

Monthly Update

June 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This month's edition of the Update contains a great deal of information, both from the recent meeting of the Council of Bishops that was held in Berlin, Germany, and plans for the General Conference that will be held next year in Portland, Oregon. We plan to start coverage in the July Update of the reports on the individual annual conferences held across our United Methodist Church. We ask that you be in prayer for what happens in these assemblies as they elect delegates for next year's General Conference.

We continue to have serious challenges both in our United Methodist Church and in our country. I cannot help but believe that what we are experiencing in our country is a result of what is happening, or rather not happening, in the pulpits of our churches. When we had fought for our independence from Great Britain over two hundred years ago, the British decried the "Black-robed Regiment" that had "fomented the rebellion" against Mother England. It had been the preachers that had thundered righteousness from the pulpits and had railed against encroachments against our freedoms, citing passages from the Bible as the guides for their messages. They have been credited with stirring up the people to fight for – and to win – our independence from the strongest nation on earth at that time.

Now we face a new type of problem, of internal decay and decline in our country. In tracing our history on this, I "credit" a fellow Texan with the results we see today – Lyndon Baines Johnson. As a United States Senator, he was opposed by two politicians through a non-profit group in seeking re-election. Determined to not let that happen again, he added to a financial bill a little-noticed provision that ministries who secured non-profit status as a 501(c)3 organization cannot engage in political activism. This was seen to prevent pastors from speaking out on government-espoused moral issues of our day. The second was President Johnson's push of the "Great Society" program that dramatically increased the incidence of welfare, with greater dependence on governmental support. This made it easier for people to make irresponsible choices in living out their lives.

But we have a God who is in control of our world, our nation, and our denomination. That is the good news. We need not worry, but we do need to pray. This Memorial Day, we trust that you have done just that – and that you have thanked a service-man or woman.

Speaking of "thanks" – we thank you for the support you provide to our ministry with the gifts, prayers, and encouraging notes you send us. We also ask that you continue to partner with us; we in Concerned Methodists are strategizing and working diligently as we look toward General Conference 2016 in Portland, Oregon. Finally, please continue to pray for the United Methodist Church, that we return to our orthodox Christian faith.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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June 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

You have to treat your goal the way your dog handles a bone:

Grab it, dream, grip it tight and don't let anyone take it away from you.

– Broadcaster Mort Crim

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The Good Stuff

+ *How would you rate your relationship with Christ?*

Look back on the past year and honestly answer these four simple questions ...

1. Are you closer to God today than you were in March of 2014?
2. Do you know more of God's Word today than you knew last year?
3. How many people have entered into a relationship with God because of your personal witness?
4. Have you gained victory over any habits, attitudes, sins, or problems in your life?

What do your answers reveal about whether you are growing in your relationship with God?

The Bible says that if you are truly in Christ, then your faith will grow.

– Dr. Robert Jeffress. Received by e-mail.

+ *Standing Pat on the Family*. A few weeks back, General Boykin and I spoke at the United Nations about the persecution of Christians around the world, and now the U.N. is turning its attention to another important topic -- the family! Yesterday, FRC's own Dr. Pat Fagan had the chance to bring some of our MARRI (Marriage and Religion Research Institute) work to bear on the conference of "The Family and Sustainable Development." Dr. Fagan's speech was sponsored by the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the U.N. and focused on the "The Family as an Agent of Economic Development and a Fundamental Safety Net." Drawing on his own research and that of his colleagues Drs. Henry Potrykus and Paul Sullins of MARRI, he illustrated how the intact married family that worships weekly is the core economic strength of society and that the further one moves away from that combination the less human and social capital is present to produce the economic benefits for which all nations strive. "Though governments are critical agents in economic development, they do not have the institutional competence to increase marriage. At the same time, they can easily weaken marriage with ineffective or harmful laws and programs. Governments don't have the competence to increase worship, though again, through legislation and policies they can weaken its practice. To strengthen marriage and the family, society must stop looking to government for solutions and instead affirm the three people-forming institutions: Family, church and school. Working intimately together, these three institutions have the greatest capacities for developing human and social capital. That is what the data of the social sciences repeatedly illustrate."

– Tony Perkins, Family Research Council: 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001; May 15, 2015.

Of Interest.

+ *Volunteer Marshals and Pages Needed for General Conference*. (Note: this was included here for greater visibility.)

