsity, which is approaching its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, hopes to build off last school year's record rates of participation and evangelism. "Our campus access challenges give this generation of students an opportunity to reinvent campus ministry," stated Greg Jao, InterVarsity's national field director, in a press release which noted:

InterVarsity is introducing creative new ways to connect with students and share the gospel message, though doing so as an 'unrecognized' student group will prove considerably more costly. Because we are no longer allowed to participate in campus organization fairs, InterVarsity will make contact with students by deploying new tools such as mobile banner stands, interactive displays, social media, and other techniques that don't rely on established campus structures.

Meanwhile, on the remaining 616 college campuses across America where InterVarsity has an active presence, the campus ministry stated it will carry on its methods refined over seven decades. InterVarsity saw its "highest participation rate ever" last school year. Nearly 40,300 students and faculty were active across its 949 chapters, and more than 3,500 people "profess[ed] faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord for the first time"—almost double the professions InterVarsity recorded 10 years ago, according to the release.

Yesterday, CT examined InterVarsity's three-phase strategy to campus access challenges. "This could be the tipping point of other university systems moving in this direction, so that's why we are concerned," InterVarsity president Alec Hill told CT. "It's as if the First Amendment now protects Greeks but not religious folks, which is Alice in Wonderland stuff." Boyce College's Owen Strachan, an alumnus of Bowdoin College which also derecognized InterVarsity this year, reflects on why the CSU decision is "a watershed moment" and perhaps only "the low point of the wave." He suggests: This should call local churches to a season of fresh investment. I am understating myself here.

Every local church that is near a college campus should soberly consider retrofitting and enhancing its ministry to the school. Campus ministries will in increasing number be unable to do things like reserve a dining room or meeting space. But local churches—at least at this point in American life—are not inhibited from doing all they can to reach out to students and inviting them to trust Christ and join the congregation. This we should all do in greater measure in coming days.

In CT's September issue, an InterVarsity leader from Vanderbilt University, one of the highest-profile disputes over campus access yet, reflects on being "the wrong kind of Christian" on today's college campuses. Tish Harrison Warren, who now works with InterVarsity at the University of Texas–Austin, examines over at Mere Orthodoxy the belief that "if Christians aren't respected, then we are doing something wrong." She also offered more details on what happened at Vanderbilt to Rod Dreher.

– Jeremy Weber; received by e-mail; 9/9/2014. Courtesy of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Permission granted.

[http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/september/intervarsity-will-reinvent-student-ministry-california-stat.html?utm\\_source=ctweekly-tml&utm\\_medium=Newsletter&utm\\_term=12019557&utm\\_content=300704612&utm\\_campaign=2013](http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/september/intervarsity-will-reinvent-student-ministry-california-stat.html?utm_source=ctweekly-tml&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=12019557&utm_content=300704612&utm_campaign=2013)

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Politicians are people who, when they see light at the end of the tunnel, go out and buy some more tunnel. ~ John Quinton

### Global Outlook

Opportunities never come a second time, nor do they wait for our leisure. – Booker T. Washington

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#### Iraq.

+ ***Persecution of Christians in Iraq.*** As Iraqi Christians fled Mosul this weekend, the horror of having to leave home because of one's faith was met with the further indignity of being stripped of all but the clothes on their backs. The jihadists of ISIS forced out the last remaining Christians whose legacy in Mosul goes back to the very origins of Christianity. According to early church history it was two of Jesus' original disciples that carried the gospel to what we know today as Iraq. Not only are the Christians being driven from their homes -- when fleeing families reached checkpoints out of the city, they were told to get out of their cars and leave all their money and possessions behind. The generosity of the ISIS extremists extended only as far as allowing them to keep what they were wearing -- after they had removed any jewelry, of course. An entire city purged of Christians. – E-mail, Family Research Council; 22 July 2014.

#### + ***Iraq crisis: End 'very near' for Christianity after Isis takeover, says Bishop***

The vicar of the only Anglican church in Iraq has warned the end for Christians in the country appears “very near” as he appealed for help after a deadline set by Islamic militants to convert or be killed expired. Canon Andrew White, dubbed "the bishop of Baghdad" for his work at St George's church in the capital, spoke after the ultimatum handed to Christians in the northern city of Mosul by the Islamic State of Iraq Levant (Isis) to convert, pay a tax or be put to death passed last week. For those Christians who did not comply with the decree by 19 July, Isis warned that "there is nothing to give them but the sword." Many have since fled their homes and Rev. Andrew-White told BBC Radio 4 Today desperate Christians were trapped in the desert or on the streets with nowhere to go. "Things are so desperate, our people are disappearing," he said. "We have had people massacred, their heads chopped off. Are we seeing the end of Christianity? We are committed come what may, we will keep going to the end, but it looks as though the end could be very near."

– Received by e-mail. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-bishop-of-baghdad-warns-end-could-be-very-near-for-christianity-after-isis-takeover-9630554.html>

+ ***In the ISIS of the Storm....*** Humanitarian aid isn't the only thing reaching the top of Mount Sinjar -- so are Western journalists. And the first-hand accounts they're sharing are horrifying. The Iraqi situation is deteriorating for the refugees, despite the last minute help from America and three days of airstrikes. "It is death valley," said Iraqi General Ahmed Ithwany. "Up to 70% of the [people who fled up the mountain] are dead." Those who are still alive are running toward the parachutes of food -- more than 36,000 meals -- and thousands of gallons of water, one of the few signs of hope on the bleak landscape. The Telegraph's Jonathan Krohn talked to some of the Iraqis pinned on the slopes, many of whom feel betrayed by the West. "When the Americans withdrew from Iraq, they didn't protect the Christians," said one of the refugees. "The Christians became the scapegoats. Everyone has been killing us." Even now, many see the U.S.'s intervention as too little too late. Late yesterday, the radical jihadists known as ISIS were bearing down on yet another village, threatening its families to "convert by noon... or we kill all of you."

– E-mail, Family Research Council; 11 Aug 2014.

