

Monthly Update

January 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This January edition of the Monthly Update contains some of the information we have been holding back so that we could help you have a “Merry Christmas” and not burden you with the more serious stuff happening in our church, the nation, and the world.

With the information we had put into our last edition of the Update, we wanted you to have the “Naughty or Nice” list so that you could make decisions that would tend to support those retailers who are not afraid to acknowledge Christ during the holiday season; in other words, let your money speak for you. Also, we had added the list of “things to do at Christmas” to stimulate any ideas as to how you might celebrate the season more enjoyably. If you yourself do something else or can think of something we forgot, by all means, please send it to us.

One person (I believe it was a lady from the way it was written) sent the newsletter back to us with items from a church bulletin with things underlined that they did. The individual then annotated on the returned newsletter itself words asking about going to church. Since it was unsigned and there was no return address on the letter, I could not send a reply. I reviewed our newsletter and, sure enough, on page 4 is the sentence:

Oh, and during the Christmas holidays—remember to read your Bible, pray, and go to church.

The idea of inserting that in the letter after all of the ideas of what to do at Christmas is for us to remember that in all of the busyness of the season’s activities, don’t forget the important things. Yes, Christmas is to be enjoyed with all of the color, lights, fun, and activities – but don’t forget the Reason for the season. That is a point that we had made more than once in the Update.

Speaking of “the more serious stuff happening in our church, the nation, and the world” just the latest is the report of the Taliban attacking a school and brutally killing the principal, teachers, but mainly children. Just think, children. It is a reminder that we live in an increasingly dangerous world and that we face an implacable adversary. At a conference at the Cove, created by the Billy Graham ministry, Dr. Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, pointed out that so many of the radical terrorists act in the same way as taught from their “holy book” – the Qu’ran.

Again, from all of us here at Concerned Methodists, we wish you the very best throughout the year 2015. We also ask that you pray for Concerned Methodists, our church, our country, and the world. We all need it.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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January 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Just give the American people a good cause, and there's nothing they can't lick. – John Wayne

The Good Stuff

+ *7 Minutes with God*

Are you pressed for time? Do you feel like there is not enough time to do the things you need to? Do you as if there is not even enough time to spend with God? As rushed as you are, could you commit to spend just 7 minutes? Then spend:

30 seconds – just thanking God for all He has done for you.

4 minutes – reading your Bible.

2½ minutes – praying.

I would venture to say that after a week or at the most two weeks, you would find yourself “finding” more time to spend with Him – and enjoying it more and more. Then you would see that “the rest of your day” goes better. Try it. – AOM

+ *Honesty is the best policy?*

Taxi drivers find lots of items such as hats, cell phones, or briefcases that passengers leave behind in their cabs. However, very few found what a driver in Singapore discovered in the back seat: a black paper bag containing Sg\$1.1 million – \$900,000 in American money. As tempting as it was to keep the money, driver Sia Ka Tian turned the bag in to his company office and waited for the owners to reclaim it. It turned out the money belonged to a Thai couple on vacation. The couple gave the driver an undisclosed monetary reward for the safe return of their cash. Also, the taxi company commended him for his honesty. [How many American Christians would do this? – AOM] – From “Coffee News”

+ Sign on the window of a travel agency: “We Mean It When We Say We Want You To Go Away!”

Of Interest.

+ ***Poll: Making Disciples Leads as Church Priority***. A new poll of UMs in the United States shows that issues related to human sexuality rank significantly lower than other concerns, and members want the church to engage on this issue and bring a positive perspective to the discussion. Creating disciples of Christ, spiritual growth and youth involvement are among the top priorities for U.S. church members, according to the survey commissioned by UM Communications (UMCOM). The research is based on a May 30–June 1 survey of UM members in the U.S. The research was conducted by Corporate Research of Greensboro, N.C., and Research Now of Dallas. It had a 4.4% margin of error.

