

Monthly

February 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the “Monthly Update” contains information on some of the actions being taken by members of our United Methodist Church employees, to include some bishops. Of especial interest are the continuing attempts to “reach out” to those involved in the Islamic culture and somehow bring it within the Christian sphere of our church. Homosexuality continues to occupy a focus in the forefront of our priorities. As we have mentioned before in past newsletters and editions of the “Update” – this is a key battle for us: if we ever lose that fight we will no longer be a true Christian denomination in terms of our faithfulness to the Bible’s teachings or those of our Lord Jesus Christ. Illegal immigration has moved to another place of prime interest, so much so that we have added a category to categorize our actions in that area.

Continued use of apportionment dollars on a plethora of issues is illustrated, so much so that we liken it to “chasing rabbits” and show how it constitutes a waste of money. We remember Jesus’ admonition about “straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.”

In these issues, you will periodically see: “[Note:....]” with a brief commentary on the issue itself or raising the question as to it’s being a waste of money – the money given into the offering plate by good-hearted, trusting Methodist laypeople who want to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. In all of the multitude of “causes” that UM personnel advocate, where is the clear message about needing Jesus Christ? After all, we are living in a world – and a country – that are increasingly becoming secular, if not pagan, and filled with people who need this priceless message of salvation.

In this month of February we have Valentine’s Day. You will see cute little baby-like figures of “Cupid” with his bow and arrows, and other symbols of “love” that are used to celebrate this time of the year. You will possibly read of couples who have come together in some unusual way due to this influence. You might even learn of some act of heroism that had been motivated by a feeling of selflessness. Indeed, this is the time of the year when love is brought to the forefront and extolled. But the greatest love of all is described in, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him might not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

I thank the Lord for the opportunities that he presents us! We appreciate so much your partnering with us – both prayerfully and financially.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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February 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Being happy doesn't mean that everything is perfect.
It means that you have decided to look beyond the imperfections.

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The Good Stuff

+ ***New Opportunities to Partner with Stop Hunger Now.*** Many United Methodists in the NC Conference have been involved with Stop Hunger Now packaging events. At these events, volunteers combine rice, vitamins, soy, and a dried vegetable mix into packages which are sealed and sent to persons in need of food throughout the world. The North Carolina Conference Missions Team wants to encourage medium and small membership churches to host Stop Hunger Now Events in their facilities. The Team has set aside matching donations for ten locations to have a 10,000 meal event in 2015. Churches selected for grants will be churches that have not ever had a packaging event. Preference will be given to churches who partner with other churches in their community. Participating churches would be responsible to recruit volunteers, provide an indoor place for the event, and provide \$1450 toward the cost of the meals. The Missions Team will pay the remaining \$1450 for the meals (\$2900 fully funds 10,000 meals). If interested, contact the Rev. Dr. Bill Haddock at revbillh@nccumc.org or at 910.262.3831 for an application and information about next steps before scheduling an event. The deadline for the submission of applications is March 1.

– North Carolina Conference Communications News Brief; January 21, 2015.

+ ***The Response: Louisiana Jan 24th 2015.*** The weekend [of] January 24, 2015, thousands gather[ed] in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for The Response, a day of repentance, fasting and prayer, hosted by Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal. Churches from every denomination in Louisiana, gather[ed] at Pete Maravich Assembly Center at LSU, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Many others will participated in large and small groups across the country via satellite and live web casts, to Worship and Pray. There was no personal promotion or hype, and no product or food sales. It was a time for seriously seeking God and His forgiveness, asking Him to show mercy for our nation.

[Note: I listened to some of the program on radio station WRAE, 88.7 FM. Governor Jindal gave an evangelistic appeal to prayer and expressed the need in this country for a spiritual revival. He also told of his conversion from Hinduism to Christianity and embracing Catholicism. He stated that our solutions are not found in electing conservative candidates to political office but in a spiritual awakening. It was refreshing to hear this – from a state governor. – AOM]

– E-mail; “The Response: a call for prayer for a nation in crisis”; From: Repairing the Foundations
22 Jan 2015

Of Interest.

+ ***GBHEM General Secretary Issues Statement.*** On Oct. 22, during a visit to Africa, Kim Cape, the head of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministries (GBHEM), shared an open letter to UMs: “Higher Education & Ministry promotes leadership development and seeks to transform the world through the power of education and the various ministries of lay and clergy

leaders. As we all receive information about an emerging global crisis due to the Ebola epidemic in various countries, we think about our sisters and brothers in the affected regions. We reaffirm our belief in God's Word as "healing and health to all flesh" (Prov. 4:22) and call for the solidarity of our connection. We need to respond with concrete actions that promote solidarity, healing, and preparedness. We need to move beyond our silos, exercise more communication, and share about the power and importance of education now!

What concerns me most is a deeper crisis, the fear epidemics, when people move so quickly from indifference to paranoia, instead of moving from solidarity to action. . . . I hope we can communicate with our communities and educate them to overcome unfounded concerns and be ready to act when needed...."

– Peace, Kim Cape, General Secretary GBHEM, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 44 / November 5, 2014

+ ***Students Say Claremont Mirrors Society's Diversity.*** It's not just the sunny southern California forecast that attracts students to UM-affiliated Claremont School of Theology. Set in one of the most religiously diverse communities in the world, future UM leaders say the school's focus on interreligious education has called them to study there. With cross-registration agreements with the University of the West, a Buddhist institution; the Academy for Jewish Religion; and Bayan Claremont (a Muslim graduate school), students of all traditions interact on a daily basis in the classroom, in chapel and during social activities. Students say a campus that mirrors the diversity of society not only prepares them for effective leadership; it also strengthens their personal faith as UMs.

As the son of two UM elders, Master of Divinity student Juan Garay has spent his life in church. "I grew up in the pews, and ministry was not very appealing to me," he said. "It was too rigid and I had problems understanding God's grace. However, when I got married, I received a calling from God that I couldn't deny, but I felt like God was calling me to raise a different kind of church." For Garay, that means planting a multicultural, multiracial and multilingual church in the heart of Milwaukee. "Claremont is preparing me to be a Christian leader in a city that's segregated by boundaries and lines that have been drawn," said Garay. "My education and experiences can help me find healthier ways to re-engage in conversations where lines have been drawn. After all, that's exactly what Jesus did."

Claremont School of Theology president Dr. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan says that interreligious engagement is no longer a choice. "It is a reality for the world in which we live," he said. "Communities of faith are now wrestling with theological and practical questions of what it means to live, work and raise families beside people who claim traditions and beliefs that differ from their own. It is critical that religious leaders, both ordained and lay people, are capable of helping families and communities navigate their way through those challenging questions."

Students and even professors say that interreligious curriculum empowers them to better explain their own beliefs to others. Dr. Helene Slessarev-Jamir, Claremont's Mildred M. Hutchinson professor of urban ministries, said, "It enables me to think more broadly and find elements in other traditions that might help me reconcile my own."