+ *Iraqi Christians flee for their lives. “Convert to Islam, Pay the Tax, Flee–or Die”*. Imagine waking up one morning to find a red spray-painted symbol on the front of your house, identifying you as a Christian. The Arabic letter for “nun,” meaning “Nazarenes,” was recently painted on homes of Christians in the city of Mosul, Iraq, by an organized terrorist group called IS (Islamic State). Then on July 17, Christians were given a choice: convert to Islam, pay a high tax, flee or die. The Voice of the Martyrs workers reported that some recited the shahada (Muslim confession of faith) and converted to Islam. None paid the tax to stay, and most fled the city to save their families’ lives. The believers fled without their belongings, many on foot. – E-mail, The Voice of the Martyrs, 11 Aug 2014

## **Islam.**

### + *Islam: 'Appalling and Abhorrent' in the Eyes of a Blind World?*

An eight-month pregnant wife and mother was sentenced to death by hanging for refusing to renounce Christ and embrace Islam. According to the LA Times: The court also ordered Ibrahim to be flogged for having sexual relations with her husband, since her marriage is not recognized by officials. Ibrahim refused a court order Sunday giving her several days to renounce her Christian faith, which resulted in the sentencing Thursday....Ibrahim, currently jailed with her son, will be allowed to give birth and raise her second child until the age of 2 years but then faces execution. Sudanese authorities refuse to allow Ibrahim's son to reside with her husband because the husband is Christian.

Tragic as this story is, it is also immensely commonplace in Islamic countries. Why? Because Islamic law does in fact punish the apostate from Islam—including with death—in accordance with the commands of the Muslim prophet Muhammad. Indeed, many Muslim clerics believe that "If the [death] penalty for apostasy was ignored, there would not be an Islam today; Islam would have ended on the death of the prophet," as top Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi once declared on live television. Of more significance is the Amnesty International statement concerning Meriam Ibrahim's plight. While its criticism is aimed at Sudan's legal system, the statement unwittingly provides a glimpse of how the international community would view Islam if it could actually understand that these human rights abuses are not products of this or that government or regime, but of Islam itself. According to the Amnesty International statement: The fact that a woman has been sentenced to death for her religious choice, and to flogging for being married to a man of an allegedly different religion is appalling and abhorrent. Adultery and apostasy are acts which should not be considered crimes at all. It is flagrant breach of international human rights law. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which includes the freedom to hold beliefs, is far-reaching and profound; it encompasses freedom of thought on all matters, personal conviction and the commitment to religion or belief.

If, as Amnesty International declares, flogging and executing a person, in this case a pregnant woman, because of her "religious choice" and marrying a man of a "different religion" are "appalling and abhorrent"; if they are a "flagrant breach of international human rights law" – what do we make of the fact that Muslim converts to Christianity are punished and sometimes killed all across the Islamic world? Consider the following anecdotes, a few examples, most from 2013 alone (culled from my monthly "Muslim Persecution of Christians" series and listed in country alphabetical order):

Afghanistan: A member of Afghanistan's Parliament said that all Afghans who convert to Christianity should be executed. His exact words: "Afghani citizens continue to convert to Christianity in India. Numerous Afghans have become Christians in India. This is an offense to Islamic Laws and according to the Quran they need to be executed." As one of many live examples, Said Musa, an amputee and father of six young children, was once charged with apostasy and pressured to renounce Christianity, but he refused. So he was imprisoned, suffering "sexual abuse, beatings, mockery, and sleep deprivation because of his faith in Jesus."

Algeria: The wife of Ali Touahir, a 52-year-old Muslim convert to Christianity, left him, taking their seven-year-old daughter, and is divorcing him in court. One of his wife's brothers openly threatened to kill apostate. The wife's lawyer asserted: "It is not possible that my client [the Muslim wife] still remain under the same roof with a

man who has renounced his religion, as he became apostate; and we are not ignorant of the punishment that is due an apostate under sharia [death]."

Cameroon: Two Muslim converts to Christianity were shot dead and two others wounded, in the Christian-majority African nation where Muslims make approximately 20 percent of the population. One of them was previously threatened by the Nigerian Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram to return to Islam or "face Allah's wrath."

Egypt: A court sentenced an entire family—Nadia Mohamed Ali and her seven children—to fifteen years in prison for converting to Christianity. A born Christian, Nadia had earlier converted to Islam and married a Muslim man; reconverting back to Christianity after the death of her husband, she attempted to reflect this change formally on her identity card and her children's, which created suspicions among security, who arrested the family. Separately... in Egypt, after a former Muslim woman on live television announced her apostasy and lack of faith in Muhammad as the "Messenger of Allah," she was insulted, ridiculed, and thrown off the set by the host.

Iran: Imprisoned American pastor Saeed Abedini was reported as "facing physical and psychological torture at the hands of captors demanding he renounce his beliefs." The 32-year-old married father of two, who left his home in Boise, Idaho, to help start an orphanage in his former country, once detailed "horrific pressures" and "death threats" in a letter to family members: "My eyes get blurry, my body does not have the strength to walk, and my steps become very weak and shaky... They are only waiting for one thing...for me to deny Christ. But they will never get this from me." The imprisonment and torture of Muslim converts to Christianity in Iran is quite common (recall the plight of Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani). According to Adnkronos News, "renouncing the Muslim faith is punishable with the death penalty [in Iran]. Over 300 Iranian converts to Christianity have been arrested over the past two years, according to opposition websites."

Kyrgyz: After a young Muslim girl converted to Christianity, her parents "wanted her to recant and renounce her faith in Christ, so they began to beat her systematically till she lost consciousness... It was winter when all of this happened, so her parents put her into a cold room and kept her there for several days. Still they were unable to break her spirit. They then started pulling her hair and put her face against the stove, burning her face. In spite of this, she remained faithful."

Morocco: A fatwa, or Islamic decree, by the government's top religious authority, calls for the execution of those Muslims who leave Islam, causing many Christian converts to live in fear. Lamented one Christian: "The fatwa showed us that our country is still living in the old centuries—no freedom, no democracy. Unfortunately, we feel that we aren't protected. We can be arrested or now even killed any time and everywhere. The majority of the Christian Moroccan leaders have the same feeling. We are more followed now by the secret police than before. Only the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ gives us courage and peace."

Pakistan: A 16-year-old Muslim boy who converted to Christianity was abducted in Peshawar by Taliban-linked Islamic militants "and his fate may already be marked, as he is considered 'guilty of apostasy.'" As one Pakistani pastor explained, "If a young Muslim converts to Christianity in Pakistan, he is forced to live in hiding. Every Muslim might feel compelled to kill him. The change of religion is not punished by the civil law, it is punishable by Islamic law. For this reason cases of Muslim conversion to Christianity are very rare and some convert in secret." Muhammad Kamran, a Muslim convert to Christianity, exemplifies the pastor's words. After he told his wife of his conversion, she abused and exposed him, resulting in his being severely beaten by local Muslims. In his words: "No one was willing to let me live the life I wanted [as a Christian]—they say Islam is not a religion of compulsion, but no one has been able to tell me why Muslims who don't find satisfaction in the religion [such as myself] become liable to be killed."

Saudi Arabia: After a woman was exposed as having converted to Christianity, she was sentenced to six years in prison and 300 lashes. Although she managed to flee the nation and went into hiding, the Christian Lebanese man accused of introducing her to Christianity received six years in prison and 300 lashes.