“We found that regardless of a person’s position on homosexuality, members felt strongly that the church could offer a positive and different voice to the broader conversation occurring in society today,” said Jack Deuterian, president of Corporate Research. “They overwhelmingly reject the idea that the disagreements over this issue were justification for splitting the church.” Seventy-six percent of members said the church “should engage and bring positive perspective” to society’s discussion of issues related to sexuality. More than 90% of respondents said The UMC should not split over issues related to human sexuality. Sixty three percent said the issue of sexual orientation and same-gender marriage is “diverting the church from more important things.” They ranked it eighth in importance among issues facing the church today. The most important issues, according to members, are creating disciples of Christ (39% of respondents ranked it as first or second in importance); youth involvement (27%); members’ spiritual growth (24%); decline in membership (19%); poverty (17%); children at risk (17%); and social injustice (16%). Sexual orientation and same-gender marriage drew 11%. “This poll shows

what really matters to the members of The UMC,” said the Rev. Larry Hollon, general secretary of UM Communications. “It also clarifies that the people in the pews are more concerned about faithful living and changing lives for Christ than they are about some of the other issues that we hear so much about.”

The poll is helpful as The UMC looks ahead to its legislative assembly in 2016, Hollon said. “As the church wrestles with issues related to human sexuality leading up to 2016, this is a hopeful reminder that our connection is strong and that

people in the pews are neither ignoring this discussion nor letting it distract from our effort to answer Christ’s call.”

[Editorial note: I question the accuracy of this poll. If we do not get the issue of human sexuality right, we will not get much of anything else right. This goes to the heart of our Christian faith. It is God who has defined who we are, “male and female He created them” (Genesis 2:24). If we are confused over this fundamental issue, we will not get anything else right, since our slipping into gender confusion indicates that we do not truly believe the Bible, and are setting ourselves against the divine order of who God created us to be – pitting our own perceptions against His. – AOM]

– News release from United Methodist Communications (UMCOM).

+ ***10 Indications a Church is Making Disciples***

I’ve often heard people say you can’t measure discipleship. I don’t know if that’s true. It is true that you can’t necessarily put a number or percentage on discipleship growth, but you can tell—over time—if it has happened or is happening. Here are 10 indications a church is making disciples:

1. Those who have been in the church the longest complain the least. – Do everything without complaining or arguing. Philippians 2:14
2. The leaders of the church are most likely to give up “their” seats, park farther from the building, or do whatever is necessary to help the Body. – The greatest among you must be a servant. Matthew 23:11
3. The church celebrates most when those far from faith come to faith. In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over a lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over 99 others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away! Luke 15:7
4. Members care that others needs are met more than their own. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. Philippians 2:4
5. The church is willing to make sacrifices to attract the lost – And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Acts 15:19
6. There is joy even during suffering – Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2
7. The teaching is a balance of truth and grace. Jesus came full of grace and truth. John 1:17
8. The financial needs of the church are funded, with people willingly sacrificing. No one begs for money. Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7
9. There are no petty disputes and grudges among the people of the church. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11
10. The church takes care of each other well. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. Acts 4:34.

– From an article by Ron Edmondson E-mail received from an associate of Concerned Methodists, 8/9/14.

+ ***Vitality Increases in U.S. UM Churches***

[Editorial note: observe the title of this article and compare it to the one immediately following. – AOM]

Even amid frequent news articles about the decline of religious affiliation in the United States, people are still joining UM churches. That growth is reflected in the Vital Congregations Report, issued July 24 by Bishop John Schol (Greater New Jersey Conference) to the Council of Bishops. According to the report, the percentage of “highly vital” UM churches in the U.S. more than doubled between 2010 and 2012—from 14.8% to 33.9%. The

same report said 34% of U.S. UM churches grew in worship attendance in 2012. The surge in vital congregations is not enough to reverse the decades-long overall trend of declining U.S. church membership and worship attendance. Schol is quick to point out UMs must do more, but the improvements do offer reasons for hope. “As we continue to increase the vitality of our congregations, we will experience a stronger missional church that is making disciples and transforming the world,” Schol told the UM News Service.