Juan Garay agrees, "I believe wholeheartedly that in order to transform the world, our view has to go beyond our own scope of what we believe the world is. If my view of the world is really small, the kind of transformation I'm going to be able to effect is also going to be really small. These aren't times for small thinking. As religious leaders, we have to have God-sized vision."

[Note: There must be a common core belief. With some of the world's religions, there can be no true accord. The basic tenets of Islam mitigate it having true "common ground" with Christianity or Judaism. – AOM]

– Natalie Bannon, UMCOM, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 46 / November 19, 2014

+ ***Holy Conferencing Key to Revival.*** Reclaiming an accurate understanding of holy conferencing is the most important thing UMs can do to revitalize the denomination, a Methodism scholar told the denomination's bishops. "I believe that if we were to reclaim this practice, that God would bless our efforts and we would see profound renewal in communities where this took place," said the Rev. Kevin Watson, assistant professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta. However, he quickly added, everything depends on "getting right what holy conferencing is." Watson described how to conference together in the Wesleyan way and tried to clear up some misconceptions. He pointed out that John Wesley never used the phrase "holy conferencing" that UMs so often use today. "But he did use the phrase Christian conferencing. Wesley referred to Christian conferencing in his 1763 'Large Minutes' as one of five channels through which God makes grace available to humanity—practices grounded in commandments from Christ. Wesley listed it alongside such disciplines as prayer, the study of Scripture, fasting and Holy Communion."

Watson also emphasized that Christian conferencing should not simply be seen as a way to have polite disagreement. Instead, he said, it should be seen as "the distinctive way that Methodists gather together to talk about their relationship with God in order to grow in love for God and neighbor."

Under Wesley's leadership, Christian conferencing was practiced mostly in class and band meetings. These weren't small groups devoted to Bible studies such as many churches have today, Watson said. Instead, the meetings primarily focused on Christian fellowship and accountability. Watson urged the bishops to make Christian conferencing a theme of the coming 2016 General Conference. By that, he said, he means teaching about the practice's history and theology, lifting up UM examples and casting a vision for its role in Christian discipleship.

[Note: However, there needs to be true sincerity and a sharing of common values for this to be real. – AOM]

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 45 / November 12, 2014

+ ***Churches Join People's March for Better Earth.*** On Sunday, Sept. 21, in New York, pennants held aloft on poles announced the presence of UMs, Lutherans, Hindus, Episcopalians and numerous other faith groups stationed there by march organizers. Baptists clad in green T-shirts demanded "Climate justice for all God's creation" and Hare Krishna danced joyously. The music and amplified speeches offered from various faith perspectives did not always rise above the din of the crowd. Early on, organizers estimated that 100,000 people would come to midtown Manhattan to demand significant commitments by world leaders to deal with the climate change issue. On Friday, Bill McKibben, a UM from Middlebury, Vermont, and president of 350.org, a group that helped organize the march, mentioned that 200,000 people might show up. The march preceded the Sept. 23 Climate Summit at the United Nations, arranged by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon—who also took part in the march—to spur political action on global warming and encourage leaders from government and the private sector to announce new initiatives.

[Note: Are we chasing a rabbit here? Is this a wise use of UM time and money? – AOM]

– Linda Bloom, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 39 / October 1, 2014

+ **Talking about ‘The Things That Make for Peace’.** When the U.N. Peace Bell rang across the street from the UM-related Church Center for the United Nations, those gathered in the center’s chapel rang their own small bells in response. Video clips of people ringing bells from the Philippines to the Democratic Republic of Congo followed, along with messages of peace. One video message from an Iraqi woman pleaded for urgent international action for those suffering in her country. “Let’s build up peace in Iraq that will enhance world peace,” she said. The U.N. General Assembly has declared the International Day of Peace, celebrated on or near Sept. 21, “to be a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples.” To mark the day, UM Women (UMW) and other religious and nongovernmental groups organized a symposium, “The Things That Make for Peace.”

Morning speakers and afternoon workshops focused on the intersection of basic needs—food, water, and health—with issues of gender, climate insecurity and conflict. “Today, we’re emphasizing the inextricable links of peace and just development,” said Harriett Jane Olson, top executive of UM Women. “We will share and examine what are those things that make for peace, real peace, peace that can last.” Helen Clark, administrator of the United Nations Development Program, had just returned from a visit to Lebanon, where the spillover effects of conflict are threatening to engulf that small country. Currently, Lebanon’s population of fewer than 4.5 million is hosting just fewer than 1.2 million refugees. Clark said, “There are huge concerns there over whether the country’s stability will hold with the Syria conflict continuing and spilling over into Lebanon itself. We see, as you do, peace and stability as a prerequisite for human development. We see these conflicts taking scarce resources away from development and costing developing countries hundreds of millions of dollars a year.”

[Note: Again, is this a wise use of UM time and money? – AOM]

– Linda Bloom, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 39 / October 1, 2014

+ **Tax Break for Clergy Housing Allowance Stands.** A longstanding tax exemption for clergy housing allowances will stand, thanks to a 7th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling, released Nov. 13. UM leaders welcomed the decision but warned the issue of constitutionality likely will resurface. In 2013, a total of 20,783 churches of The UMC, about 64% of the denomination’s churches in the U.S., paid some amount of housing allowance to clergy, said Scott Brewer, General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) associate general secretary for connectional relations. Religious groups have long provided parsonages for their ministers. Parsonages have been tax-free since the U.S. enacted federal income tax in 1913. This case did not deal with the tax exemptions for parsonages. The Freedom from Religion Foundation, a Madison, Wis.-based group that seeks to support “freethinkers,” provides its co-presidents with a housing allowance. But they never sought the tax break from the Internal Revenue Service. Never having requested the exemption, “they have suffered no injury” and have no standing to sue, the appeals court panel said. Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, the foundation’s co-presidents, released a statement disputing that they suffered no injury. “We will continue to challenge this indefensible favoritism for religion in other forums until the issue cannot be circumvented,” Barker said.

–Heather Hahn and Sam Hodges, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 47 / November 26, 2014

+ ***Sacred Conversations: Because Black Lives Matter.*** The Sacred Conversations: Because Black Lives Matter event is scheduled for Jan. 28, 6:30–8:30 p.m., at Duke Memorial UMC in Durham. Speakers will include Mary Fulkerson, Professor of Theology; Willie Jennings, Associate Professor of Theology and Black Church Studies; and J. Kameron Carter, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Black Church Studies, all from Duke Divinity School. The purpose of this gathering is to be in prayer and conversation with sisters and brothers around the issue of anti-Black violence in our communities and our nation. The church should be involved in discussions of race as both a prophetic voice and an instrument for change when and where needed.