Somalia: The Al-Qaeda linked Al Shabaab ("The Youth"), which has vowed to cleanse the Horn of Africa of all Christian presence, has slaughtered countless Muslim converts to Christianity – men, women, and children – in

the last few years. Most recently, Al Shabaab shot to death 42-year-old Fartun Omar, a widow and mother of five, for converting to Christianity. Months earlier, they had killed her husband for the same "crime," and had been hunting for the wife. In a separate incident, Al Shabaab publicly executed a 28-year-old man after determining that he had in fact become a Christian. Al Shabaab Muslims also seized Hassan Gulled, 25, for leaving Islam and converting to Christianity, and imprisoned him, and tortured him. According to local sources, "Al Shabaab have been torturing him to see whether he would deny his Christian faith. Since last week, no information has surfaced concerning Gulled. There is a possibility that he could have been killed."

Tanzania: At the time pregnant and with three children, Lukia Khalid explained how when she told her Muslim husband that she had converted to Christianity, "He threatened to kill me if I was to stay with him. I then decided to escape that night with my three children to a neighbor's house.... We left only with the clothes that we were wearing. The command was so urgent that we could not wait any longer. We had to leave immediately." Last heard, they were living in destitute conditions.

Returning to Meriam Ibrahim, the pregnant Sudanese mother who had been set to be executed for refusing to recant Christ and embrace Islam, some questions and observations are in order:

Are all the other anecdotes listed above not equally "appalling and abhorrent" – to use Amnesty International's words describing Meriam's specific plight? Are they not all a "flagrant breach of international human rights law"? If so, and if the international community is actually serious about putting a stop to them, should it not try to ascertain the true source behind them?

After all, considering that Muslim converts to Christianity are being attacked all throughout the Islamic world – including in nations as diverse as Algeria, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, and Kyrgyz – surely the source is not something as simple as "Sudan's legal system."

The fact is, Muslim converts to Christianity are even under attack in Europe. In Norway alone, for example, two Iranian converts out for a walk were stabbed with knives by masked men shouting "infidels!" One of the men stabbed had converted in Iran, was threatened there, and immigrated to Norway, thinking he could escape Islam's apostasy penalty. Earlier, an Afghan convert to Christianity was scalded with boiling water and acid at a Norwegian refugee processing center: "If you do not return to Islam, we will kill you," his attackers told him.

Of course, the true source for all these attacks on Muslim converts to Christianity – in nations that do not share race, language, culture, politics, or economics – is Islam itself. Anyone with common sense, anyone with the ability to be honest with oneself, must [recognize that the core issue is the core of the religious beliefs themselves].

But so long as the international community and human rights organizations fail to employ some common sense and honesty – fail to call a spade a spade – so will they ensure that countless more innocent humans like Meriam Ibrahim continue to suffer "appalling and abhorrent" treatment, simply for trying to exercise their "right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" under Islam.

– By Raymond Ibrahim, *Human Events*; Middle East Forum. May 21, 2014. Raymond Ibrahim, author of *Crucified Again: Exposing Islam's New War on Christians* (Regnery, April, 2013) is a Shillman Fellow at the David Horowitz Freedom Center and an Associate Fellow at the Middle East Forum.

### **Liberia. UPDATE FROM LIBERIA**

Friends, Jerry Kulah is a dear Christian brother in Liberia. Formerly a district superintendent, he is now the Dean at the Gbarnga School of Theology at the UMC University there in Liberia. It's easy for us to watch the news and think about how bad things are, and then move on. But as Brother Jerry tells us, the "storm of Ebola" is real and devastating. Thought you might be interested in reading this message from him, and doubling up on your prayers for our UM brothers and sisters in Africa.

Blessings, [Received from an associate in the Renewal Movement]

We send you our love, greetings and best wishes in the most powerful name of our God and King, Christ Jesus. The “storm of Ebola” is raging across the length and breadth of Liberia, affecting the entire fabric of the nation. This national crisis is very serious, but we are confident that God is in control of the situation. We thank you, your family, and church for standing with us in prayers and supporting us in other meaningful ways. God richly bless you.

The Ebola crisis caught us unaware. We as a nation and people were foreign to the deadly virus and its effects until it suddenly came upon us and overtook us. Before national leaders could give careful attention to the virus, we found ourselves in harm’s way. When it was first reported, initially affecting just a county within the nation, the majority of our citizens were largely in a state of denial, claiming that the information was untrue. At the same time national leaders responsible for health issues did not take the necessary precautionary measures to contain the virus.

Borders of neighboring countries of Sierra Leone and Guinea from whence the virus came were left unattended health-wise in favor of cross borders trades until the virus invaded the nation’s capital as well as additional other counties as the case is at the moment. Ebola is real. It is a challenging crisis. But our God is able to rescue us. So we are hopeful that this too will come to pass as we seek God’s intervention, create awareness, and intervene in other helpful ways as a Church.

We at the Gbarnga School of Theology had a successful 2013/2014 second semester academic studies and concluded our exams in late July, just at about the time the Ebola crisis was becoming an epidemic of national proportion. Graduation was scheduled for 12th August. But that, as well as other major events has had to be postponed as we all give our collective attention to the fight against the Ebola virus. At the moment, all of our students are off campus and back into their cities, towns and villages as we all battle it out in prayer, sensitization, awareness and community outreach to ensure that this dangerous and deadly virus is wiped out of Liberia. We are praying that the same will be true for neighboring countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and our most populous country, Nigeria.

As I write to you, our UMC students are into their various districts mobilizing prayers, some are serving on volunteer teams to create awareness and distribute needed items such as Clorox, buckets, chlorines, and other disinfectants, as they are able to help save lives. The situation is highly volatile and hazardous, but we are determined to “fight” this deadly virus until God takes it out of Liberia.

As a Conference, we have already lost some members to the virus. Several of our districts have reported cases of death, including 8 family members from one family in the Kakata/Farmington River District who died some time ago. The District Superintendent of the Sinoe District also died on last week, but it is not clear whether his death was due to the Ebola virus, but he was criminated by authorities along with other Ebola victims, etc. In the wake of the temporary close down of major health centers in the country; some doctors and nurses’ voluntary abandonment of their assignment due to inadequate equipment to protect themselves; many major businesses have closed down as many expatriates have left the country in their droves. Many across the county are gripped with fear and uncertainty of the future. But we are trusting God for his intervention.