The Vital Congregations initiative measures congregational vitality based on four major areas church life: growth, member involvement in the congregation, engagement in the community, and giving. To be considered “highly vital,” a congregation must be in the top 25% of all U.S. congregations in two of the four major areas and cannot be in the bottom 25% in any one of the areas. A group of clergy, laity, bishops and agency heads developed this formula working with the consulting firm Towers Watson. The report on vitality uses data churches submitted to the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA). The 2010 percentage uses data from 32,228 U.S. churches, and the 2012 percentage uses data from 32,947 churches. The slight increase owes to more complete reporting from churches.

The complete list of highly vital congregations is confidential. Bishops can request and receive the lists for their episcopal areas. In the report, Bishop John R. Schol acknowledged that some people might attribute the upturn to churches over-counting. But the bishop noted that the increase also coincided with an increase in money sent to the general church and annual conferences. Scott Brewer, an executive GCFA, agrees the data are reliable. “These numbers are never perfect, but we do crosscheck data when trends fall outside of our normal expectations,” Brewer said. “When we saw the percentage of smaller and medium-sized churches growing in attendance jump in 2012, we checked those increases against changes in giving. There was a statistically significant relationship between the two.” Annual conferences in the U.S. also reported an increase in total professions of faith in 2012, for the first time in 11 years. Professions of faith include youth completing confirmation and adult new church members who make a profession to follow Christ. The number does not count people who transfer from one church to another. Like Schol, Brewer finds the news encouraging: “I believe the results of the [vitality] index give us a reason to thank God for our progress in 2012. . . . I hope that we take this opportunity to celebrate what we’ve accomplished through God’s grace and then ask, ‘God, what’s next?’”

– Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 31; August 6, 2014.

+ *New Churches Rise; Overall Vitality Dips.*

The Congregational Vitality Report, presented to the Council of Bishops in early November, shows the number of new church starts in the U.S. is rising, from 116 in 2012, to 145 last year. Over the past two years, 688 new faith communities have started in the Central Conferences. Faith communities include small worship groups that may never grow big enough to be considered churches. The same period saw a drop in what the denomination defines as “highly vital congregations.” Such congregations in the U.S. dipped 7% from 34% in 2012 to 27% in 2013. The UMC measures a congregation’s vitality by growth, member involvement in church, engagement in the community and giving. The recent data follow another report earlier this year that showed in 2012 a surge in U.S. vital congregations as well as an increase in professions of faith. “We’re in a time of transition and working on turning things around,” New Jersey Area Bishop John R. Schol, a leader of the denomination’s Vital Congregations Initiative, told UM News Service. “Any time you’re in transition and turnaround, you’re going to see progress and you’re going to see unevenness in the progress.” In 2013, six U.S. conferences increased in highly vital congregations, while 47 decreased. Ten conferences increased the percentage of congregations growing in worship attendance, while 42 conferences saw declines. Overall, U.S. churches saw a 2% reduction in worship attendance. Worship attendance is growing in only about a third of U.S. churches. Still, the denomination is ahead of where it was in 2010, when it began its current focus on vital congregations. That year, only about 14.8% of U.S. UM churches were identified as highly vital.

One of the biggest challenges the denomination has faced in recent decades is the result of Methodism's early success. In the 19th century, the movement spread rapidly across the U.S., with new churches sprouting in just about every human settlement. Today, about 60% of U.S. UM churches are in rural communities, while about 80% of the U.S. population now live in urban areas. While many rural churches are doing vital ministry, growth often occurs where more people are.

For many decades in many conferences, planting churches was not a priority, said Fort Worth (Tex.) Area Bishop J. Michael Lowry. That began to change in 2008 with the founding of Path1 New Church Starts, part of the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD). Path1 works with conferences to provide coaching, training and other resources for new church developers. Lowry chairs Path 1's advisory board. The Rev. Candace M. Lewis, Path1's executive director, said her division helps "the denomination see the big picture" as it goes about starting new faith communities.