[Note: Again, is this a wise use of UM time and money? One could raise the question of abortion: do the lives of unborn black babies matter? Also, one could raise the question of obeying the law. One might surmise that if the black men who had been killed by police had been obeying the law and cooperating with law-enforcement officials, they would be alive today. Also, where is the question of white people killed by blacks? Rather than making the point that “Black Lives Matter” might one state that “All life matters.” How about the rights of the unborn, 56 million of whom have been killed since abortion was ushered in by the Supreme Court’s decision in Roe versus Wade. – AOM]

– North Carolina Conference Communications News Brief; January 21, 2015.

+ ***Conference Seeks Dialogue among Police, Black Citizens.*** Bishop Hope Morgan Ward and the Rev. Chris Brady recently spoke on television station WNCN about an upcoming North Carolina Conference event called “Sacred Conversations: Because Black Lives Matter.” Ward and Brady hope the Jan. 28 gathering will be a safe place for candid conversation among police and African American citizens. [Note: See the note above. – AOM]

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 43, Issue 03 / January 21, 2015

+ ***Responses to the Ferguson Grand Jury Decision.*** As protesters took to the streets in dozens of U.S. cities after the Missouri grand jury decision not to indict a police officer in the shooting of Michael Brown, the general secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) issued a statement. The church must show up “with words of hope, justice, and service. . . . This is what it takes to be disciples of Jesus Christ engaged in the transformation of the world,” Erin Hawkins writes. GCORR offers resources for congregations and conferences. In the wake of the violence that followed the grand jury decision, the Rev. Cedrick D. Bridgeforth, chairperson of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), writes about what can be done now. Ministry Matters offers a perspective from F. Willis Johnson, a pastor in Ferguson. In a statement on its website, the National Council of Churches expresses deep disappointment in the decision.

[Note: What is missing in all of this activism is the reality that the young man who was killed had previously broken the law, had , resisted arrest, attacked the police officer and was clearly outside all bounds of restraint and reason. When the UM people here cannot recognize these facts nor accept responsibility for the young man’s wrongdoing, one can only wonder if their perspectives are racially motivated, coming down on the side of the young man because he is black? Would they have expressed the same degree of outrage if the man had been white? We must ask yet

again, “Is this a wise use of UM time and money, not to mention the “good offices” of the United Methodist Church? – AOM]

– UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 48 / December 3, 2014

+ *The Church’s Witness after Grand Jury Rulings*. Elyse Ambrose Minson, a member of Church of the Village, a multiethnic UM congregation in New York City, said she wants to have faith in the U.S. justice system. Lately, she said, that has been hard. A New York grand jury decided not to bring charges in the death of Eric Garner, who died after a Staten Island police officer put him in a chokehold and officers compressed his chest. The decision came a little more than a week after a grand jury ruled there was no criminal case in the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. Ambrose Minson cried after the ruling in the Garner case, then decided to take action. On Dec. 4, she joined fellow church members and thousands of others at a largely peaceful demonstration that extended from lower Manhattan across the Brooklyn Bridge. She is among the UMs across the U.S. who seek ways to bear witness that all lives matter.

Church members have held prayer gatherings and joined in protests. Church leaders, including those at the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), also have made plans to advocate for long-term reforms aimed at serving both the police and the people they are called to protect. A GBCS statement, Repent—Reconcile—Restore, encourages UMs to advocate for evaluation of law enforcement practices, the demilitarization of police forces and the establishment of independent citizen-review boards. The statement calls for establishing economic and social systems that ensure the welfare of all, as well as strong nonviolent direct action against injustice and institutional racism.

Ohio East Area Bishop John L. Hopkins, whose area encompasses Cleveland, said churches are responding to law-enforcement concerns with prayer. They also are striving for better relations between police and the communities they serve, but that remains a challenge. “My experience in all kind of community tensions is that you need to develop relations before the problems come,” he said. “I am proud of churches that have been developing relationships.”

The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) offers resources for congregations to have “vital conversations” about violence and working with law enforcement. Erin Hawkins, the agency’s top executive, stressed that healing relationships between police and communities will take time. “There are decades of tension,” Hawkins said. Congregations, she said, should start with prayer. “But if we never get up off our knees and never do something with what we’re hearing from God in these conversations, then we are not fully being the church.”

UM Women (UMW), in a statement, also called for embracing the church’s tradition that challenges “the status quo when the norms of society do not honor all human beings as children of God.”

Much of the problem boils down to trust, Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, interim leader of the New York Area, said in a statement. He urges police to get out of their cars and walk around among the people they serve.

[Note: Again, what is missing here is the reality that these young men who died had broken the law, resisted arrest, and brought these results on themselves. Where is the call for respecting the law or abiding by norms of our society? – AOM]

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 50 / December 17, 2014

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ ***Roe v. Wade***. The Supreme Court placed a dark mark on American history 42 years ago today with the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in January 1973, which made abortion legal in America. Since then, National Right to Life estimates that more than 56 million abortions have taken place in America.

The American Pastors Network (APN, www.americanpastorsnetwork.net) says that four decades of abortion have left lasting scars on never-to-be mothers and fathers, families, communities and churches. "Legalized abortion has been a shameful stain on our society for decades—and actually a 'legal' murderous choice in America for 42 years," said APN President Sam Rohrer, who is also President of the Pennsylvania Pastors Network (PPN, www.papastors.net). "Abortion not only steals life from a human being with a God-given spirit and potential to do great things on this earth, but also leaves many, many wounds on everyone it touches—mothers, fathers, families, churches and entire communities."

[Editorial note: I was one of the marchers in the pro-life rally in Washington, DC on January 22nd. – AOM]

– American Pastors Network, P.O. Box 537, 4020 Main Street, Elverson, PA 19520;
www.AmericanPastorsNetwork.net

+ ***Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton***. The U.S. Supreme Court issued its twin *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions which invented a new legal right to elective abortion for any reason and struck down legal protections for unborn children throughout pregnancy. Scripture teaches us that God "fearfully and wonderfully" made all human beings in His own image, that He "knit me together in my mother's womb," and that the first man recorded as rejoicing at Jesus Christ's coming into the world was the unborn baby, John (Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 139:13-14, Luke 1:44). Since the first century, the global, ecumenical church of Jesus Christ – including Methodism's founder, John Wesley – strongly opposed abortion. Yet the 1973 decisions were openly welcomed by leaders of both the United Methodist Church and the Southern Baptist Convention. The transformation of the formerly "pro-choice" Southern Baptist Convention into a strongly pro-life church demonstrates that the dramatic transformation of an entire denomination over time, with God's help, is indeed possible. – John Lomperis, M.Div., UMAction Director

+ ***March For Life attendance figures***. The January 22nd March for Life in Washington, DC to witness against abortion:

[1] The march has previously drawn around 250,000 people annually since 2003

[2] though estimates put both the 2011 and 2012 attendances at 400,000 each.