Government has put into place several stringent measures to limit the spread of the virus: a state of emergency has been declared for three months; a night to dawn curfew has been imposed across the country; movements have been restricted in some high risk communities, including time limit to entertainment centers; etc. These measures are not however without high price being borne by everyone. Prices of basic commodities, especially food have suddenly increased; thereby making the cost of living very difficult for many. Because institutions, offices and jobs as well as some business are temporarily closed, that means salaries and funds are also not available for many of us who work with Church institutions. If this situation continues for too long, many might not be able to afford daily meal. So, how long will this scourge afflict us? Only God knows. Our responsibility is to continue to pray until our change comes.

As we pray, based on my Christian perspective and undaunted faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ, I am confident that our nation and people will survive this national epidemic “storm” called Ebola because the Lord, Jesus is in this “storm” along with us (Mark. 4: 35-41). Whatever might be the cause of this Ebola outbreak, whether due to

mere human errors, poverty, lack of effective health facility and education or whether it is a spiritual discipline of God upon the nation (2Chron. 7:13), we are believing God to heal our Land, as He has promised in His Word, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sins and heal their land (2Chronicles 7:14).

Personally, the Lord has been good to us. We are here in Liberia and are keeping safe. However, we are in dire need of basic resources to help support many needy families who cannot afford food and other basic necessities. The Seminary where I work was also shut down since we concluded academic work in early July. Because the Institution’s operations entirely depend upon fees from students, we are not being able to earn salary since July; while prices of some basic commodities are increasing by the day. We may not be able to earn salary or get the Seminary operational until the Ebola crisis comes to an end.

Few weeks ago, we received a gift of Two Thousand Dollars (\$2000.00) from friends we do not know, through the International Leadership Institute. With that fund, over the past weeks we have been engaged with sensitization within various communities and the sharing of some disinfectants, including outreach into parts of the interiors of Liberia. We made outreach to the Gbarnga, Kokoya and Jorquelleh Districts of our Conference. We also visited several villages within Bong County, including Boway, Shenkpoi, and Gowoan to create awareness and give out buckets, Clorox, soap, etc. Now, what the people need, including several quarantined families, is food. We trust God for funding to help support this initiative; and for support for my family as well. I am glad to share these needs and concerns with you. Thanks for keeping us in prayers for safety and provisions. Blessings, Jerry Kulah, Dean, Gbarnga School of Theology, United Methodist University, Liberia Episcopal Area, UMC

– Jerry Kulah by e-mail; September 15, 2014 9:13 AM.

### **Annual Conference Reports**

**New York Annual Conference.** New York Annual Conference met June 4–7 at Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY. The theme was “The Prophetic Church: Pray about It. Talk about It. Be about It!” Resident bishop Martin D. McLee was unable to preside (McLee began a six-month medical leave of absence on July 1). The officiating bishops were Sudarshana Devadhar (New England Annual Conference) and Alfred E. Johnson (retired), who presided over the conference business; Bishop Jane Allen Middleton (retired) led the ordination service. Guest speakers: The Rev. Dr. Zan Holmes. Memorable points or quotes by speakers: Holmes: “What would happen in the church if we didn’t care who got the credit? If we gave God the glory and checked our egos at door?”

**Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference:** Offerings: \$30,848, in four offerings; 4,554 health kits for UMCOR. Awards: Shirley Parris Award for exceptional volunteer service (Barbara Edwards of St. Paul’s UMC, Jamaica, N.Y.); Harry Denman Evangelism Awards (Kevin Rushlo of East Quogue UMC and posthumously to William Listwan of Drew UMC); Approved: 62 submitted petitions and reports, including one affirming the ministry of all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender clergy, and a second declaring the NYAC a safe space where GLBTQ persons can participate openly and equally in the full life of the church; budget of \$8,527,715, a 3.1% decrease; merger of four churches into two new congregations; sale of 12 properties; pending sale of Camp Epworth. Name of delegates elected to 2016 General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference: Lay delegates to General Conference: Fred Brewington, Dorothee Benz, Dorlimar Lebròn Malavé and Carolyn Hardin Engelhardt. Clergy delegates to General Conference: Tim Riss, William Shillady, Noel Chin and Denise Smartt Sears. Lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Roena Littlejohn, Ximena Varas, Rashid Warner, and Ross Williams. Clergy delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Vicki Flippin, Kun Sam Cho, Sara Thompson Tweedy, and Milca Plaud. Reserve delegates not named. Conference statistics: The 2013 church membership is 107, 571, down 2,658 from 2012. Weekly church attendance is 32,296, down 1,501. Church school attendance is 7,986, down 535.

– Joanne S. Utley, Conferencember; as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 33 / August 20, 2014 & Vol. 42, Issue 35 / September 3, 2014.



**Rocky Mountain Annual Conference.** The conference met June 19–22 in Pueblo, Col. The officiating bishop was Elaine J. W. Stanovsky. Guest speakers: Ray Buckley, director for the Center of Native Spirituality and Christian Study, Tlingit Lakota, Ala.; Dr. Henrietta Mann, president of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal College in Oklahoma; Gary L. Roberts, emeritus professor of History, Abraham Baldwin College, Tifton, Ga.; Albert Hernandez, academic vice president and dean of the Faculty at Iliff School of Theology; the Rev. Chebon Kernell, executive secretary of Native American and Indigenous Ministries Justice and Discipleship, General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). Memorable points or quotes by speaker: Ray Buckley: “All that is sacred is the hoop that binds us all together. Which knot can we do without?”

**Adopted legislation:** Approved: Fifth Annual Valentine’s Resolution on Global HIV and AIDS: Endorsed the Global AIDS Fund as a “mission of the month” for February 2015; encouraged special offerings and related presentations; directed the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference Global AIDS Fund Committee to use a portion of the offering to help (a) AIDS orphans in Meru, Kenya, and (b) support a rural Women and Children’s Center in Namakkal, India; planned several “Have a Heart” Training Days for clergy and laity. Approved “Hydraulic Fracturing” – encouraging conversations about hydraulic fracking between UM congregations and local communities and governments; resources provided by Board of Church and Society.

**Conference statistics:** Membership is 61,095, down 2, 213. Worship attendance is 29,399, down 841. Sunday church school attendance is 7,649, down 1,070. Professions of faith are at 1,451, down 204. Total participation (children, youth, adults) in all Christian formation small groups or ministries stands at 36,732, down 950. Number of persons engaged in mission stands at 15,780.

[Note: Is it any wonder that the statistics all indicate decline when priorities are misguided and politically-oriented. – AOM]

– Kerry Greenhill, Rocky Mountain Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 35 / September 3, 2014.

