

Monthly Update

May 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” contains some “tough” information that we may not want to read – but that we need to. Just as many people in the 1930s needed to know the unsettling news about a guy in Germany with a funny little mustache, just so many people today need to know the reality of what is happening in the world today. We need to know both the good and the “bad” so that we will be aware of our world’s reality and can respond to it.

The power of prayer. The vote was 10 to 1 against Dr. James Dobson. He had been a part of the President’s Commission on Pornography and the 11-member group had just voted which study to accept. There were two: a long, 400-page study that detailed the insidious effects of pornography on individuals, marriages, morality, and society; and a second, shorter one that minimized the effects. They had adopted the latter. Dr. Dobson called back to his office at Focus on the Family in Colorado and asked that his staff pray for the situation. They did just that. They went out into the parking lot and prayed, asking for God’s help. One member of the staff was led to pray that the people on the commission would not rest with their decision. Others took up that idea and for a long time they prayed in that parking lot. Dr. Dobson later reported back to them that when they reconvened the next day, the man who chaired the commission (who was very influential and who had originally supported the shorter report) said that he did not get any sleep the previous night. Other members of the commission had reported similar experiences of troubled sleep. The chairman felt led to take another vote. They did vote again – and this time the results were 10 to 1 for the longer, extended report on pornography.

Why can’t we do the same thing? This Update has information on the decision pending before the United States Supreme Court to decide on whether or not to allow “same-sex marriage” as a right. This will destroy morality in our culture, undermine traditional marriage between man and woman (the bedrock of our society), and will endanger our free exercise of religion. I urge you to pray about this. On my prayer list, I have those who need a strong intervention from God. I pray something like this, “Oh, Lord. I lift up ‘Bob’ to You. I pray that You would make him really unsettled, that You would wake him up at 2:00 in the morning and not let him sleep, that he would have a turbulent life until he does what You need him to do.” Why not pray for the Supreme Court justices – that God would impress on them what His design for marriage is? I believe that we can – and we should.

Thank you for partnering with us with your gifts, your prayers, and your very kind notes. They are appreciated so much.

In His service,

Allen O.

Executive

Morris,

Director

June 2015 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

It is better to fail in an endeavor that you know will ultimately succeed than to
succeed in an endeavor you know will ultimately fail. – Warren Wiersbe

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The Good Stuff

+ ***The Power of prayer***: Nearly a month after the Pennsylvania Pastors Network's (PPN, www.papastors.net) powerful "U-Turn" conference in Lancaster, Pa., where more than 500 pastors and church leaders were equipped and motivated to effect true change in the culture, APN is looking ahead to the National Day of Prayer on May 7. On this day, churches, pastors and Christians across America will pray for the nation, lawmakers and leaders, specifically praying that leaders will guide the country with biblical and constitutional principles and will work to return the nation to the ideals of its founding. "We are so encouraged and blessed to hear how attendees at last month's 'U-Turn' event were motivated to preach on society's pressing issues and work toward cultural change," said APN President Sam Rohrer, who is also president of the Pennsylvania Pastors Network. "We pray their passion and enthusiasm to 'stand in the gap for truth' will never waver and that they will use the National Day of Prayer on May 7 to lift up our nation and her leaders to the Lord and pray for revival across America."

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

+ ***The "I Will Pray" pledge***

Dear Supporter,

On April 28, the Supreme Court will [have heard] oral arguments for and against redefining marriage in America. The very institution of God's design for marriage as only between one man and one woman is on trial. As hard as it is to believe, nine people will decide if our nation will honor God and obey Him, or turn its back on the most fundamental building block of society and on God himself.

This will be the most important decision in the history of America.

I don't have to tell you, the consequences this decision could have on people of faith is staggering. As you know, private business owners have already come under great pressure to surrender their religious liberty and provide services to same-sex marriages. It would only be a matter of time before pastors and churches would be coerced to do the same.

As Christians, we know that prayer has changed the hearts of leaders and the course of nations. Never before has the need to pray been so critical to the future of our country.