[3] The 2013 March for Life drew a claimed 650,000 people.

[4] The 2015 event was larger still. Every year the percentage of young people increases.

...Liberals/progressives (sometimes deceptively called "moderates") can't have it both ways. They disparagingly accuse the annual March for Life participants of being a bunch of out-of-touch and hopefully soon-to-die-off old folks, or, now that the demographics are shifting a bit,..just a chaotic profusion of bused-in naive and clueless kids...probably skipping school...children who will one day wise up to the ways of the world...

As usual, accurate coverage is sparse in Major US media...My son sent me this link from the UK Guardian:

<http://www.inquisitr.com/1780056/march-for-life-2015-thousands-gather-washington-d-c-overturning-abortion/>

As we prognosticated on the bus ride home last night from DC, the major media news coverage so far is more "like liberals would like it to be": (mere) "thousands" gathered to pray with friends, etc. Another article shows the picture of a handful of pro-abortion protesters confronting Capitol police but nary a glimpse of the over half-a-million marchers on the streets behind the cops that they were blocking before being carted off in paddy wagons. I was standing right there where that picture was taken, and ...it seemed that this represented a breakdown in policing as these people should have been escorted to the sidewalk so the marchers could proceed. After all, MFL was the one with the march permit, right? And what an inconvenience to thousands who had to hurry and catch buses heading home, some like us to other states.

My respect for those who started the March For Life organization and who have kept the fires burning under it for these last 42 years since the Roe v Wade decision in 1973 only grows with each year that goes by.

It is a crucial HIGHLY VISIBLE component in the pro-life dynamo that whirls with increasing power as evidenced by the fact that now over 50% of Americans believe that abortion should be outlawed in all circumstances.

J

eff

Long

E-mail from his pastor: "Brother Long, Thank you for the update on the march. I would like for this to be on the church

calendar for 2016." Thank you, Pastor

–E-mail received from Jeff Long, Jan 23, 2015, at 4:29 PM.

+ **Alveda King: Pro-Life movement rescues African Americans.** The niece of Dr. ML King Jr. (and daughter of AD King) says the pro-life movement is the next civil rights movement. Alveda King believes Planned Parenthood is targeting African Americans for genocide or extermination, and she is not happy about that. King said on a TV show: "Abortion was part of a program of genocide and eugenics, and highly supported by the founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, who said, [paraphrasing Sanger] 'Colored people are like weeds, they need to be exterminated. We don't want that word to get out, so let's cultivate some of their leaders.'" "The Bible says the blood of the innocent cries out to Him [God], and of course we are instructed to choose life," Alveda continued. "My uncle Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was pro-life...I was not always pro-life, my mother was not. But after we heard the truth we embraced life very much."

Alveda leads a campaign to defund Planned Parenthood, so [that] tax-dollars are not used indirectly or directly to kill innocent children.

– Pray In Jesus Name ·

PO Box 77077 · Colorado Springs, CO 80970 · USA

+ **Sen. Rand Paul's "Life Begins at Conception Act." Can it stop abortion?** The U.S. Senator from Kentucky, Rand Paul (R) has introduced the "Life Begins At Conception Act" Senate Bill S. 583, which is modeled after "Personhood" legislation supported in ballot initiatives in Mississippi, Colorado, and Florida. The pro-life legislation simply applies the protections of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to unborn children, by defining them as "persons." Personhood is a legal strategy that can potentially overturn Roe v. Wade and stop the abortion

holocaust in America, as predicted by Justice Blackmun who wrote the 1973 ruling: "If this suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant's case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life would then be guaranteed specifically by the [14th] Amendment." For example, Tom Hoefling, former political director for Alan Keyes presidential campaign and current Chairman of America's Party, has drafted a free petition on <http://faxcongress.com> to amend S. 583 to make it even stronger in the protection of innocent life. Tom writes: "While we appreciate the declaration of principles that the Life at Conception Act represents, far more is needed than mere words to stop the daily killing of thousands of the weakest and most helpless among us...[The United States] Code must be stripped of provisions like the Laci Peterson law of 2004, Title 18, Chapter 1, §1841 and Title 10, Chapter 22 §919a, which, while rightly defining the child as an individual person, then allows the killing of certain classes of those innocent persons via the practice of human abortion. Without these amendments the legislation accomplishes little beyond mere political posturing."

God Bless you, in Jesus' name, Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt, PhD

– Pray In Jesus Name · PO Box 77077 · Colorado Springs, CO 80970 · USA

(UM) General Board of Church and Society. *Applause for New U.S-Cuba Relations.* In a Dec. 17 statement by general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) applauded President Obama's efforts to begin reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba. The General Board of Church & Society (GBCS) of The United Methodist Church applauds President Barack Obama's instructions to Secretary of State John Kerry to immediately begin discussions with Cuba with the intent of re-establishing diplomatic relations, including re-opening an embassy in Havana. Our Methodist, ecumenical partners, and CIEMAL (Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches of Latin America & the Caribbean) are linked in sharing a common Christian heritage for peace and social justice. The United Methodist Book of Resolutions has for decades acknowledged the difficulties that our churches continue to face due to the U.S. embargo and the lack of diplomatic relationships between the two countries...“We encourage the Dept. of State to restore diplomatic relations, including the immediate removal of Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. We also ask Congress to join President Obama in lifting economic sanctions on Cuba. In this season of Advent, we welcome the... restoration of relationships between the peoples of the United States and Cuba,” said Henry-Crowe, General Secretary, General Board of Church & Society, The United Methodist Church. Both the National Council of Churches and Church World Service also applauded the new diplomatic agreement between the United States and Cuba and the return of Alan Gross, imprisoned for five years in Cuba. The Rev. John McCullough, a UM pastor and CWS top executive, led a delegation of U.S. faithbased advocates to Cuba in early November to support the release of Gross. [Note: Again, your apportionment dollars at work – advocating for a brutal dictatorship. – AOM]

– UMNS, LEADEcumenical, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 43, Issue 01 / January 7, 2015

Homosexuality.

+ *Living with Integrity amid Sexuality Debate.*

[Note: There really should be little to debate here. Every reference to homosexual practice in the Bible from Genesis to Jude is either negative or condemning. In addition, secular socio-psychological data demonstrate that this is not a good way to live. In addition an overwhelming

majority of UM support the orthodox view. These continued “hearings” and conferences are merely a tactic to wear down those who support the orthodox, biblical view that sexual practice is only acceptable between a man and woman within the context of marriage, with any other activity being sin. In addition the continued unwillingness to discipline UM clergy for violations of the Book of Discipline for in this area are rendering our church law meaningless and will result in projected anarchy within our denomination – if not collapse. – AOM]

[Panel] discussions have centered mainly on UMs’ differing views of how best to minister with LGBTQ individuals (the initials stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning). The Connectional Table invited church members to submit videos sharing their perspectives on human sexuality. Four were submitted. The other three came from gay church members. For more than 40 years, UMs have debated the stance in the church’s Book of Discipline that the practice of homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian teaching.” The debate has intensified in recent years as more states in the U.S. and more nations around the globe have legalized same-gender civil marriage. Same-gender marriages are now legally recognized in 32 states and the District of Columbia. At the same time, homosexual acts are criminalized in 38 of 54 African countries, including 18 that could send delegates to General Conference. [Thankfully.]