Between 2008 and 2012, UMs started 684 congregations in the U.S., exceeding the denomination's goal of 650. Most of those churches are going strong, Lewis said, but Path1 is working on tracking closures of the new congregations. By the end of 2016, the goal is to start 1,000 more. The denomination is still closing more churches than opening new ones. In 2013, 375 churches closed, according to General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) statistics. Lowry envisions that trend changing in 20 or 30 years if the denomination keeps an emphasis on establishing new congregations.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 47; November 26, 2014

+ *Border Crisis Prompts Protest, Call for Congressional Action*

[Editorial note: Nothing is said about obeying the law, One wonders how Bishop Carcaño would respond to those UM laypeople who say that paying the apportionments is not necessary – despite what the UM Book of Discipline mandates. If we can choose to disobey the laws of our country, could we not also choose to disobey the guidelines of our church's document, the UM Book of Discipline? Here UM clergy are taking a far-left political position and engaging in political activism that portends greater problems. Unrestricted immigration puts our country at risk by creating a nation without the ability to control its borders, society, and laws, and allows those who would consciously harm the United States entry into unfettered entry into our midst to undermine us from the inside. This is a very serious problem. – AOM]

During a July 31 protest, 112 faith leaders and advocates, including 45 UMs, were arrested in front of the White House. The demonstrators demanded more humane immigration and deportation policies from the Obama Administration. Bishops Minerva Carcaño (Los Angeles Area) and Jack Meadors (retired) were among those arrested. In a recent statement, a wide coalition of faith, human rights and development groups, including the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and the National Council of Churches (NCC), called on Congress to address the humanitarian crisis of tens of thousands of children from Central America who have been apprehended and detained at the U.S. border. The call came in a full-page ad in the July 23 edition of The Hill newspaper. Faith groups have shown near unanimity in calling on President Obama and Congress to protect children crossing into the U.S. "This is a regional humanitarian crisis, not a U.S. immigration enforcement problem," religious leaders have proclaimed. The leaders called on the U.S. to "embrace its moral and legal obligations to asylum seekers . . . who have arrived at our borders seeking protection. A policy of 'sealing' borders and housing vulnerable people in jail-like conditions will not dissuade people who are fleeing for their lives and seeking safety." Instead, the leaders said, such policies "risk driving desperate people into more dangerous circumstances and inflicting more pain upon those already suffering."

– Erik Alsgaard for UMCOM; NCC, as reported in UMNewscope; Vol. 42, Issue 31; August 6, 2014

+ *United Methodists praise president's immigration order.*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) – President Barack Obama's immigration plan offers "a word of mercy and a measure of justice," said United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño, co-chair of the denomination's interagency

task force on immigration reform. – UM News Service (UMNS), as reported in UMNS Daily Digest, Monday, November 24, 2014

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ ***I supported our euthanasia law, but I was terribly wrong: Dutch ethicist.*** Twelve years ago, Dutch ethicist Theo Boer supported the new law to legalize euthanasia in the Netherlands, the first country in the world to do so. In 2007, he wrote an article arguing that, with appropriate euthanasia laws and medical reviews in place, there would be no "slippery slope" to fall from, as those safeguard should keep euthanasia numbers low and steady. Now, however, Boer has changed his mind, especially in light of an annual 15% increase in euthanasia deaths since 2007, the rise of roving euthanasia doctors traveling with End of Life Clinics, and the growing public perception of euthanasia and assisted suicide as not just an exception but a right. The Netherlands have started their slide down the proverbial "slippery slope,"

– E-mail received from Anglicans For Life, 405 Frederick Avenue, Sewickley, PA 15143

+ ***Legislator had two Abortions, now she's Pro-Life.*** In a story that reflects the redemptive forgiveness of Jesus Christ, a woman who regrets her two abortions has become a leading voice in the pro-life movement. She is now a pro-life state representative in Texas. "Abortion advocates don't know what to do with Rep-Elect Molly White, a pro-life woman in the Texas House of Representatives. In a recent article in a Texas newspaper, White shared more about her opposition against abortion," reports Life News. She said, "We are women and we are designed to give birth, we're designed to nurture, we're designed to bond. It's just nature, and when we violate that natural way of having a child and giving birth, it's going to affect us. White explains that her pro-life views come after having two abortions of her own when she was in her twenties. Her abortions caused her years of mental suffering as well as cervical damage and a hysterectomy..."