Join me and millions of others in prayer, starting today. Pledge to pray for the decision.

Please, please consider sharing this to your Facebook page and forwarding to your friends.

For a time such as this...

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (II Chron. 7:14)"

For more information, go to the website: afa.net

– Tim Wildmon, American Family Association, P O Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803. Tel.: 1-662-844-5036

+ ***America Gives Libs a Pizza Their Mind***. When Memories Pizza reopened late Thursday afternoon, everyone wanted a slice of the action! The Walkerton restaurant became the biggest story of the Indiana religious liberty debate when its Christian owners were asked a hypothetical question about catering a same-sex "wedding" ceremony. When Kevin and his daughter Crystal O'Connor answered truthfully that they wouldn't, the tiny town was overrun by protestors. The threats from the "tolerant" Left were so vicious -- everything from burning down the pizza parlor to killing its owners -- that the O'Connors closed the store and went into hiding. Fortunately, the Blaze

got a hold of the story and rallied tens of thousands of people to their side. Through a GoFundMe account, donations started pouring in to the family at a pace no one expected. In just 48 hours, supporters blew past the original \$25,000 goal into an \$842,000 explosion of generosity for the O'Connors -- stunning the mainstream media and turning the narrative of marriage and the notion of nationwide acceptance on its head. Now, after two weeks of absolute turmoil, the O'Connors are back in business, reopening to huge and enthusiastic crowds. Ken Gumm was just one of the hundreds of Hoosiers who drove miles to repay the O'Connors for their stand. "We couldn't wait to get down here," he told reporters. "To us, this whole thing isn't about gay marriage. It's mostly about freedom of religion." With the kitchen buzzing and the seating area jam-packed, Crystal and her dad, Kevin, say they want to return the favor by giving a share of the near-million dollar gifts to another sister in persecution, Arlene's Flowers owner Barronelle Stutzman. Faced with losing her home, her shop, and her retirement savings for turning down a same-sex "wedding" request, friends like the O'Connors want to pay America's kindness forward. "... God has blessed us for standing up for what we believe, and not denying Him," an emotional Crystal said. "I'd do the same thing again," Kevin explained. "It's my belief. It's our belief. It's what we grew up on. I'm just sorry it comes to this because neither one of us dislike any of those people. I don't hold any grudges."

For the rest of the country, the Memories Pizza story is an important one. Apart from rebutting the argument that the marriage debate is a settled one, it's an important reminder that bullies only win when people lose their voice. As Christians, we need to stand up with those who speak up. Not only do we need to support those who are viciously attacked by the Left, we need to stop supporting the businesses enabling these bullies.

And thanks to organizations like 2nd Vote, it's a lot easier to know where your money is going. With apps like theirs, you can ensure that your dollars aren't lining the pockets of companies that contradict your values on marriage and religious liberty. In the lead-up to the Supreme Court's oral arguments on marriage, 2nd Vote just released a special Marriage Values Page that ranks businesses on how vigorously they advance a far-Left agenda. For most CEOs, the bottom line on these issues is their bottom line. So don't just voice your values -- shop them!

– Washington Update, the Family Research Council, 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001; April 13, 2015.

+ ***Chicken in a blizzard.*** Two years ago Chick-fil-A made national headlines when company president Dan Cathy spoke out in support of traditional marriage. Liberals and gays came unglued and launched massive protests against the restaurant chain. Several mayors spoke out saying they would not allow any more Chick-fil-As to be built in their cities. They tried boycotting the Christian owned company, but that backfired. Instead, Chick-fil-A had a world record day with many locations selling out of food to the hundreds of thousands of supporters. Is it any surprise that the only news the liberal mainstream media has reported concerning Chick-fil-A has only been the negative?

Remember... when the ice storm hit the south? The mainstream media showed footage of miles of cars stranded on the frozen interstates. Several national news broadcasts that I saw reported about school kids trapped on busses for almost 24 hours because of all of the ice and parents going frantic wondering where their kids were. In all of the icy gloom and doom, I bet you didn't hear about the heroic and generous actions of a Chick-fil-A along Highway 280 in Birmingham, Alabama, did you?