Church law sanctions marriage only between a man and a woman and bans the ordination of “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy. Some UM clergy have publicly defied the prohibition against performing samegender unions.

The panel members were all contributors to *Finding Our Way: Love and Law in The UMC*, released in late April by Abingdon Press (an imprint of UMPH). The Rev. Amy Valdez Barker, the Connectional Table’s executive secretary, was the moderator. Bishop John K. Yambasu of Sierra Leone initially planned to participate but had to cancel. He faced a potential 21-day quarantine in the U.S. because of the Ebola outbreak in his country. All outside observers, including a UMNS reporter, were excluded from the room because of concerns about limited space.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in *UMNewScope*, Vol. 42, Issue 45 / November 12, 2014

+ ***No church trial.*** Two Michigan Conference pastors will not go to trial for officiating at same-sex unions, Bishop Deborah Kiesey announced. Instead, the two hope to lead a series of discussions in the conference on the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning people in the denomination.

– *UMNewScope*, Vol. 42, Issue 46 / November 19, 2014

+ ***Gay Couple Files Complaint for Refusal of Wedding.*** A UM pastor is facing a complaint under church law because he declined to officiate at a same-sex wedding. A gay couple at Green Street Church, a UM congregation in Winston-Salem, N.C., has filed the formal complaint against their pastor, the Rev. Kelly P. Carpenter. The couple, Kenneth Barner and Scott Chappell, charge Carpenter under the Book of Discipline with failure to perform the work of ministry. Their complaint also accuses Carpenter of “gender discrimination,” a chargeable offense under church law, in not officiating at their ceremony. It is also a chargeable offense under church law for clergy to preside at same -sex unions (see ¶2702). In the complaint submitted to Western North Carolina Bishop Larry Goodpaster, the couple say the denomination’s rules are contradictory.

Carpenter said he has followed the church's prohibition against same-gender weddings because he does not want to jeopardize his work for the church or harm the other ministries of Green Street Church. However, he is sympathetic to Barner and Chappell. "If there was a way for me to be a co-signer with the complaint, I think it's right on the money," he said. "It really calls out the contradictions in our Book of Discipline...."

Green Street UMC made national headlines in March 2013 when the church's leadership council decided not to hold any weddings in the church sanctuary until the denomination lifts its ban on same-sex marriage. Initially, people protested the church's decision outside worship services and through emails. But eventually the church attracted supporters, too. Since the leadership council's decision, Carpenter said worship attendance has risen from around 160 to consistently more than 200 each Sunday. The public statement also said the church's pastors still would offer premarital counseling for "all couples, regardless of orientation."

In October of this year, a U.S. federal judge overturned North Carolina's ban on legal recognition of samegender couples. But the church has maintained its policy. "I have initiated the proper response according to The Book of Discipline," Goodpaster told UMNS. "Because this is now a personnel matter of the annual conference, it will need to remain confidential until further notice." Carpenter said he thinks the church's public witness in this dispute has the potential to be "uniting" for the congregation. Carpenter stressed that Barner and Chappell are serious about the complaint, and he commended them for finding a creative way designed not to harm the church. [Note: This is seen as a sham designed to further the pro-homosexual agenda toward acceptance in the UMC. – AOM]

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 46 / November 19, 2014

+ ***Complaint against Bishop Talbert Resolved.*** A resolution has been reached in the complaint against retired Bishop Melvin G. Talbert, who blessed the union of two men in 2013, in violation of church law. The parties involved in the case have agreed to what church law calls a just resolution, and the result is that Talbert will not face a trial or lose his status as bishop. The joint resolution agreement calls on all parties to follow the Book of Discipline and urges the Council of Bishops to do more work related to the denomination's longtime debate around human sexuality. The resolution also expresses regret "over harm to gay and lesbian sisters and brothers, and all those involved, through the complaint process." Mountain Sky Area Bishop Elaine J.W. Stanovsky, president of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, announced the conclusion of the process on Monday, Jan. 5. Before his retirement, Talbert served in the Western Jurisdiction, which encompasses the eight westernmost conferences in the United States. UM church law requires that complaints against bishops be heard in the jurisdiction where the bishop is a member.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 43, Issue 02 / January 14, 2015

+ ***Responses to Just Resolution of Bishop Complaint.*** The end of the complaint against retired Bishop Melvin Talbert for officiating at a same-sex union has brought comfort to some UMs and consternation to others. What it's likely to bring to General Conference in 2016 is legislation. The "just resolution" follows similar conclusions last year to complaints against clergy who officiated at samegender unions or weddings in Michigan, eastern Pennsylvania and New York. The Talbert complaint was resolved just months after the Judicial Council upheld the reinstatement of the Rev. Frank Schaefer as a UM pastor. Schaefer's trial for officiating at his son's same-sex wedding made national headlines in 2013. The outcomes in these cases have split UMs. With the 2016

General Conference fast approaching, advocates of varied perspectives are gearing up to bring legislation that, if passed, would change the Book of Discipline, which has stated since 1972 that all people are of sacred worth, but “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” For just as long, UMs have debated that stance. Some clergy increasingly have been willing to publicly defy the prohibitions, particularly as more states legalize same-gender civil marriage.

The response to such violations has varied across the U.S. The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, vice president and general manager of Good News, an unofficial UM advocacy group that supports the Discipline’s language, said he and others are working on legislative proposals that would establish a global committee on investigation to handle complaints against bishops with the goal of ensuring more consistency; remove bishops from handling complaints at all, turning the process over to pastors and laity; require that individuals who file a complaint be a partner in any “just resolution” reached; require that the church counsel in the case, roughly the equivalent of a prosecutor, certifies his or her agreement with the

Discipline; establish a minimum penalty for those found guilty of performing a same-sex marriage or union – a one-to- two-year suspension (without pay) from ministry for a first offense, and removal of clergy credentials for a second offense. Reconciling Ministries Network, an unofficial UM group that advocates for greater inclusion of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning) members in the life of the church, is also preparing for General Conference. “We’ll be there with pro-LGBTQ legislation and to help resist any anti-LGBTQ legislation,” said Matt Berryman, the group’s executive director. He added that his group also plans to oppose any change to church law that moves from “restorative justice to retributive justice.” He acknowledged that at this point, removing the Book of Discipline’s prohibitions against openly gay clergy and same-sex unions seems unlikely.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 43, Issue 03 / January 21, 2015

+ *Mt. Bethel UM Church Withholds Apportionments*, by Walter B. Fenton

Mt. Bethel UM Church: One of the largest congregations in The United Methodist Church withheld over \$200,000 of its apportionments in 2014 in response to what it believes to be "wholly unsatisfactory" inaction on the part of the Council of Bishops to recent controversies within the denomination. The congregation will make no further payments in 2015 without the explicit approval of the church's administrative council.