"Despite the fact that numerous female politicians like White have expressed their pro-life views, abortion proponents continue to push their 'war on women' rhetoric."

[Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt's comment: Clearly the Texas voters rejected Wendy Davis (D-TX) for governor, after she became the pro-abortion poster child of the child-killing movement. The voters reject their arguments, and even young people are becoming more pro-life.]

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

(UM) Bishops.

+ ***Bishops: Pray for Us amid Sexuality Debate.*** The bishops of The UMC said in a statement addressing the denomination's human sexuality debate that "our hearts break because of the divisions that exist within the church." The Council of Bishops issued the statement Nov. 7 after hours of closed-door discussions on the subject throughout their meeting in Oklahoma City. They asked that UMs pray for their leaders and one another. They reiterated their consecration vows and a commitment to "be in ministry for and with all people." The bishops wrote that they recognized the church exists in a variety of contexts around the world and that bishops and the church are not of one mind about human sexuality. "Despite our differences, we are united in our commitment to be in ministry for and with all people. We are also united in our resolve to lead the church together to fulfill its mandate—to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As we do so, we call on all UMs to pray for us and for one another."

Bishops openly acknowledge that they are divided on human sexuality teachings and on how to interpret Scripture on the subject. "Because we are divided, we are all struggling to see how we can actually help everybody in the church," said Nigeria Area Bishop John Wesley Yohanna. "We are working to see how we can serve all people."

Bishop Warner Brown Jr., (San Francisco Area, new president of the Council of Bishops), pointed out in his closing sermon that the Methodist movement has faced deep divisions before. In recent history, those differences were especially apparent during the fight against U.S. racial segregation. "How we go forward as a people

remains to be seen,” Brown said. “But it is important that we understand that it is not about us. As different as our opinions will be and what we think is right or wrong, we are called to be a light that shines in the darkness around us. And a part of that light is the love with which we continue not to give up on another.”

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

+ ***Bishops Called to Be More Accountable to One Another.*** UM bishops must be accountable not only to UMs in their areas but also to the full Council of Bishops, asserted the council’s new president. Bishop Warner Brown Jr., concluded his first address as the body’s president by asking his fellow episcopal leaders to affirm the vows they took when they were consecrated as bishops. The bishops stood in unison to show their assent. As his fellow bishops stood, Brown prayed over them: “Gracious God, look in mercy on these your servants. Replenish them with holiness and life, and fill them with the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, fill us, so that both by word and by deed we may serve you faithfully and joyously.” Brown, who also leads the San Francisco Area, spoke to a group that included 64 active and 43 retired bishops from around the globe. The council met Nov. 3–7 in Oklahoma City. Brown offered a broad understanding of how bishops should work together, including “not looking over one another’s shoulder to second guess” each other. “It is an accountability focused on the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” he said. “Being mutually accountable requires intentional collaboration. We will need to stay engaged with one another long enough to trust each other.” Before the 2012 General Conference, the council approved a motion to have its executive committee develop measures for accountability. Charlotte (North Carolina) Area Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster, who leads the council’s accountability task force, gave the bishops an update on that work. He invited bishops to send their input on what should be part of a code of conduct. To start the conversation, Goodpaster shared with small groups some common courtesies that bishops can agree to follow, such as responding to email and calls promptly. “We realize this is low-hanging fruit,” Goodpaster said. “How do we go deeper? And then, what happens when someone does not do what we wrote down? What are the consequences?” The effort remains a work in progress.