Mark Meadows, owner of the Chick-fil-A, closed early the day of the storm and sent all of his employees home. However, the employees and Meadows soon discovered that they were not going to be able to get home with all of the stranded motorists stuck on the roads. Some of the cars near the restaurant had been stranded for up to 7 hours. Audrey Pitt, manager of the Chick-fil-A described the conditions: "Our store is about a mile and a half from the interstate and it took me two hours to get there. It was a parking lot as far as I could see. At one point there were more people walking than driving." Meadows and his employees fired up the kitchen and began preparing chicken sandwiches as fast as they could. They prepared several hundred sandwiches and then Meadows and his staff headed out and began distributing the hot meals to the stranded motorists on both sides of Highway 280.

Some of the drivers tried to pay them for the sandwiches, but Meadows and his employees refused to take a single penny. Pitt explained why: "This company is based on taking care of people and loving people before you're worried about money or profit. We were just trying to follow the model that we've all worked under for so long and

the model that we've come to love. There was really nothing else we could have done but try to help people any way we could."

However, Meadows and Pitt were not through with their Good Samaritan efforts. They helped push cars off the roads, up inclines and whatever else they could do to help. Then they kept the restaurant open overnight so that stranded motorists could have a warm place to be. A number of motorists slept in booths or on the benches. Then in the morning, they again fired up the kitchen and prepared chicken biscuits for their overnight guests and once again they refused to accept any payment. During that 24 hour period, this Chick-fil-A restaurant opened their kitchen, their doors and their hearts to hundreds of stranded motorists and they did so refusing to accept any payment. As one source put it, Meadows and his staff lived up to the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 25:35 which states: "For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in..."

Their actions were truly generous and heroic as they also braved the frigid temperatures to hand out hundreds of hot meals to complete strangers. And I bet you never heard anything about this from the mainstream media. Had it been a group of homosexuals or atheists, it would have been all over the news from coast to coast. It was too much against their liberal standards to report a Christian company doing something so positive for so many.

We need to support this and all Christian companies.

Pass this along and bypass the media!

– E-mail received from a cherished friend and "contender for the faith", Ms. Lynn Dahnke.

+ *HAPPENINGS AROUND THE CHURCH: United Methodists behind the Culture?*

by Dr. Riley Case

Jeremy Smith of First UM Church, Portland, Oregon, is scandalized that The United Methodist Church still believes in faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness, and that marriage is between a man and a woman: "Why is this still in the books? In the Methodist church we have been behind the culture."

What "culture" does Jeremy Smith have reference to? After the Revolutionary War the United States was in serious moral decline. The new land faced deism in the East and lawlessness in the West. Francis Asbury, however, saw only a bright future for Methodism and for the country. "O America, America, God will surely make it the glory of the world for religion." The instructions to the newly formed church were visionary: save souls and reform the nation.

And so they did. The earliest Methodists railed against slavery, alcohol, gambling, and dancing girls (prostitution). They disdained fashion and ruffles and gold jewelry in order to live a simple life style. They even disdained extravagance in church buildings. The reason for this, following Wesley, was to identify with the poor. Of all the American groups the Methodists were probably the strongest supporters of the family. Every single Discipline from 1784 on in all the predecessor bodies of the UM church emphasized family and family worship. It was not until the 1980s, when progressives were buying into a new sexual agenda that the family was de-emphasized.

In large part because of United Methodists and its predecessor bodies, American culture has through most of its history reflected Christian values (though admittedly imperfectly). America has led the world in charitable giving, in the importance of education, in opposition against bribery and corruption, and in concern for the poor and dispossessed. It has stood for freedom and equality and opportunity. It has been known for reaching out to other countries. America has stood for that which brings hope to the rest of the world.