Mt. Bethel UM Church, located in Marietta, Georgia, is the largest UM congregation east of the Mississippi River and is part of the North Georgia Annual Conference. The church, widely known for its local, national and global missions programs, and for Mt. Bethel Christian Academy, a K-12 Christian school, operates three campuses in the Marietta area.

Its administrative council voted to place its apportioned funds in an escrow account until the Council of Bishops (COB) fulfills the requests made in the "Integrity and Unity Statement" published by over 120 leading pastors and theologians, and endorsed by nearly 8,500 clergy and laity across the UM connection. All bishops received a copy of the statement in July 2014 and it was formally presented to the council at its November 2014 meeting in Oklahoma City.

Ferrell Coppedge: "The administrative council's decision was unanimous," said Ferrell Coppedge, lay leader at the nearly 10,000-member church. "We thought the silence from the Council, especially after some pastors and even a bishop openly broke their vows, was inexplicable,

unhealthy and unwise. Their lack of response to the 'Integrity and Unity Statement' was wholly unsatisfactory given the gravity of the issues it addressed and the reputations of the leading pastors and theologians who presented it."

In 2012 delegates to the UM Church's Western Jurisdictional Conference adopted a resolution stating that its clergy and churches would engage in ministry as if the passages regarding the practice of homosexuality and the prohibition against clergy presiding at same-sex services were no longer applicable. Since then, UM pastors across the connection have openly presided at same-sex services. Most notably, Bishop Melvin Talbert presided at a service celebrating the marriage of two men at a church in Birmingham, Alabama in October 2013. Thus far, breaches of the church's covenant have been met with few or no consequences. Not long after Bishop Talbert performed the service in Birmingham, congregants at Mt. Bethel expressed their dismay to church leaders, and some decided to leave the church in the middle of a building campaign. "It became apparent to us," said Coppedge, "that the [COB] does not recognize how these very public acts of defiance, like Bishop Talbert's, undermine the health and vitality of churches like Mt. Bethel. Surely, they will have some understanding and appreciation for the measured actions Mt. Bethel has taken in good faith."

On December 30, 2014, Bishop Elaine Stanovsky announced that the complaint filed against Bishop Talbert had been resolved. The complainants, Bishops Rosemarie Wenner and Debra Wallace-Padgett reached a "just resolution" with Talbert. Talbert expressed "regret for felt harm and unintended consequences that his actions caused," but he also claimed in the resolution that "his actions were just and right." He was not required to acknowledge that he had broken the covenant he had required other pastors to uphold when he was an active bishop. The reaching of a "just resolution" allowed him to avoid further investigation and adjudication of his case, and therefore any penalty that might have been administered had he been found guilty of presiding at a same-sex service.

The COB will meet again this April and not long after their gathering many annual conferences will begin electing delegates to the 2016 General Conference. "We hope and pray," said Coppedge, "that the General Conference will reaffirm our Biblical stand on these matters and that bishops will fulfill their responsibility to hold pastors and their colleagues accountable. We are praying for the future of the church."

– E-mail received from an associate. Walter Fenton is a United Methodist clergyperson and analyst for Good News.

Illegal Immigration Issues.

[Note: One can only surmise what the reactions would be of those UM church officials to people within the United Methodist Church who might advocate not paying the apportionment, a violation of the UM Book of Discipline. Yet unrestricted, illegal immigration goes against the tenets of our country's founding document – the Constitution of the United States of America. It is important to call this "immigration" issue what it is. When variations of the term "undocumented workers" or "undocumented immigrants" the reality is that we are talking about illegal immigrants – people who are here in this country because they have broken the law. Many are from Mexico and other Latin American countries, nations who are very brutal toward people who cross their borders illegally. Also, it is important to understand that there is a real danger from enemies of our country who are coming into the United States to do harm. Finally, it must

be observed that if a country cannot control its borders, it is doomed to collapse. All of these factors are ignored by the apologists in these articles who use positive words to describe illegal immigrants.

Again, in all of this, one must ask the question, “Is this a wise use of UM time and money?” – AOM]

+ ***UMs Praise President’s Immigration Order.*** President Barack Obama’s immigration plan offers “a word of mercy and a measure of justice,” said Bishop Minerva Carcaño (Los Angeles Area), co-chair of The UMC’s interagency task force on immigration reform. The plan means undocumented immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for more than five years and have children who are U.S. citizens or residents “can now come out of the shadows,” said Carcaño. The Council of Bishops has long supported immigration reform and encouraged local communities “to participate in ministries of mercy and justice,” said Bishop Julius C. Trimble, co-chair of task force and Episcopal leader of the Iowa Conference. Trimble said critics have attacked the president’s action before, saying reform is the responsibility of Congress. “Nevertheless, the question remains unanswered as to why the House of Representatives will not act on a Senate-approved bill,” he said.

[Note: Two answers to that question is because of two reasons: the President’s action is unconstitutional and the Senate at that time was controlled by the Democratic Party. Another observation is that this is political activism by a UM bishop, one of the leaders of our denomination. When he interjects himself into the political process, he is purporting to show that United Methodists support this illegal immigration, misusing the “good name” of our denomination. – AOM]

The General Board of Church and Society’s (GBCS) top executive, the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, has written a letter to Obama commending him on extending deferred status to more than five million undocumented immigrants. But she emphasizes that this is just “a critical first step.” Carcaño urged UMs to call and send letters to their congressional leaders supporting the president’s plan. She also called on UMs to contribute to the cost of legalization processes for immigrant families. “Immigrants are some of the hardest working people in this country, yet they are also among the lowest paid,” she said. “Immigration application fees must be set within their economic reach. We have seen this need as we have encouraged young people to apply for DACA [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals]. Many qualify but have not applied because they cannot afford the application cost.” Eligible immigrants will need a “massive level of assistance” in the months that follow, agreed Rob Rutand-Brown, director of UM National Justice for our Neighbors (NJFON). “These vulnerable immigrants will be targeted by unscrupulous people eager to take their money,” he said. Brown said the national organization, which offers free legal assistance to immigrants, will be stepping up its efforts. “We will strengthen our partnerships—within The UMC and beyond—throughout the cities we serve,” he said.