In his address, Brown said his role as president is “to help us be an effective leadership organization. . . .The challenge is for us to come together on that which we agree is most important and lead together in a cooperative way. In other words, we must speak as pastors to the church and keep the Wesleyan spirit.”

[Note: It seems that they should be more accountable to the teachings of the Bible, the Book of Discipline, our Wesleyan heritage, and to the laity – the people in the pews who pay their salaries. The record of decline for the past 45 years testifies to the fact that there are serious problems with the leadership of this body. – AOM]

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

(UM) General Conference – 2016. Early Warning Proposed for General Conference Legislation.

Some UM leaders still talk with frustration about the last day of the 2012 General Conference, the afternoon the Judicial Council struck down as unconstitutional a plan to restructure the denomination’s general agencies. What if General Conference delegates could get a heads up that legislation might be in trouble without waiting for a Judicial Council ruling?

That is one aim of the Advance Legislative Research Panel proposed by the Commission on the General Conference, which met at Lake Junaluska in mid October. The planned panel will include experts on UMC law who are willing to volunteer significant time reading submitted petitions prior to the next General Conference in May 2016. The panel members’ task will be to review all petitions they are assigned. They will identify closely related Judicial Council decisions and memoranda as well as related paragraphs in The Book of Discipline.

The information assembled by panel members would be strictly advisory, and panel members are not to include any editorial comments. Only the Judicial Council officially can answer the question of whether legislation passed by General Conference passes constitutional muster. It will be up to the General Conference whether to take the panel’s advice when it votes on the rules and orders of the meeting. “The commission wanted this to operate as a test model this time around,” said the Rev. Gary Graves, who compiles petitions for General

Conference. The panel will operate as though it has already been approved, he said. If General Conference approves the effort, then legislative committees will receive the information compiled. If not, then they won't.

The commission's executive committee will select the panel from former Judicial Council members, conference chancellors and members of the Committee on Correlation and Editorial Revision, which works to maintain accuracy and consistent language in the Discipline. Being a panel member does not prevent a person from also being General Conference delegate. The goal, for now, is to have 12 panel members, one for each of the 12 legislative committees at the 2016 General Conference. The panel members each will review one legislative committee's petitions. They will not meet face-to-face but instead review the assigned petitions on their own.

Under the Book of Discipline, the Judicial Council rules only on proposed legislation if such a decision is requested by the General Conference as a whole or by the Council of Bishops. The panel can also help ensure the Book of Discipline does not contain contradictory paragraphs. The Rev. L. Fitzgerald "Gere" Reist II, General Conference secretary, like others at the commission meeting, sees the advisory panel as a step toward a less frustrating General Conference. "It will help legislative committees actually make a change rather than just thinking they've made the change," he said. "It may also help prevent people from doing something that is unconstitutional."

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 43 / October 29, 2014

(UM) Judicial Council. Judicial Council Looks at "Aspirational" Declarations

When is language about The UMC's positions on issues of sexuality considered "aspirational," and when could it condone a violation of church law? That question relates to several statements adopted in 2014 by annual conferences. Rulings by bishops on the statements were among the 21 docket items considered by the Judicial Council during its Oct. 22–25 meeting in Memphis.

In Decision 1283, the denomination's top court affirmed the ruling of Bishop Marcus Matthews that a statement entitled "Agree to Disagree on Issues Pertaining to Gender and Sexual Minorities," 1 of 5 human sexuality resolutions passed by the Baltimore-Washington Conference, was lawful and did not violate the Book of Discipline or other council decisions. In Decision 1285, the council "affirmed in part and modified in part" the ruling by Matthews that the smallgroup "circle process" and written ballot used to vote on the five resolutions was lawful. "The Judicial Council does not have jurisdiction in parliamentary matters," the decision said. "Annual conference rules that make no distinctions because of race, color, national origin, status or economic conditions and apply to all members are not discriminatory."