This Christian-influenced culture is obviously not the "culture" that Jeremy Smith and progressives generally are enamored with. In a world of fast-changing values, new "cultures" are challenging traditional culture. Jeremy Smith's remarks were made in support of a culture strongly influenced by a sexual revolution that has reached tsunami proportions. It is a culture reflected in Hollywood movies, in People magazine, in the entertainment world, in (usually biased) gender studies on campuses, and especially among what appears to be a growing scientism (an exaggerated trust in science to explain reality) & atheism....anything goes, at least anything that does not offend progressive sensitivities.

Several months ago I was in the nation of Turkey for a week. Every night on the Turkish television American movies were shown. The movies spewed out a steady diet of violence, killing, promiscuous sex, rape, and cursing, with vampires, werewolves, zombies, aliens, psychopaths, and evil spirits thrown in. The wealthy in these films were usually corrupt and crime was rampant. I remember no portrayals of stable American homes. In as much as Christian faith was portrayed it was never in a positive light. It is no wonder persons in Muslim lands believe Americans are morally decadent.

Religious progressives obviously would not support everything that secular progressive culture wants to impose on us, but they seem to support that portion of the culture that is critical of Biblical and traditional sexual morality. What was once affirmed as positive--the Biblical orders of creation, and marriage as a mystery related to the relationship between Christ and His Church--is linked with hatefulness and discrimination.

The arguments for this are incredulous and usually take one of two forms:

1) God has revealed new truth to religious progressives that all manner of sexual expression is now acceptable and this new truth takes precedence over Scripture; and/or,

2) To be relevant in the modern world Christianity needs to adhere to the standards of inclusivity and freedom as reflected by our secular, enlightened culture.

Both of these arguments serve to invalidate historic Christian faith and are unacceptable to Christians.

What then is our response?

1. Our primary task as believers is to uphold Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is most unfortunate that at the present time obsession with sexual morality has distracted us from proclaiming the saving message of Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification.

2. In Christian morality means is more important than ends. "Winning" is not as important in the present debate as conducting ourselves with respect and dignity for all persons.

Unfortunately, the present atmosphere in society (and in the church) on matters of sexual morality is being poisoned by ugly accusations, bullying, disruption, ecclesiastical disobedience, demonstrations, intimidation, name-calling and plain old ugliness. Let it not be said that evangelicals are guilty of such methods.

3. We must never compromise on Scripture. It is difficult to exaggerate how seriously the Bible treats sins of sexual immorality. Teachings on sexual morality are not, like teachings such as food laws or holy days, addressed to customs of the times that are superseded by the New Covenant. Teachings on sexuality are linked to the Orders of Creation and with Covenant understandings (the mystery of marriage and the relationship of Christ and the Church) and they are repeated in both the Old and New Testaments. There are at least eight vice lists in the New Testament (Mark 7:21-22; Romans 1:24-31; I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9; I Tim. 1:9-10; Rev. 21:8); sexual immorality is included in every one of these.

4. We need to remember that for United Methodists to compromise with error on the matter of faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness, would be to seriously blemish our connection with the Church universal. Progressives generally like to see themselves as "ecumenical" and in relationship with Christians all over the world. According to present statistics the denominations that have declared themselves supportive of gay marriage (Episcopalian, Presbyterian USA, Evangelical Lutheran, United Church of Christ, and Disciples) together represent less than 10 million members out of a national church membership of about 180 million members. That represents a paltry 6% of the nation's denominational membership. Outside the United States there are probably fewer than 1% of the world's Christians that would discard Scripture teachings on marriage and the family.

Within the past several weeks 34,000 African American churches which are part of the National Black Church Initiative have separated themselves from the Presbyterian Church USA after the Presbyterian officials changed its definition of marriage. The National Black Church Initiative explained: "PCUSA's manipulation represents a universal sin against the entire church and its members... In forsaking 2,000 years of Christian scripture and tradition PCUSA has forfeited the right to be a Christian entity in the body of Christ." The Coalition calls on the Presbyterians to repent and be restored to fellowship.