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### **Of Special Interest**

On August 28<sup>th</sup> of this year, the General/Jurisdictional Delegation held a meeting at the headquarters of the North Carolina Conference (NCC) of the United Methodist Church in Garner. This was as a result of the 2012 General Conference held in Tampa, Florida. The meeting was to explore the question of whether or not to make the United States into a separate “Central” or “Regional” conference similar to those of the overseas Methodist Churches. Below are papers I had formulated as a result of this process, two from Dr. Riley Case, and an extract from a book I had authored entitled *At the Crossroads*. I offer them for your consideration since they deal with important, foundational issues in the UMC. The first letter is addressed to Mrs. Emily Innes, the very-capable leader of the NCC Delegation.

Dear Emily,

I cannot get our last meeting out of my mind, with thoughts of the times in which we live in the life of the United Methodist Church and the importance of what is happening now – especially the issues that we had addressed.

First of all, as we had discussed previously, I am grateful that the members of our delegation relate to each other as members of a family – with differing opinions but not with animosity.

Secondly, as I had said to you at the end of our meeting, I am so grateful for your leadership – that at times you are tasked with trying to “herd a group of cats” in that so many of us with differing ideas believe we have something to say and want to say it.

But I am worried about our United Methodist Church and I had wanted to offer some real concerns. When I was in the Army I had on several occasions formulated what is known as an “Estimate of the Situation” – which was an evaluation of different military combat/contingency actions that were being considered. These were always classified from “Secret” up to “Top Secret/SCI”. In it I evaluated our contemplated action, friendly

forces, enemy forces, what the enemy was likely to do – and what the outcome would be. Then we would know how to go in and complete our mission in the most effective way possible.

I cannot help but use this experience to look at the situation in which we find ourselves. Attached is the paper (entitled “Thoughts on the Issues before Us”) I had used as my “thinking guide” for the meeting. The paper by Dr. Riley Case, again a retired elder and former district superintendent from the Indiana Conference, is one which lays out several plans before members of our denomination and offers some analyses on what the courses of action are. In preparation for our August 28<sup>th</sup> delegation meeting, I had met with him in Tipton, a little town northeast of Indianapolis, and we discussed these matters for 2½ hours over dinner. He is a person whose opinion I respect a great deal, very level-headed and analytical.

One thing I will say at this point is that I do not support schism in any way nor will I ever be a part in it, even though that is one of the “plans” out there and being considered by some as described in Dr. Case’s paper; I believe that we as a church need to work out our problems internally without resorting to that.

And I do appreciate the fact that the Connectional Table has used the approach that it did in giving us the three options to consider in advance of any contemplated legislation they may draft for General Conference 2016.

Here is where my “Estimate of the Situation” keeps cropping up, and assuredly the Connectional Table is not “the enemy” in this; it is just that the same principles apply.

I am a bit surprised that the Connectional Table is contemplating this action at this point in time in view of what the results were after the 2008 General Conference and the legislation that went out to a world-wide vote of the annual conferences in 2009. Then later when the Connectional Table introduced legislation before the 2012 General Conference and, as we had seen, it was dead in the water by Saturday night after the first week; General Conference 2012 was like no other I had ever attended (since 1996).

And now the Connectional Table is contemplating a similar action at this time.

I perceive that the two previous actions (2009/2012) were rebuffs to the leadership and the thinking of not only the Connectional Table but also to the Council of Bishops. I also believe that the rejections may have been due at least in part to what someone else had initially brought up at our meeting – an air of distrust. This view is reinforced by what Dr. Case had written in another paper in the fall of 2010 entitled “Call to Action and the Agencies (and mentioned in the August 28<sup>th</sup> “thinking” paper)” *Perhaps as never before there is a fundamental divide between the corporate leadership of the United Methodist Church and its people. In addition, the corporate leadership is either unwilling or unable to recognize the seriousness of this problem and relate it to the membership and financial crisis presently facing the church.*

This air of distrust may be even more widespread today with the growing disobedience to the Book of Discipline that is being evidenced by, not only some UM pastors, but also by some of our bishops. In addition, some actions by some of the general boards and agencies have long been seen as problematic and are causing concern at this time; these too lend to the air of distrust (See the books *The Betrayal of the Church* by the late Dr. Ed Robb and Julia Robb, *Biases and Blind Spots* by the late Professor Robert L. Wilson [both on the Concerned Methodists’ website at:

<http://www.cmpage.org/betrayal/>; <http://www.cmpage.org/biases/>], *On Thin Ice* by Roy Howard Beck, and both *At the Crossroads* and *Stewardship Perspectives – 2007*, books which I had put together.)

A major concern is the last point I had made in the August 28<sup>th</sup> “thinking” paper: *Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this would in fact damage the interconnectivity of our worldwide church. Rather, we need to enhance this connectivity.* The faith in the “third world” countries has much to teach us, especially in Africa. Over ten years ago I had spent four weeks with a Methodist missionary family in Africa and was amazed at the faith and spirituality of the Africans in Tanzania. It is truly a mission field waiting to be harvested. My impression of their strong faith was reinforced by Dr. Richard Bowen, an ordained Baptist minister here in Fayetteville, who had spent some time in Ivory Coast; he came back amazed at the depth of faith he had witnessed. He had story after story after story he told me from his experiences there. We have much to gain by our relationship with those

in the “third world countries” and would be much poorer spiritually if that connectivity were in any way damaged. (See the attachment “Two African Grandmothers”)

Emily, I love our United Methodist Church and do not want to see it damaged any further. I would like nothing more than to see revival that would get our church turned around. If true revival did come, we would correct our problems, and our decline would be reversed. The book *Rekindling the Flame* by then-professors William H. Willimon (later bishop) and the late Robert L. Wilson (both formerly at Duke University) speaks to ideas for this. The subtitle is “Strategies for a vital United Methodism”; the book lays out what the authors believe would turn the church around, and speaks to things needed that are, for the most part, non-organizational in nature. The only chapter dealing with organization is one on simplifying the local church structure. (This book in its entirety is available to read on the Concerned Methodists’ website at: <http://www.cmpage.org/rekindling/>)

Rev. Paul Stallworth had mentioned the Law of Unintended Consequences; I was not aware of that law, but I have certainly seen the reality played out in practice. One aspect of my “Estimate of the Situation” in this regard is how it may play out in the United Methodist Church. I believe that if the Connectional Table does proceed with this legislation, it will again be defeated, and as a result, their credibility will be further eroded along with that of the Council of Bishops. Who knows where that will lead? Will people question the future viability of our general church leadership? This may very well be the case. Will laypeople question why they should support the general church with their money? Will churches grow reluctant to pay their apportionments? Will even more laypeople question why they should remain as United Methodists? Will this be a catalyst that will precipitate the dissolution of the connectivity of the United Methodist Church as we know it? Who knows where this action would lead?