Nashville, Tenn.: Beginning April 1, volunteers can apply online to serve as marshals or pages during The United Methodist Church's 2016 General Conference. The denomination's top legislative assembly will meet in Portland, Oregon, May 10-20, 2016. Approximately 150 volunteers are needed to serve as marshals and pages during General Conference. Preference will be given to applicants who can serve throughout the entire conference. Marshals are responsible for assisting visitors and special guests in the visitor and reserved seating galleries, checking credentials to make sure that only authorized persons are admitted to the bar of the conference or that of legislative committees, and other duties as assigned. Pages assist delegates, secretarial staff,

bishops, members of the Judicial Council and official visitors. They distribute approved materials and deliver printed information.

Volunteers are responsible for their own travel and expenses. Those interested should submit an online application before the deadline of July 31. If you have additional questions, contact Dick Hooton at revshoot@gmail.com.

– Diane Degnan, United Methodist Communications Office of Public Information; umcprescenter.org. April 1, 2015.

+ *Bishops ask if agency restructure plan is constitutional.*

[Note: This was included here for greater visibility. Also, I remember well the circumstances in Tampa of how concerned delegates worked into the night on Saturday evening of General Conference 2012 to come up with Plan UMC to replace that put forth by the Connectional Table that we had opposed and that had been defeated. It came as a shock when the Judicial Council ruled Plan UMC unconstitutional on that last Friday, in the waning hours of the assembly. – AOM]

The denomination's top court will get a chance to weigh in on a proposal to restructure The United Methodist Church's general agencies before General Conference delegates consider the plan in May 2016. The move comes after the Judicial Council ruled on the last day of the 2012 General Conference that a similar plan violated the denomination's constitution.

After two hours of discussions behind closed doors, the Council of Bishops announced that it would not wait until the denomination's top legislative assembly meets to see if a revised version of Plan UMC passes constitutional muster. The active bishops voted to ask the Judicial Council for a declaratory decision regarding the legislation's constitutionality. The council will next meet in October. San Francisco Area Bishop Warner Brown Jr., the Council of Bishops president, said the decision to seek review is meant to keep delegates from spending "a great deal of time on something" only to have it ruled out of order. "The action of the council is in no way intended as support or opposition to the proposed Plan UMC but an effort to facilitate the work of the 2016 General Conference," Brown said. The revised restructuring plan comes from six 2012 General Conference delegates who were among the supporters and drafters of the original Plan UMC. The Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders also plans to submit separate legislation that deals with conference structures. The new plan marks a change from the 2012 restructuring effort. Back then, the bishops took the lead in pushing to restructure the 10 church agencies that receive general church funds. The previous legislation came out of the multiyear Call to Action process launched by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table, a church body that coordinates the denomination's ministry and resources. The Council of Bishops endorsed the original Call to Action restructuring plan in November 2011. The Judicial Council...cannot rule on hypothetical actions, but the Council of Bishops can ask...for a review of proposed legislation.

Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer and Charlotte (N.C.) Area Larry M. Goodpaster each served as president of Council of Bishops during the Call to Action process. Palmer said he remembered some discussions with church law experts, but the bishops "were not convinced" the plan would give rise to constitutional questions.

In 2012, General Conference delegates by almost 60 percent approved an amended version of the Call to Action restructuring proposals, called Plan UMC. The vote was 567 to 384. The Judicial Council then overturned the legislation, leaving many of the plan's supporters feeling stunned and hurt. After the ruling, delegates spent the last hours of the last day of 2012 General Conference scrambling to downsize agency boards. "There is great concern amid the Council of Bishops about the disarray at the end of (2012) General Conference," said Great Plains Area Bishop Scott Jones. "We passed this motion ...in order to know what are the constitutional boundaries." He and Dallas Area Bishop Mike McKee brought the motion to the Council of Bishops at the request of drafters of the new legislation. Jones said the bishops are not likely to make a habit of getting proposed legislation from outside groups reviewed. But because such a high percentage of General

Conference delegates supported the initial plan, Jones said he thinks the revised version “is worthy of special consideration.”

What is in the new plan? The 2012 Plan UMC would have established a General Council for Strategy and Oversight to oversee the work of six of the denomination's agencies and consult on the budget of seven. Judicial Council identified two problems: The legislation delegated authority that should remain only with General Conference, and the General Council for Strategy and Oversight would intrude into the bishops' constitutional authority for general oversight of the denomination. The revised version of Plan UMC aims to rectify those issues. The plan also includes the following changes to the current structure:

- It gives the Connectional Table new authority to elect the top executives for the United Methodist Discipleship Ministries and the Boards of Global Ministries, Church and Society and Higher Education and Ministry once those agencies have nominated a candidate for the top post. The legislation says the top executives will be accountable programmatically to their boards and administratively to the newly created position of Connectional Table executive general secretary.
- It details the Connectional Table's authority to evaluate agencies based on how the agencies direct the flow of energy toward vital congregations and carry out the mission of the global church.
- It reduces the size of agency boards and the Connectional Table, while increasing representation from outside the United States, especially Africa.
- It eliminates the Commission on Archives and History, and moves its functions to the General Council on Finance and Administration.
- It eliminates the United Methodist Commissions on Religion and Race and the Status and Role of Women. The plan moves the commissions' functions, including monitoring and advocacy, to a new Connectional Table committee called the United Methodist Committee on Inclusiveness. “The church is four years behind where it ought to be in going forward with this needed and overwhelmingly supported restructure of its general agency complex,” said the Rev. Clayton Oliphint, one of the new plan's drafters and senior pastor of First United Methodist Church in Richardson, Texas. “Structure isn't our primary obstacle on the way to fulfilling our mission, but it is one obstacle with which we can and should deal in a straightforward and expeditious manner.”

Jones said the revised plan is “too timid.” He would like to see most agencies merged into one.

– By Heather Hahn; Berlin (United Methodist News Service (*UMNS*); May 6, 2015. E: newsdesk@umcom.org)

+ ***Pastor's Dismissal Sparks Outcry.*** Serious questions have been raised by congregants and ministerial colleagues regarding the highly peculiar removal of Dr. Carole Hulslander as pastor of Still Waters United Methodist Church in suburban Atlanta. The congregation began as a Bible study in Hulslander's living room 16 years ago and has grown into a 120-member multi-racial and multi-ethnic United Methodist church. For the last 15 years she has been recognized as a licensed local pastor – a non-ordained clergyperson – by the North Georgia Annual Conference. Although local pastors do not have the same clergy rights as ordained elders, observers are questioning the legitimacy of her dismissal. Local pastors are afforded the same due process rights as all ordained clergy. Hulslander was informed that she was losing her congregation and ministerial standing in a March 17, 2015 meeting with North Georgia representatives. In a letter sent the following day from the Revs. Dana A. Everhart, District Superintendent of the Atlanta Emory District, and Jessica E. Terrell, Chairperson of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry, Hulslander was told she was being dismissed because she did not “order the life of the local church to the 2012 Book of Discipline” and because she had failed “to properly report and handle an allegation of Child Abuse within [her] congregation/school.” Hulslander said concerned members of the Still Waters congregation were shocked to learn about her removal two weeks before Easter. They were further confused and angered by the anonymous “child abuse” allegation they regarded as groundless and resolved three months previous. According to Sharon O'Conner, principal of the school, neither law enforcement officers nor representatives from child protective services ever visited or even contacted the school regarding the

allegation. Furthermore, O'Connor confirmed that Everhart himself never followed up on the allegation with officials at the school, the church, or with the parents of the child purportedly involved.

Good News called Everhart's office and sent written questions. Everhart has not responded to any of our requests for comment. Since the removal of Hulslander, members of Still Waters UM Church council have vigorously and publicly contested Everhart and Terrell's charges. The lay leadership at the church has refused to receive interim pastors the conference has sent to lead Sunday worship. Pastor Hulslander told Good News that she was not aware of any alleged incident of "child abuse" at Still Water's Elementary School until Everhart informed her of the anonymous allegation on December 8, 2014. She immediately investigated the allegation by speaking with the school's principal, teachers, and the parents of the child purportedly abused. Hulslander reported back to Everhart via an email message on December 10, informing him the allegations were "false" and that there were "no grounds for such a charge."

That same day, in an email reply, Everhart wrote to Hulslander, "Thank you for the follow up email. I appreciate your research and your thoughtful approach to the possible concerns being shared via my office."

Hulslander said that Everhart never mentioned the incident again until her appearance before the District Committee on Ordained Ministry on March 16, 2015, and in the letter notifying her of her immediate dismissal from Still Waters.

The parents of the child purportedly involved in the case have [said]...they "are hurt and deeply troubled that [Everhart] used a call from an unknown person to ... attack our pastor, church and school." The parents, who remain active in Still Waters UM Church, and have three children enrolled in its school, claim Everhart "never asked to speak with [them] or anyone" at the school.

Hulslander said she is mystified by the charge that she has failed "to order the life of the local church to the 2012 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church." Neither Hulslander nor the church's lay leadership was warned that the congregation was so egregiously out of compliance with the Book of Discipline that their failure to rectify the situation would result in the immediate dismissal of their pastor, an unusual and grave step for such a charge. Hulslander maintained her annual reviews were always positive, that the congregation she helped grow always paid its apportionments, and has been recognized by the North Georgia Annual Conference as a strong multicultural congregation serving in an urban environment.