In Decision 1284, The council declared "null and of no effect" the ruling by Bishop Sally Dyck that a 2014 Northern Illinois Annual Conference resolution on marriage equality is "an historical and aspirational statement without prescriptive force which does not specifically negate, ignore or violate provisions of the Discipline." While noting that Dyck's response was "a thorough explanation and analysis," the court said the questions presented to her were hypothetical and did not require a ruling. Also considered an improper request by the council was a request submitted by a clergy member during the May 15, 2014, session of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference. The questioner asked whether it was "legal" for members or advisers of the Board of Ordained Ministry to remain on the board when they had made public statements "that they cannot and will not uphold the Discipline." The request cited Judicial Council Decision 980, "which held that persons who would not uphold the Discipline were ineligible to serve on the Committee on Investigation or a jury pool."

Bishop Peggy Johnson issued a decision of law that Decision 980 does not apply to the nominations process by the conference's committee on nominations. In Decision 1286, The Judicial Council reversed her decision, saying the request was moot and hypothetical. The council deferred decisions on sexuality-related rulings by Bishop Deborah L. Kiesey regarding a 2014 Detroit Annual Conference resolution and by Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar on a 2014 New England Annual Conference resolution until its April 2015 meeting.

The council held an oral hearing on a petition filed by the Western Pennsylvania Conference asking for a "declaratory decision" about Book of Discipline guidelines regarding the process for the review and dismissal of

a complaint against a bishop. Although the questions raised in the petition applied to the church in general, the conference included details regarding its continued concerns about what it considered a lack of response from East Africa Bishop Daniel Wandabula over the handling of funds.

The Judicial Council made two separate rulings related to the dispute. Decision 1275, addressing the general questions in the new petition, noted that the president or secretary of the College of Bishops has the power to refer a complaint and added, "If the matter is not referred, it is effectively dismissed." Decision 1281 addressed three issues raised earlier by the Western Pennsylvania Conference as part of Decisions 1238 and 1241.

In other rulings, the Judicial Council said, in responding to a request from Western Jurisdiction bishops (Decision 1287), that a complaint against a bishop filed with the president of a Jurisdictional College of Bishops may be handled initially through the supervisory process but if just resolution cannot be achieved, "the involved parties may initiate an administrative complaint or a judicial complaint."

The council also instructed that the plan unifying the Southwest Texas and Rio Grande conferences into the Rio Texas Conference is "remanded back" for further refining, with a report and revised structure plan sent to the council's secretary 30 days following the adjournment of the 2015 Rio Texas Annual Conference (Decision 1271).

– Linda Bloom, UMNS, as reported in UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 44 / November 5, 2014
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When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny.
The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort,
to protect themselves against tyranny in government. – Thomas Jefferson

Global Outlook

The tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do . . . James 3:5 (TLB)
* * * * *

Pakistan. *Pakistan flood relief.* The UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is supporting partner Muslim Aid with a grant to support its response to flood-affected families in District Jhang of Punjab, Pakistan. In September 2014, monsoon rains affected more than 1.8 million people and caused 318 deaths. The floods damaged or destroyed acres of crops making farmers unable to get fodder for their livestock, as 80% of fodder stock was destroyed. UMCOR assistance will support 500 most-affected families, or 3,500 individuals with emergency agricultural and livestock inputs. The goal is to provide short-term rapid assistance to help increase their capacity to generate income and produce food while in recovery.

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

Syria. *Assisting families fleeing Syrian conflict.* The UM Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is supporting the work of the International Blue Crescent Foundation, a partner agency, in providing basic food packages and hygiene kits for 1,000 families displaced by heavy fighting in Kobani, a Kurdish City in Syria near the Turkish border. An offensive against Kobani by the Islamic State has driven tens of thousands of refugees to Suruc, Turkey.

– UMNewScope, Vol. 42, Issue 44 / November 5, 2014
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The chains of a habit are too light to be felt – until they are too heavy that they need to be broken. – Anonymous