That has been one of the ironies of our ministry. When we talk to people, we want them to stay and make a difference; yet all too often, we in Concerned Methodists are seen as their last chance for encouragement. But all too often, they leave our denomination anyway. Just one example is a medical doctor (a surgeon) whom I had encouraged to stay and “fight for the future” of our United Methodist Church – yet he took his family which included two young children and joined Manna, a large non-denominational church here in Fayetteville.

Emily, I had wanted to air these concerns with you. It is just that this may play out in the way that my “Estimate of the Situation” portends – and I will be very concerned that it will further damage our United Methodist Church.

Thank you again for your leadership and be assured that you all will continue in my prayers.

Sincerely,  
Allen O. Morris  
Member of the NCC Delegation

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August 28, 2014

**Thoughts on the Issues before Us:**

Our United Methodist Church is in a serious time of crisis in the history of our denomination. We have been in a period of unbroken membership decline since 1968. At this time, there are various proposals offered (see paper by Dr. Riley Case, a retired United Methodist [elder] and former district superintendent from the Indiana Conference). One is being put forth by the Connectional Table – and it merits some thoughts. Its basic premise seems to be that “we have failed so we need to have a new structure.”

Questions.

+ Why is there the push for reorganization at this time in light of the various plans being considered [and especially at the 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth]?

- + What is the urgency to restructure the church at this time?
- + Do you consider the United Methodist Church to be dysfunctional?

### Observations.

- + Attempts to restructure the church in the recent past include:

The amendments passed at the 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth with their being rushed through on the last day with minimal or no discussion or examination of their provisions (and with some of the procedures being problematic in that one entire African delegation had been sent home early because of their airline reservations).

The amendments failed in 2009 when they were sent to the annual conferences around the world for a vote.

The attempt at the 2012 General Conference in Tampa with the Connectional Table legislation. It was obvious by Saturday night after the first week that this proposal was dead in the water.

- + This restructuring presupposes that this is needed to effect our global ministry. Yet there are numerous examples of how this is happening independent of organizational structure: Africa University, Russian Seminary, the use of indigenous missionaries, Annual Conference partnerships with those overseas, and local church mission teams.

- + Proposals to restructure the church are applying an organizational solution to what is essentially a discipleship problem. As one who has a Masters of Business Administration, we had studied companies who experienced problems, and then reorganized with the illusion that they had accomplished something when in actuality they had failed to solve the problem. This appears to be the case. We are trying to apply the wrong solution to the problem.

- + There is a trust issue present in our United Methodist Church. Dr. Riley Case wrote of this in a paper published in the Fall of 2010 entitled, "Call to Action and the Agencies" in which he stated, "Perhaps as never before there is a fundamental divide between the corporate leadership of the United Methodist Church and its people." More widely known is the result of the two research studies commissioned by the Call to Action Project. One of the issues mentioned in the report was, "Among the problems outlined by the operational assessment are a general lack Vital Congregations and a Creeping Crisis of Relevancy of trust within the denomination and a perception of great distance among local churches, annual conferences and the general church agencies." [Emphasis added] (Source: Heather Hahn of the United Methodist News Service and Newscope, as reported in Newscope, August 4, 2010).

During the 1980s [and later] the bishops and others with the general boards and agencies disconnected themselves from the people in the pews. Some members of the general church took the position that they would not be controlled by the laity and exhibited this in the forms of unresponsiveness to concerns of the people and with some in church leadership being arrested in acts of civil disobedience. (See the books *The Betrayal of the Church* by the late Dr. Ed Robb and Julia Robb, *Biases and Blind Spots* by the late Professor Robert L. Wilson [both on the Concerned Methodists' website], and both *At the Crossroads* and *Stewardship Perspectives – 2007*, books which I had put together.)

More recently is the fact that the 23 amendments failed when put to a vote of the conferences in 2009 and then the defeat of the Connectional Table legislation at the 2012 General Conference.

- + Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this would in fact damage the interconnectivity of our worldwide church.

Rather, we need to enhance this connectivity. I suggested a method in a book I had published 10 years ago (*At the Crossroads*, Chapter 26, "Repentance and Reconciliation"; pp. 170-171.) with these words extracted from a prayer:

*We acknowledge that, as those of us in the United States, we have been blessed by you with material riches greater than this world has ever known, yet suffer from a poverty of faith. At the same time, our brothers and sisters in the "Third World" countries have suffered from a poverty of material needs, yet*

*are so rich in faith. Please forgive us, and show us how we can use our earthly riches to help our brothers and sisters overseas; please show them how they can help us to have the rich spiritual faith that they possess.*

Allen O. Morris  
Member of the NCC Delegation

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## **Finding the Way Forward**

**By Dr. Riley Case**

"The Way Forward" seems to be the designated nomenclature for ideas that promise to help United Methodism work through its present crisis over issues related to marriage, the practice of homosexuality, ecclesiastical disobedience, the authority of the Discipline, and a growing number of other divisive issues in the church.

The United Methodist Church is a church divided. Our doctrines are being challenged; our connectionalism is unraveling; our covenants are being violated; and our unity is being shattered. Never before has there been so much talk about "amicable separation," or separation of any kind. In a time of confusion, proposals for a "the way forward" suggest a map through the ecclesiological wilderness.

While the divisions in the church are larger than the matter of homosexual practice, it is homosexual practice, and what attends it--the definition of marriage, ministry to all people, the moral standards for ordination--that is pushing the crisis at the moment. While the church has affirmed the traditional Biblical understanding of human sexuality for over forty years, this has been deemed unacceptable to those who want the church to reflect more modern (secular) times. Their arguments generally make an appeal to feelings (experience). The argument is that persons who understand themselves to be gay and lesbian have been discriminated against and feel excluded. Since the church is built on the idea of inclusiveness the church must rid itself of any ideas, attitudes, or statements--including traditional understandings of sexual practice--that are offensive or discriminatory against any who feel excluded.

This is the "progressive stance." The progressive strategy in the past has been to promote conversations, dialogues, panels, and studies for "better understanding." These conversations are not directed toward better understanding of the Scriptural views of holiness and the family and the orders of creation, but for better understanding of the hurt of those who identify themselves as homosexual, to the end that all negative references to homosexual practice will be removed from the Discipline.

But now the strategy has changed. If "conversation" will not change the church then the church must be subjected to political pressure. Political pressure takes the form of ecclesiastical disobedience, covenant breaking, disruption, plain old bullying, and appeals to the direction of history. This political pressure has been successful enough that the reaction on the part of a few evangelicals has been to call for drastic response, even separation.

It is this state of affairs that has now inspired some proposals for "a way forward." Could the major portions of the church agree on something that might unite us, hold together the connection, and allow us to re-focus on more important matters, such as the making of disciples for Jesus Christ?