Unless questions are answered and the matter is resolved before the North Georgia Annual Conference, Everhart is likely to face numerous inquiries from his colleagues at the conference's clergy session. "I hope and pray that due process was followed in this case," said the Rev. Randy Mickler, senior pastor of Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church in Marietta, Georgia. "And I trust it will be addressed at the annual conference clergy session."

– By Walter B. Fenton; Good News. Received from an associate. Walter Fenton is a UM and analyst for Good News.

+ *Mt. Bethel UMC Resumes Payment of Some Apportionments.* Mt. Bethel UM Church members by action of its administrative council, in what was described as a "measured" response, Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church (MBUMC) in Marietta, Georgia, will resume payment of some of its apportionments beginning in the month of June. The council also voted to retain in escrow over \$400,000 in apportionments (\$200,000 from 2014 and over \$200,000 in 2015) to reflect its continuing concerns for unacceptable lapses of integrity, accountability, and fidelity in complying with the Book of Discipline. In 2014, MBUMC took actions to withhold apportionments after the Council of Bishops failed to respond to the "Integrity and Unity Statement" signed by over 100 leading pastors and theologians and then endorsed by over 8,200 lay and clergy people across the UM connection. The resumption of partial payment of apportionments was described as a show of "good faith" and appreciation for Bishop Mike Watson's stand with MBUMC. In early March 2015, MBUMC sent a letter to Bishop Watson requesting that he clarify his understanding of marriage for United Methodists in his Episcopal area, and MBUMC received his response on April 13, 2015 (see links to letters). In his reply, Bishop Watson wrote, "I gladly reaffirm my commitment to fulfill my sacred calling to follow Christ within the covenant of scriptural faith

outlined by our United Methodist Book of Discipline." He went on to write, "The principles you described in your recent correspondence are in accordance with our Book of Discipline, which I uphold."

Ferrell Coppedge, lay leader of the congregation, said, "We're grateful for Bishop Watson's clear and unambiguous support for the issues we raised in our letter, which ostensibly, are the same issues raised in the Integrity and Unity Statement." Coppedge went on to say "we hope that other bishops will be asked by their churches to publicly clarify their positions. As grateful as we are for our bishop's stand, if other churches across the connection do not hold their bishops accountable, the foundation of trust that has been so severely damaged may prove to be irreparable. We can think of no credible argument for unity without restoring and maintaining the highest standards of integrity within the UMC, beginning with the visible conduct and accountable leadership of our bishops, as their silence has been deafening."

Based on counsel it received from emissaries Bishop Watson sent to respond to the congregation's concerns, the administrative council decided to take a "line item" approach to paying apportionments. Like a growing number of local churches across the UM connection, Mt. Bethel's administrative council decided to continue to escrow all apportionments designated for the general church, and the Episcopal Fund in particular.

"We'll be happy to consider the release of funds to the general church and the Episcopal Fund," said Coppedge, "as well as maintain an open mind regarding the release of apportionments held in escrow, when our bishops and other church leaders hold one another accountable, fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities, and consistently act with integrity and fidelity as it pertains to both the form and substance of the Discipline."

– By Walter B. Fenton; Good News.

+ ***Number of annual conferences.*** In 2014, there were 57 U.S. annual conferences in the United States, down from 60 in 2007. There are 76 conferences outside of the U.S.

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in the Vol. 43, Issue 13 / April 1, 2015, edition of UMNewScope. Statistics come from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) records.

+ ***NewScope cease[ed] publication.*** The UM Publishing House (UMPH), publisher of Newscope, announced Mar. 27 that Newscope will cease publication as of the Apr. 1, 2015, issue, after forty-three years of serving UM leaders with news and information of interest from around the globe. Originally an experiment, this weekly news digest included accounts of UMs in action, annual conference reports, highlights of work related to the Four Areas of Focus, forthcoming events, and other items of interest, often involving persons who were or are widely known within the connection. "For everything there is a season, and for more than forty of them Newscope proved to be...an... accessible source of denomination-wide news and information...It was widely read and was for a time the official vehicle for first notice of Judicial Council decisions. But church leaders, like many readers, increasingly turned to an array of up-to-the-minute Internet sources for news, and Newscope's circulation declined," said Neil M. Alexander, president and publisher of UMPH. "We celebrate what Newscope accomplished and are grateful to the readers and the staff who made it such an integral part of UM life for more than forty years." – The Vol. 43, Issue 13/April 1, 2015, ed. of UMNewScope