The executive order is a cause for celebration, but there are still more than 7 million left out of the plan, said Carol Barton of UM Women (UMW). She coordinates the Immigrant & Civil Rights Initiative. Barton said that includes the Central American women and children who arrived this summer fleeing violence, only to be detained, forced to wear electronic ankle bracelets, or served pending deportation papers. The executive action is also partial and temporary, Barton said. “It does not guarantee permanent status, or health care and social welfare benefits. It can be

revoked at any time. Thus, as we work to assist all those eligible for deferred status, we will also continue to advocate for just immigration reform that includes all...in the U.S. and addresses future flows of migration. And we will continue to accompany those facing more intense criminalization, detention and deportation, until they, too, can celebrate,” she said.

– Kathy L. Gilbert, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 48 / December 3, 2014

+ ***President Obama and Bishop Carcaño on Immigration.*** President Barack Obama and Bishop Minerva Carcaño have cited the Christmas story as the best example of how to welcome the undocumented “strangers among us.” Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), a denomination-wide program that offers free legal service to immigrants, is located in Casa Azafrán. Carcaño, episcopal leader of the California-Pacific Conference, long an outspoken advocate for undocumented people, was attending another meeting in Nashville. “When we look at the vulnerable immigrant child we should see the Christ child,” Carcaño said. Obama said his order shifts the priority of who is deported to “felons instead of families, to criminals instead of children.” This will allow ordinary law-abiding people to “come out of the shadows,” he said. Undocumented people who have lived in the U.S. for more than five years and have children who are U.S. citizens will be able to register. They will have to pass a background check and, if they have not already done so, begin to pay taxes. “This isn’t amnesty, or legalization, or even a path to citizenship,” Obama said. “What we’re saying is, until Congress fixes this problem legislatively, if you have deep ties to this country and you are willing to get right by the law and do what you need to do, then you shouldn’t have to worry about being deported or being separated from your kids.”

About 75 people—many of them undocumented or advocates for immigration reform—were part of the “town hall” meeting. Obama acknowledged it will take time to build trust and courage for undocumented people to come forward but, he pointed out, that is where churches and other organization can step in. “The president is limited in what he can do unilaterally. It is still vital for Congress to act to repair our immigration system, and the only way to make sure that happens is to let our leaders know that is what the American people want.” Responding to a Christmas blessing from the audience, Obama said, “It’s worth considering the Good Book when you’re thinking about immigration. This Christmas season there’s a whole story about a young, soon-to-be-mother and her husband of modest means looking for a place to house themselves for the night, and there’s no room at the inn.” Carcaño said it is time for Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform and for the church to be open to helping undocumented people. “In this season of mercy and grace, how do we open our hearts to the vulnerable immigrant child?”

[Note: One can only wonder that these two, President Obama and Bishop Carcaño, did not recognize the differences in the case of Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem two thousand years ago and illegal immigrants today: the journey into Bethlehem was in accordance with the decree of the government, while the illegal immigrants are in violation of the legally constituted laws of our land. Again, this is an example of apportionment dollars at work. – AOM]

– Kathy L. Gilbert, UMCOM, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 50 / December 17, 2014

+ ***Tucson Church Provides Sanctuary.*** Francisco Perez Cordova, an undocumented husband and father, lives like any American. He spends time with his wife Sarai and five U.S.- born children, he works hard, and he pays taxes. Although Francisco is considered a low-priority case by

Immigration and Customs Enforcement, he has orders to leave the country, so the family lives in constant fear of being separated from one another. To help keep the family together, local Ums are intervening. Francisco lives in sanctuary at St. Francis of the Foothills UMC in Tucson. According to Rev. Jim Wiltbank, the church provides a bedroom for Francisco, a trailer for the family to spend time together, and a nightly prayer vigil. The church members take shifts around the clock so Francisco is never left alone. “There are more church communities ready to take people in if the situation arises.” He is referring to the 24 other churches and synagogues in 12 different cities who are a part of Sanctuary 2014 [movement], a growing movement protecting immigrants...in fear of deportation.

– Kate Strohmeier, Desert Southwest Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 45 / November 12, 2014

+ **“Dreamers” Now Eligible for UM College Loans.** Dreamers are young adults who were unauthorized immigrants [read “illegal aliens” – AOM] brought into the country as children. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) board recently voted to expand the eligibility criteria that will enable Dreamer students to apply for a loan or scholarship from GBHEM under the current Domestic Applicant guidelines. GBHEM is adjusting the online application questions regarding citizenship status so that they are able to identify the Dreamers who apply this year. GBHEM opened applications for spring and summer loans on Dec. 11, 2014 and will accept loan applications until May 5, 2015. The spring and summer loans are for school enrollment between Jan. 1 and May 31.

[Note: Again, this is an example of your apportionment dollars at work – helping illegals. – AOM]

– GBHEM, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 43, Issue 02 / January 14, 2015

Islam. Duke Cancels Muslim Call to Prayer after Revolt. Officials at Duke University abruptly dropped plans to broadcast the Muslim call to prayer from the iconic bell tower of Duke Chapel after online protests led by evangelist Franklin Graham and unspecified security threats. The decision on (Jan. 15) came one day before the “adhan,” or traditional call to prayer, was to be broadcast from the heart of campus in Durham, N. C. Michael Schoenfeld, a Duke vice president for public affairs and government relations, said in a statement the school remains committed to “fostering an inclusive, tolerant and welcoming campus” for all students but “it was clear that what was conceived as an effort to unify was not having the intended effect.” Schoenfeld said campus officials were aware of several security threats but declined to elaborate.

Graham, who leads [the] Billy Graham Evangelistic Association from the other end of the state, in Charlotte, said the call to prayer includes the words “Allahu Akbar,” or “God is great,” which was shouted by Islamist militants during last week’s deadly attacks across Paris. “As Christianity is being excluded from the public square and followers of Islam are raping, butchering, and beheading Christians, Jews, and anyone who doesn’t submit to their Sharia Islamic law, Duke is promoting this in the name of religious pluralism,” he said on his Facebook page. Graham urged alumni to withhold donations until the call to prayer was suspended. Duke was founded by Methodists but is now largely secular. The Duke Chapel at the center of campus bills itself as a “Christian church of uniquely interdenominational character and purpose.”

Omid Safi, director of the Duke Islamic Studies Center, said in an email that he was deeply disappointed. About 700 of the university’s more than 14,000 students are Muslim. “What could

have been a celebration of Duke’s commitment to our robust and diverse religious community has had to be adjusted due to . . . bigotry. I know that there are many inside of the Duke community and beyond who want to see us be better, be a loving and welcoming community in which all of us bring our religious particularity to the public arena. I look forward to that beloved religious community at Duke, in America, and in the world community.” Safi said Duke’s Muslim community had received “credible threats” but said Friday prayers would continue as normal in the Duke Chapel lounge. “The call to prayer will be given. It just won’t be amplified from the Chapel top,” he wrote. Khalilah Sabra, executive director of the Muslim American Society Immigrant Justice Center, and a member of the Raleigh-Durham Muslim community, said Duke’s Friday prayers were supposed to be followed by an open discussion to talk about the pros and cons of having the adhan amplified from the bell tower. She said it would have been an event that gave Muslim students a chance to feel that they belonged.