The following is a summary of five different proposals of a "way forward." These are from several different perspectives and are offered with little comment. The next Happenings article will suggest what might be gleaned from a combination of these

**1)** The group of 80 proposal: Four names associated with the proposal are Maxie Dunnam, Charles Savage, Larry Baird, and Tom Harrison. A group of 80 evangelical pastors and theologians have approved a May 22 statement entitled: Regarding United Methodism's Future. The statement recognizes a rift in the church so serious it probably cannot be healed. It then suggests that it may be time to work on a "win-win" situation in which the church, like Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:39-41, chooses to part amicably.

**2)** The Adam Hamilton proposal ([awayforward.net](http://awayforward.net)): Adam Hamilton, pastor of the 18,000 member Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, is considered a "moderate" and wants to propose a kind of compromise. He is

joined by 80 other original signees. As of June 16, an additional 2,300 others, lay and clergy, had signed on to this proposal.

In this proposal the church officially would keep its stated position that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching but it would at the same time offer something like a freedom of conscience clause which would allow local churches to determine their own course in ministering to persons. Local churches could decide whether or not to marry practicing homosexuals and whether to receive practicing homosexual pastors. Meanwhile, annual conferences could decide for themselves whether or not to ordain homosexual ministers. The proposal includes a statement of what it considers core values and principles which unite United Methodists. It is quite telling that the statement on the things that bind us together as United Methodists makes not the first mention of the doctrinal standards.

**3) The Bishop Mike Coyner proposal:** Bishop Coyner of the Indiana Conference in an article posted on the website Ministry Matters asks a series of discussion starter questions which might be considered a proposal. Coyner is considered a moderate who also wants to find a way apart from separation.

Coyner proposes using the church's Constitution and structure to allow each annual conference more freedom to deal not just with homosexual practice but with a number of issues. Coyner comments that the Discipline identifies the annual conference as the basic unit of the church. Why not, then, allow the annual conference to make all decisions not restricted by the Constitution? While doctrinal standards are restricted by the Constitution, social principles are not. Supposedly then each annual conference could write its own social principles. Conferences could fashion their own structure. They could also establish their own standards and processes for clergy training; they could elect their own bishops and maybe even set term limits. Annual conferences could also partner with general agencies and they, and not the general conference would support such agencies as are helpful (which might well put some agencies out of business). Under this proposal there would be no need for jurisdictional conferences.

**4) The Timothy Tennent proposal:** Tennent is the president of Asbury Seminary and writes from an evangelical perspective. Tennent suggests the church not separate but multiply. Two different movements or expressions would operate under the single United Methodist title of corporation. These both would subscribe and support the Methodist General Rules and Doctrinal Standards and pension programs. Leaders who tend to be more progressive and of those who tended to be more evangelical would gather to draw up statements of cultural and missional principles, core values and social outlook. Local churches and pastors and bishops would decide after deliberation, study and prayer which set of principles and core values best reflected their congregational perspective and which group they wished to identify with. Eventually two separate Disciplines would be written. Both groups would be United Methodist but would be free to develop their own forms of ministry.

**5) The Connectional Table proposal:** The Connectional Table is the church's major agency designed to act on behalf of the General Conference between General Conference sessions. Unfortunately, since it is composed of bishops, members of various caucus groups, and agency personnel, it basically fronts for progressive causes. At its recent meeting it passed a motion to petition General Conference to remove all negative references to homosexual practice. This supposedly would be its version of "a way forward." The proposal seeks no compromise, no middle ground, and suggests no unifying principles. Its proposal would lead to "win-lose" major decisions in the church.

As can be seen, there are serious problems with each of these proposals. However, stay tuned. There is much more that will be said in the coming months.

Thu, 26 Jun 2014

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## Finding the Way Forward (Part 2)

By Dr. Riley Case

"Finding the way forward" is a phrase being used among United Methodists these days to find solutions to the church's present crisis. The crisis has come about because of what appear to be unsurmountable differences in the church over the mission of the church (are we really about making disciples or are we about seeking something called "inclusiveness?"), marriage, the practice of homosexuality, the authority of Scripture, the meaning of covenant, and the unwillingness on the part of some, including leaders of the church, to uphold the Discipline.

A number of proposals have been made that might help guide the church to "a way forward." Five of these were summarized in the last Happenings article. Here are some more:

### The Way Forward:

6) "A Plea for Unity" is a statement by two persons on opposite sides of the sexuality issues, Paul Stallworth and Laurie Hays Coffman of the North Carolina Conference. The statement argues for staying the course. Let the struggles and debate in the church play out. Make use of the General Conference the way it was intended to be. In the meantime all UMs must acknowledge and abide by church order as contained in the Book of Discipline. This plea is well intentioned but some progressives have indicated the church as it presently is constituted is so bound by "hatred" and "homophobia" that they have no intention of abiding by church order as contained in the book of Discipline.

7) Do nothing. This is the default plan of action. This is the United Methodist way. Call for more talks and conversations and dialogues where nothing will be accomplished. Let the bishops issue calls for unity when there is no unity. Let those who have pledged to divest (no longer give support of prayers and money to the church), disrupt (that is, demonstrate at places like the Connectional Table or the Council of Bishops), continue to divest and disrupt. Let those who are breaking the covenants of the church by committing ecclesiastical disobedience (while at the same time calling it "Biblical obedience") continue to break covenant. Let us practice connectionalism by waging all-out war that supposedly will be settled by the next General Conference. If this leads to ill-feeling and splintering away of individuals and churches, so be it.

8) See our present crisis as an opportunity for real structural change and renewal in the church. This approach would take some of the best features of some of the proposals that call for a different way of church operation. The Hamilton-Slaughter proposal calls for what might be called a conscience clause for a local church to be given freedom to determine how it might best minister to and with homosexual persons. It also calls for annual conferences to be given freedom to set their own ordination standards. The Coyner plan calls for taking seriously the church's claim that the annual conference is the basic unit of the church and would shift major decision-making to annual conferences.

Both of these plans, as well as some others, allow for a new way of understanding the connection, one that would move the church away from top-heavy institutionalism to a new empowerment of annual conferences and local churches. Let us agree that the day of institutionalism--the view that one's primary allegiance is to an institution run by bishops, boards and agencies, in which apportionments are imposed from on high, ordination standards are imposed from on high, accreditation of seminaries is imposed from on high, apportionments are assessed from on high, and power is in the hands of an elitist over-class--is over. Almost no Protestant churches that are primarily big institutions are thriving.