+ ***So Much for 'Big Tent' Methodism.*** Centrists and some progressives within The United Methodist Church are fond of talking about how we can have a "big tent" version of Methodism that embraces (or at least accommodates) a broad spectrum of theological and moral understandings. In my experience, however, there are places in the U.S. church where evangelicals have been marginalized and excluded from the church. Over the years, we have heard first-hand testimony from evangelical candidates for ministry who have not been approved by district committees or conference boards of ordained ministry. – By Tom Lambrecht; Good News. As received by e-mail from an associate.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ ***National Right to Life Mourns the Death of Dr. John C. Willke.***

The National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), the nation's oldest and largest pro-life organization, joins with pro-lifers across the country and around the world in mourning the death of former National Right to Life President Dr. John C. (Jack) Willke, an obstetrician who devoted his life to the right-to-life movement. Dr. Willke died at his home in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Friday. He was 89. "There is no way to quantify the contributions Jack Willke, along with his wife Barbara, made to the right-to-life movement," said Carol Tobias, president of National Right to Life. "Jack's generous heart and wonderful sense of humor will be greatly missed. He and Barbara devoted their lives to the right-to-life movement, and we will be forever in their debt."

In the early days of the right-to-life movement, Jack and Barbara Willke helped form the foundation of right-to-life educational efforts through the development of the "Willke slides" on fetal development and abortion, and their first book, "The Handbook on Abortion," which sold an estimated 1.5 million copies. Both were considered must-haves for local activists. "Every pro-lifer relied on the 'Willke slides' on fetal development that beautifully depicted the development of the unborn child as well as the brutal reality of abortion," Tobias said. The Willkes crisscrossed the nation for four decades speaking out on behalf of society's most defenseless members. They inspired some of the earliest state and local right-to-life groups combatting abortion before the Supreme Court decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*. The Willkes co-founded Right to Life of Greater Cincinnati in the early 1970s. In September 1973, Dr. Willke joined the National Right to Life board of directors representing his home state of Ohio, and served continuously until his retirement in 2012. He served in a variety of capacities throughout the 1970s, including terms as vice-chairman of the board and vice president. He was elected president of National Right to Life (1980-1983 and 1984-1991), serving a total of ten years. During his tenure, he helped raise the profile of the organization through radio and television appearances + trips across the country and round the world as an ambassador for the right-to-life movement. To expand National Right to Life's efforts to educate the nation, on January 7, 1985, Dr. Willke premiered Pro-Life Perspective, National Right to Life's daily radio program. The show, now in its 30th year and hosted by National Right to Life president Carol Tobias, has served as an educational resource for countless millions of Americans concerned about the right-to-life issues.

In 1990, Dr. Willke helped lead NRLC's response to the late Congressman Henry J. Hyde's request that the pro-life movement come to Washington to "stand and be counted." That response was the "Rally for Life 1990," which remains one of the largest gatherings ever to be held on the National Mall. In addition to his work locally and nationally, Dr. Willke expanded right-to-life efforts with the formation of the International Right to Life Federation, which brought together pro-life organizations operating in countries around the world. He was president emeritus of the organization at the time of his death. In 1991, he founded the Cincinnati-based Life Issues Institute, and through the organization, continued his passion to educate the nation and the world about the tragic realities of abortion and euthanasia. Together, Jack and Barbara Willke co-authored twelve books on human sexuality and abortion. They created audio and visual pro-life educational materials used throughout the world, and those materials have been translated into 30 languages on five continents. They jointly spoke in 64 different countries. For their selfless dedication and innumerable contributions to the pro-life cause, in June 2014, National Right to Life presented its inaugural "Henry J. Hyde Award for Lifetime Achievement" to Dr. Willke, and posthumously to his beloved wife, Barbara (who died in April 2013).

"The right-to-life movement has lost one of its most influential activists," Tobias added. "But we know that Dr. Willke's legacy of education and activism will live on in the countless men and women who were inspired to join the fight for life because of his efforts."

[Editorial Note: I knew him to be a quiet, intellectual man – and the consummate gentleman. – AOM]

– E-mail received from the National Right to Life Committee, Washington, DC

(UM) Bishops.

+ *Council of Bishops Meet, Elects New Officers, No Africans*. Meeting in Berlin earlier this month, the United Methodist Council of Bishops announced the election of eight officers that will assume leadership roles in the council at the 2016 General Conference. The new officers are: President, Bishop Bruce R. Ough (Dakota-Minnesota); President designate, Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr. (Florida); Secretary, Bishop Cynthia Harvey

(Louisiana); Connectional Table chairperson, Bishop Christian Alsted (Nordic and Baltic); Executive secretary, Bishop Marcus Matthews (Washington); and Ecumenical Officer, Bishop B. Michael Watson (North Georgia). What surprised some observers about the elections was the continuing lack of any African episcopal leaders on the leadership team. Currently, Africa accounts for 41 percent of the church's membership, and yet none of the elected episcopal officers are from Africa. According to statistics compiled by the UM General Council on Finance and Administration, church membership in Africa grew at an 11 percent annual rate from 2008 to 2013, while U.S. membership declined at a 1.2 percent rate over that same period. If those rates continue to hold, then by the close of 2016 there will be more members in Africa than in the U.S.