[Note: One can only wonder where all of the “openness” and “tolerance” are in the Islamic countries where they allow no other religion than Islam. And how is the “love” shown in those countries when they kill people for not being Muslim. In how many countries in the Middle East is Christian church music played over loudspeakers for all the community to hear? Those who do not understand Islam do not realize that actions such as broadcasting this “call to prayer” over the loudspeakers is tantamount to their laying claim over Duke Chapel for the Islamic religion. The reality is that Islam is fundamentally irreconcilable with the Christian faith – or all others, for that matter. Since Duke receives money from the Ministerial Education Fund, this is yet another example of your apportionment dollars at work. – AOM]

– Mariam Sobh, Religion News Service, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 43, Issue 03 / January 21, 2015.

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Life offers no guarantees, but abortion offers no chances.

Global Outlook

"You know Genesis 2:24 is pretty clear about marriage being instituted by God and between a man and a woman, so I couldn't in good faith do that." – John Kallum, Rockingham County magistrate who resigned rather than perform same-sex weddings. Received from the North Carolina Values Coalition.

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India. *Cyclone Hudhud response.* In October, a cyclone named Hudhud unleashed widespread destruction to the city of Visakhapatnam, India and the neighboring districts of Vizianagaram and Srikakulam of Andhra Pradesh. In Visakhapatnam, which bore the brunt of the storm, hundreds of trees and poles were knocked down and rubble blocked roads as winds of nearly 200 mph tore away roofs and signage throughout the city. In Srikakulam, about 3,500 homes were damaged and 800 homes were destroyed. Thousands of people were evacuated from their villages and relocated to relief camps. In addition, 104 coastal villages, where about 40,000 families reside, were also severely affected by the storm. The UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is supporting partner Church’s Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) to provide food such as rice and lentils, and non-food items such as hygiene kits, tarpaulin sheets for temporary shelter, and other daily necessities such as cooking pots, utensils and blankets for 1,500 families in the hardest-hit areas.

– UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 47 / November 26, 2014

Sudan. *South Sudan: Improving food security.* Decades of civil war prior to South Sudanese independence in 2011

took an estimated 2 million lives and forced many to flee in search of safety. By 2007, displaced persons began returning to Northern Bahr el Ghazal state seeking favorable living and working conditions. But jobs, social services and resources were limited. Today, a grant from the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) in support of its field office in Aweil in Northern Bahr el Ghazal will improve food security and livelihoods of South Sudanese families through goat rearing and vegetable farming projects. The projects will allow families to meet their food needs and sell surplus produce at the local market to meet other needs such as school fees and medication. UMCOR has purchased, vaccinated and distributed 450 goats to 54 returnees and 36 internally displaced persons. The funding allows for continued training in animal husbandry techniques and for additional vaccinations of the goats against common diseases. In addition, UMCOR has provided tools and vegetable seeds to 28 returnees and 18 internally displaced persons who were identified as particularly vulnerable. These individuals have received training in appropriate agricultural practices and in business management practices. They are also working collaboratively on small plots to plant their vegetable gardens. World Food Day is Oct. 16.

– UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 40 / October 8, 2014

Tanzania. *Water for Tanzania.* The Tanzania UMC in Dar es Salaam, now a provisional annual conference under the North Katanga Episcopal Area, recently purchased property in the suburban Mviti area, but there is no water. A grant from the UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to the church will provide the means to drill and identify a safe water source that will meet the daily needs of 1,215 individuals. The grant also will support hygiene education and water safety to help raise awareness and reduce the occurrences of cholera, worms, typhoid and diarrhea, which are all associated with poor drinking water. The new mission compound sought funding for the installation of wells to support the various ministry projects that will occur on the grounds, including a church, guesthouse for volunteers and missionaries, school, conference offices and a hospital. This water project will also benefit surrounding communities. Gifts to Water and Sanitation, Advance #3020600 will help meet the need for water and sanitation in this and other areas around the world.

– UMCOR UPDATES, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 42 / October 22, 2014

Annual Conference Reports

Dakotas Annual Conference. The conference met June 5–7 in Rapid City, S.D. The theme was “Unleashed: Fearless, Spirit-led Churches!” The officiating bishop was Bruce R. Ough. Guest speakers included The Rev. Adam Hamilton. Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference: Offerings: Bishop’s call for a miracle offering of \$100,000 to launch a new church by merging two congregations, and 5,000 items for Bakken Oil Rush Ministry Mobile Thrift Store resulted in \$180,000 for the new church and more than 10,000 items for the store. Launched: capital campaign feasibility study, with focus on equipping missional congregations. Celebrated: grants and programs for campus and young adult ministries; four new church starts; 8,000 camp attendees; eight churches participating in Missional Church Initiative; hire of associate director of Missional Impact; launch of the Bakken Oil Rush Ministry; implementation of new apportionment formula. Approved: budget of \$6,935,433, a decrease of \$49,538.

Clergy statistics: provisional deacon: 2; ordained deacon: 0; provisional elder: 3; ordained elder: 1.

Conference statistics: Membership is 36,592, down 140. Worship attendance stands at 20,511, up 369.

– Doreen Gosmire, Dakotas Conference, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 43 / October 29, 2014

Southwest Texas Annual Conference. The conference met June 12–14 at the American Bank Center, Corpus Christi. The officiating bishop was Bishop Jim Dorff. Guest speakers: The Rev. Ruben Saenz, executive director of New Church Development and Transformation for the conference; the Rev. Markcus Freeman, director of Clergy Development (as of January 2015). Main actions enacted and resolutions adopted by the conference: approved standing rules and budget for the new Rio Texas Conference Names of delegates elected to 2016 General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference: Lay delegates to General Conference: Theresa Keese, Ralph Thompson, Carol Loeb and Jay Brim. Clergy delegates to General Conference: Teresa Welborn, Laura Merrill, Eradio Valverde and Carl Rohlf. Lay delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Aislinn Deviney, Rachel Wright, Byrd Bonner and Lawrence Harrison. Clergy delegates to Jurisdictional Conference: Russell Miller, Austin Frederick, Tom Deviney and Paul Escamilla. Lay reserve delegates: Sean Raybuck, Rick Mantooth and Michael Sweatner. Clergy reserve delegates: Abigail Parker Herrera, Terrence Hayes and Leslie Tomlinson. Conference statistics: Membership stands at 114,990, down 2,055.

– Thomas Monahan, Southwest Texas Conference, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 39 / October 1, 2014

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A good friend is a connection to life – a tie to the past, a key to the present, a road to the future, the key to sanity in a totally insane world. – Lois Wyse