### Some assumptions, if we were to move in this direction:

a) Amicable separation, though it has much to commend it, will probably not work. There are too many practical obstacles. It would end up not being amicable. It could not garner enough support (constitutional amendments would require 2/3 vote by annual conferences) to be put in place. Except for the Methodist Protestants, who agreed to divide amicably before the Civil War (and then were reunited in the 1870s) no denomination has ever made amicable separation work.

b) A number of evangelical churches and some progressive churches will never agree to any "way forward" in which there are either negative references in the Discipline to the practice of homosexuality, or, on the other hand, where the denomination in any way approves of the practice of homosexuality. Therefore, there should be a "conscience clause" or at least some freedom-of-conscience-understanding in which local congregations can be released to carry on their mission without the hindrance of the denominational label.

One of the country churches on my first three-point circuit grew considerably during my three-year appointment there. But it was not necessarily happy with the denomination. Several years after I was gone the district superintendent holding quarterly conference there became frustrated and suddenly declared: "You need to decide if you are going to be Methodist or not. I want you to go to the basement and talk it over. If you are determined not to be Methodist you can be on your own and I will sell you the building for one dollar." It was a short meeting, and the conference lost a good church, to my great disappointment. But what the superintendent did has always intrigued me. It is possible, and probably without Disciplinary changes, for churches, if they cannot in good conscience be a part of the connection as it now exists, to be given permission to exit with some fair way of handling the church's trust clause. This happened to a group of about sixty former E.U.B. churches in the Pacific Northwest at the time of merger. These churches were given freedom to leave the United Methodist Church and form a new denomination (The Evangelical Church of North America).

c) The great majority of churches would not exit the denomination because they would be given a new gift of freedom to pursue mission and to relate in a new way of being connectional. Apart from a few required general church agencies such as the Board of Pensions, annual conferences could authorize and fund only those agencies that are proving helpful to them. Instead of local churches and conferences serving boards and agencies, boards and agencies would serve local churches. The annual conference could set standards for ordination; they would also elect their own bishops. They would also approve any seminary or college that they might partner with and which advance their ministry. Mission outreach would be done by the local church or the annual conference which would partner with ministries and churches overseas (already being done in many places). A general missions board would serve primarily as a coordinating agency.

There could even be freedom for churches within an annual conference to relate to a different conference more consistent with their own vision of ministry. There is precedence for this in the Friends Church. In Indiana Friends churches have a choice of relating to three different yearly meetings--the Eastern Yearly Meeting, the Indiana Yearly Meeting, or the Western Yearly meeting.

Is this an impossible dream? Of course. But the old ways aren't working.

It is time to think in terms of new wineskins.

Thu, 10 Jul 2014

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### **Two African Grandmothers**

...We need to get our priorities realigned. The Methodist Church in the "Third World" countries is exploding. What are we missing? One thing is "Christ-centered dedication" – as this lady showed. We need to truly give ourselves to His service:

"The month was November, the year 1956 or 1957. Pastor Moise Ngondjolo, Superintendent of the Lodja District in what is now the Central Congo Annual Conference, and I were attending the first celebration of the annual Harvest Festival at the Methodist Church in the village of Dikfunjambudi.

The newly built church was constructed with a thick, thatched roof and sun-dried, mud-and-stick walls up to about the three-foot level, with logs for pews. A narrow center aisle led to an altar railing made of freshly cut palm branches. The church was packed out that day with twice as many people looking in from outside the building. Drums beating in tones matching the Otetla words, "Come, let us worship Jesus, God's Son, who loved us and gave Himself for us," announced the call to worship.



The already lengthy service was extended that day as people brought to the altar their Harvest Festival gifts for missions. At the pastor's invitation almost all the people got up and went outside to where their gifts were waiting to be brought in. In a moment they came streaming down the aisle with baskets of home-pounded rice, stalks of bananas, and all sorts of other fruits and vegetables. Several brought live chickens, while other dragged in squealing pigs and bleating goats and tied their struggling gifts to the altar rail! When it appeared that nearly all the gifts had been brought forward, Pastor Ngondjolo stood up.

Before he could speak, however, an elderly woman arose from the last pew and made her way to the center aisle. She carried nothing, but one of her hands was closed as if grasping a few coins. After she started slowly walking toward the altar, her hand fell open and I saw that it too was empty.

"Why is she going?" I wondered. "She has nothing to give." A man sitting on the aisle also saw her empty hands and tried to stop her, muttering in Otetela just loud enough for me to hear, "Old woman, sit down! You don't have anything to bring!"

Pulling away from him, she continued to the front of the church. There she turned to face the tightly packed congregation, all of whom saw that she was empty-handed. She waited for the murmuring to quiet and then, standing among all the gifts that had been brought, she slowly raised her outstretched arms, palms up. Looking beyond the congregation, she said in a voice clearly heard by all,

"Dwandji, dimi lambelaka utemami!" "Lord, I bring myself!"

– Dr. H. T. Maclin, former missionary with the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries. As reprinted from the book *At the Crossroads*, by Allen Morris, copyright 2004; pp. 166, 167. Permission granted by the late Dr. H. T. Maclin.

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Another thing is "authentic evangelism." When I was in Tanzania in Central Africa, I had the opportunity to preach in a Methodist church by Lake Tanganyika. It was truly an amazing experience. The people hung on every word I preached; the room was full, and people outside listened at the door and windows. When I quoted a scripture verse during my message, people turned in their Swahili Bibles to read along with me. The depth of their spiritual hunger humbled me.

The Methodist missionary Rev. Lowell Wertz told me about an old African lady in Congo who bought a French bible, even though she could neither read nor speak that language. She would then sit outside of the university in Lubumbashi. When one of the students would pass by, she would ask him if he could speak French? ... the students would answer, "Yes." She would then open her Bible to a "random" place, point to [the passage that was] John 3:16, and ask, "What does that say? I have this book, and I cannot read it." The student would then read it and then translate it into the dialect of Swahili spoken in that part of Africa. She would pretend ignorance and ask him to explain it. She would patiently keep asking him questions about the meaning, all the while acting as if she did not understand. Through her getting these young men to explain the scripture, many came to understand and appropriate that verse for themselves – and accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. Right now there are preachers in Congo spreading the news of Christ – all because of that little old African lady.

Reverend Wertz later told me, "Allen, never underestimate what these little African grandmothers can do!"

Maybe we need to take lessons and "get back to the basics" of what it is to be a Christian; we need to have a passion for telling others about Christ and the salvation He offers in whatever way we can.

– As reprinted from the book *At the Crossroads*, by Allen Morris, copyright 2004; p. 167. Permission granted.

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"...And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone...your interference is doing him positive injury. ... I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs Man's greatness consists in his ability to do and the proper application of his powers to things needed to be done." ~ Frederick Douglass; The Frederick Douglass

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