Bishop Ough's term as president begins in 2016 and will end [at the end of May] 2018. Bishop Carter, as president-elect, will then serve through 2020. By then African membership is likely to exceed U.S. membership by three to four million members, and the gap will continue to widen. Ough currently serves as the chairperson of the Connectional Table (CT), essentially the church's general administrative council.

The 59-member body is charged with implementing the vision and ministries of the UM Church as set forth by the quadrennial meetings of General Conference. Under Ough's leadership the CT has been criticized for the manner in which it has handled the debate over human sexuality. During its November 2013 meeting protesters from the LGBTQ activist group Love Prevails disrupted the body's proceedings. Ough yielded to the protesters, and in an unprecedented move, he set aside the CT's agenda for the day so that Love Prevails could share its own. While Carter has stated he will uphold the church's Book of Discipline, he has exhibited openness to modifying the church's statement that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching."

[It is anticipated that] there will soon be a robust conversation about diversity and inclusivity on the Council of Bishops. It will be very odd for the COB's executive officers to all come from the U.S. and Europe (less than 1 percent of UM members reside there) when the church gathers for the 2020 General Conference in the predominantly white and largely progressive city of Minneapolis.

– By Walter B. Fenton; Good News. As received by e-mail from an associate; May 15, 2015.

+ Bishops: “Work to end racism and welcome the stranger.”

Berlin (UMNS) – The United Methodist Council of Bishops unanimously adopted a pastoral letter on racism affirming that “all lives are sacred and that a world free of racism and xenophobia is not only conceivable, but worthy of our pursuit.” UM bishops are committing to work for toward a church “that is anti-racist and pro-humanity.” In a unanimously adopted pastoral letter, the Council of Bishops affirmed that “all lives are sacred and that a world free of racism and xenophobia is not only conceivable, but worthy of our pursuit.” The active bishops approved the letter on the last day of the council’s weeklong spring meeting in Berlin, which happened to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and the Holocaust of Jews and others in Europe. “The people of our world are hurting, as injustice, violence and racism abound,” the bishops’ letter said. “Our witness to the dignity of all human life and the reign of God is needed now more than ever.” The letter came after San Francisco Area Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr., the council’s president and a Baltimore native, gave an emotional address about the racial tumult in his hometown of Baltimore [that] erupted in looting and violence after Freddie Gray died from injuries sustained in police custody. Gray’s death followed other multiple cases where unarmed African-Americans and other young men of color have died at the hands of police and others. As Brown noted in his address, the United States is not the only place stained by racial strife and fear of the stranger...He joined the letter’s call “to work against racism and abuses of privileges in all our contexts.” The [bishop’s] statement draws attention to problems of racial and ethnic animosity in various regions of the world:

- Migrant people being attacked and burned in the streets of South Africa.
- Jews who are fleeing Europe after spikes in anti-Semitic violence.
- The plight of Mediterranean refugees who are fleeing war and poverty.
- Racially charged protests and riots in cities across the United States “that remind us that systems are broken and racism continues.”

Retired Bishop Linda Lee, who helped draft the bishops' earlier 2010 pastoral letter on racism, said she felt "God had really moved" when bishops asked her to convene the team who wrote the current letter. "I'd like to commend us for taking this step of publicly speaking out on the violence that has resulted from racism, xenophobia, tribalism and other abuses," she said. Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory V. Palmer made the motion for the bishops to speak out as a group on racism. He added that he hoped bishops would invite people to engage further. Charlotte (N.C.) Area Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster challenged his fellow bishops to "do more than simply publish the letter and walk away." He suggested bishops could model for the church how to hold the difficult conversations around issues of racism.

Mozambique Area Bishop Joaquina Filipe Nhanala urged the bishops to report on the results of their commitment.

"What we are dealing with is something that is deep-rooted and longstanding and often not visible to people who are not people of color," Lee said. "It's not a quick fix."

[Editorial Note: It is curious that the bishops "witness to the dignity of all human life" for people who break the law – yet are silent about the over-fifty million unborn babies killed by abortion. They further talk about a "world free of racism and xenophobia" in their statement. We can surmise that they are alluding to their support of illegal immigration and the of Islamic forces in Africa and Europe. Xenophobia is defined as the state of "being unduly fearful or contemptuous of strangers or foreigners, especially as reflected in his political or cultural views." {The American Heritage Dictionary} I would suggest that if a citizen of the United States is concerned about illegal immigration and the infiltration of Islamic terrorists across our borders, it is not unreasonable to be concerned about or national safety and survival. Furthermore, in reference to Freddie Gray and the injuries he sustained, it appears that they may have been self-inflicted. Finally, when Retired Bishop Linda Lee addressed the subject of racism with "often not visible to people who are not people of color" she implies that those of us are white simply "cannot understand" how racism feels. There is a further thought process that is widespread in our church that those who are white are racist and operate from a position of "privilege" and those who are "people of color" cannot be racist. This reflects a politically liberal point of view that is defective. – AOM]

– By Heather Hahn, Berlin (*UMNS*); May 7, 2015.

[Editorial Note: Reference the tone of the above article, we believe the following information is instructive.

In other words, if you take the attitude that we have made a lot of progress and we need to try to get beyond the issue, you are "blind" to the race problem in our country. It appears strange that this charge would be made at a time that we have a president and attorney general who are black. It would also seem that some people cannot get beyond seeing the world through the lens of "racial prejudice" that never gets better. – AOM]

Advertisement for a book that was featured on the page of the above article under the heading, "Resources for further study": *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America*, October 1, 2007

by Joseph Barndt (Author). A partial description of the contents is, "Most white Americans now report in surveys that race is no longer a feature of U.S. political, social and economic realms. As if they lived in two separate but unequal nations, particularly Latinos and African Americans note the intractability of race and racism in this country. The explanation is simple: in a white supremacist country unless you are a person of color you don't "see" racism because that is not part of your daily experience. The color-blind ideology that permeates our major institutions puts a veil over the eyes of white Americans (and some persons of color) blinding them to the reality of racism in this country."

(UM) General Conference – 2016. About General Conference:

+ *Courtesy of the Commission on General Conference.* The General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, and meets once every four years to consider revisions to church laws, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs. The [upcoming] General Conference takes place May 10-20, 2016, at the

Oregon Convention Center, the largest convention center in the Pacific Northwest, in Portland, Oregon. The 2020 General Conference will be in the “largely progressive” [Note: read “theologically liberal”] city of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The new logo for General Conference 2016 provides "an action-themed logo that ties to the roots of The United Methodist Church, a denomination striving to fulfill the Great Commission." Matthew 28:19-20.

Petition Submissions will be accepted from April 1 through Oct. 13, 2015.

[Note: As far as the “new logo for General Conference 2016 provides ‘an action-themed logo that ties to the roots of The United Methodist Church, a denomination striving to fulfill the Great Commission’ let us hope that, again, this is not merely appearance over substance. Let us pray that this will be matched by action. – AOM]

The General Conference 2016 website is: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2016>.

– Diane Degnan, *UMNS*.

+ ***General Conference Sites Chosen for 2024 and 2028.*** Legislative Body to meet in Philippines and Zimbabwe
Portland, Oregon: Meeting in Portland, Oregon this week for their final meeting before General Conference 2016, the Commission on the General Conference voted to take the quadrennial legislative gathering out of the U.S. for the first time in 2024 – and again in 2028. Manila, Philippines was chosen as the site for the 2024 General Conference. The Commission also voted to hold the 2028 conference in Harare, Zimbabwe. Judi Kenaston, chairperson of the Commission on the General Conference, said that the Commission has been considering holding the assembly outside the U.S. for some time. Bishop Rodolfo Alfonso Juan of the Manila Episcopal Area and Bishop Eben K. Nhwatiwa of the Zimbabwe Episcopal Area both extended invitations for the General Conference to meet in their respective areas, an important consideration in choosing those areas. "The Commission wanted to set these locations now to allow plenty of time for all involved to make the necessary preparations," said Kenaston.

“Meeting outside the U.S. is an important statement to say that we're a worldwide denomination,” said Sara Hotchkiss, business manager of the General Conference. “The enthusiasm and hospitality in the two host countries has been remarkable.” The meeting is expected to cost more than the 2016 General Conference, but pricing is not available at this early date. Hotchkiss said there are two convention centers in Manila to be considered and that the University of Zimbabwe would be a potential location in Harare, but it is too soon to make any definite decisions.

The Commission also took steps to help delegates from outside the U.S. participate more fully in the 2016 General Conference. They voted to provide tablets to Central Conference delegates so they would be able to receive documents electronically. "We want to utilize technology to improve communication and provide opportunities for discussion for non-U.S. delegates ahead of time," said the Rev. Gere Reist, secretary of the General Conference. "It will enable us to ensure delivery of the Advance Edition Daily Christian Advocate to delegates who have the tablets in a more timely way ... they could get the information at the same time as delegates in the U.S. and participate more fully." Reist said the General Conference had specifically charged the Commission to look at "greater use of technology before General Conference to inform our debate, let dialogue between delegates begin before arriving at the session and to prioritize petitions." The staff at United Methodist Communications evaluated a variety of tablets... looking at pricing, ease of use, size, weight, battery life and durability in harsh environments, and chose the Samsung Galaxy Tab 4.

Sherri Thiel, interim General Secretary of United Methodist Communications, said her agency would distribute the tablets beginning in October and would also be responsible for training delegates how to use the tablets and coordinating help-desk support during the 10-day event. "It's an exciting opportunity," said Thiel. "This is just one of the ways that technology is transforming the way the church communicates. We want the delegates to have the tablets in advance so they will be able to get familiar with the technology." She said the tablets would also include an electronic version of the Bible and the United Methodist Book of Discipline. "We think this is a good opportunity to see how the tablets work to test whether they might move towards going to

an electronic state for all delegates in 2020," said Hotchkiss. "We'd love to avoid the bulk of the paper and lessen our environmental impact."

[Note: This is interesting in that Sara Hotchkiss had said that, "Meeting outside the U.S. is an important statement to say that we're a worldwide denomination." Yet earlier we have read in this edition of the Update that at the recent meeting of the Council of Bishops not one overseas bishop was elected to any office. What we have here is appearance over substance. "Making a statement" is useless if this is not backed up by substantive action. – AOM]

– Diane Degnan, *UMNS*; April 26, 2015.

+ ***Early warning proposed for General Conference legislation.*** Some UM leaders still talk with frustration about the last day of the 2012 General Conference when the Judicial Council, the UMC's top court, struck down as unconstitutional a plan to restructure the denomination's general agencies. The plan had been years in the making. Delegates then scrambled to downsize agency boards in hopes of salvaging some part of the movement for structural change.

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 General Conference, which met at Lake Junaluska last week. The planned panel will include experts on United Methodist church law who are willing to volunteer significant time reading petitions submitted 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 denomination's law book. The Discipline includes the denomination's constitution. 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 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.

Who can serve on the panel? 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 Book of 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.

In a survey of General Conference delegates, the Commission on General Conference received a number of requests for Judicial Council to review petitions before they go before the delegates. But that's not possible. Under the Book of Discipline, the Judicial Council only rules on proposed legislation if such a decision is requested by the General Conference as a whole or by the Council of Bishops. As a practical matter, the Judicial Council – which typically meets twice a year – does not have time to review all the submitted legislation. "Hopefully, this would answer some of that concern in more of an advisory role," Graves said. "They are... going to do research and make sure pieces aren't missed."

The panel can also avoid another problem, helping to ensure the Book of Discipline does not contain contradictory paragraphs. "What's happened is we have approved petitions that are in direct contrast with each other," said Duncan McMillan, chair of the commission's rules committee and member of the North Carolina Conference. "This is to say that if you do this change, you need to look at this (paragraph) as well even if it's before a separate committee."

The 2012 General Conference also faced an issue with disciplinary consistency. It deleted required security of appointment for elders in good standing in one paragraph while leaving it intact in another. The Rev. L.

Fitzgerald "Gere" Reist II, General Conference secretary, pointed out the conflicting language a month after the 2012 General Conference had adjourned. Later that year, the issue proved moot when the Judicial Council ruled that eliminating security of appointment would violate the denomination's constitution.

Reist, 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."

– By Heather Hahn (*UMNS*); Lake Junaluska, N.C.; Oct. 20, 2014.

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There are only two main theories of government in the world. One rests on righteousness, the other rests on force.

One appeals to reason, the other appeals to the sword.

One is exemplified in a republic, the other is represented by a despotism. – Calvin Coolidge

Global Outlook

Money is a mirror. The way we act with money tells us a lot about ourselves. – Guideposts, p. 24.

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China. "Chin Su" will never forget the day she received her first Bible. She was finally able to hold God's Word in her own hands and encounter Him in a new way. Chin Su was willing to walk for more than 12 hours to get a copy of God's Word. For many believers in restricted and hostile nations, Bible ownership is out of the question. Bibles in these areas are simply unavailable or too costly for poor believers. This year, Voice of the Martyrs workers have collected the names of 249,843 believers from hostile and restricted nations who are waiting for a Bible. Each Bible costs just \$6, including the cost of distribution. Join us in providing Bibles to these waiting believers today.

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The trouble with Socialism is, sooner or later, you run out of other people's money.

– Margaret Thatcher