Do we wish United Methodists to go the way of the Presbyterian Church USA?

Do we wish to separate ourselves from Scripture and tradition and from other Christians not only in America but the world over in order to align ourselves with secular culture?

We hope not.

– Received by e-mail from The Confessing Movement. Note: Dr. Riley Case is a cherished friend and co-laborer in the Renewal Movement.

Of Interest.

+ *March for Marriage*....funds are being put to use subsidizing 50 buses that [came] down to the March for Marriage on Saturday, [April 28th]. That is 2,500 marriage supporters! We have received an unprecedented number of requests...

This year's critical March for Marriage [featured a wide array of speakers and participants].

[Editorial note: I attended and was gratified by the broad based support it received from a variety of groups and denominations, from the Orthodox Catholic Church in America, to strong support from the Roman Catholic Church to the solid representation from Black and Hispanic congregations. – AOM]

– National Organization for Marriage, 2029 K Street NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006.
www.MarriageMarch.org

+ Gay Activist Claims 'The End of Marriage Is Near,'" read the headline of the *Christian Post*. But is it?

– Ken Blackwell, Washington Update, the Family Research Council Action, 801 G Street N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001

+ *Do Two Wrongs Make a Right?* By Thomas Lambrecht. As the discussion over Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church's decision to delay paying apportionments for 2015 continues to roil, I want to offer a few observations about another of the arguments I have heard against the idea of withholding apportionments.

I am not advocating the withholding of apportionments, and I have always encouraged the churches I served in pastoral ministry to fully pay apportionments, as they were able. Nevertheless, I find some of the arguments against withholding worth comment. My first post in this series dealt with the response that "this is not how United Methodist polity works." Let me address another popular response. "It's not loving." Withholding apportionments - and in fact any opposition to the affirmation of same-sex intimacy -- is not a loving and inclusive way to be.

Since the church is called by God to love, we must change our stance and certainly not engage in withholding.....this is a faulty definition of love. Love does not mean unconditional approval or the acceptance of all behavior.

Jesus drew clear boundaries of what types of behavior and attitudes are acceptable in his disciples and in the Kingdom of God (e.g., Matthew 5:20, 29-30, 7:13-14, 19-23). Jesus even threw the money-changers and merchants out of the Temple! Exercising disciplinary action toward someone or holding someone accountable is not a lack of love.

– Good News, PO Box 132076, The Woodlands, TX 77393-2076

+ The Rev. Lyle E. Schaller (91), author of more than 50 books published by Abingdon Press, died Mar. 18. Schaller is widely considered one of the most important and influential observers of 20th-century church culture.

– UMNS, as reported in the vol. 43, issue 12, edition of UMNewScope, March 25, 2015

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ *The "Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act" (H.R. 36).*

Dear Friends,

Just this past week, my wife Anna and I were excited to announce that we are expecting a baby girl! This is a very special time for our family and we are thankful for this new blessing God has given us -- we are now at 4 kids and counting! Anna is just over 20 weeks along and this precious gift is again a reminder to us about the gift of life and how precious each baby is. As I reflected on this, I couldn't think of a better time to write to you and ask you to lend your voice to the voiceless -- we need your help to pass an important piece of legislation here in Washington, DC that would protect babies from the pain of abortion. The bill I'm referring to is the "Pain-Capable Unborn Child

Protection Act" (H.R. 36) sponsored by Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) and Rep. Marsha Blackburn (TN). This bill is before Congress right now and we need you to contact your Member of Congress and tell them to support H.R. 36. You can send a message by clicking here -- 2 minutes of your time will help save babies! This bill was originally scheduled to be voted on during the March for Life in January, but it faced unexpected obstacles getting to the House Floor for a vote. Congress needs to know you still support this vital bill and want to see it passed very soon. This legislation is essential to stopping late abortion. It would also help stop so-called "doctors", like the now imprisoned Dr. Kermit Gosnell, who are willing to allow babies be born alive to more easily kill them -- if the abortion doesn't work. But tragically, this problem goes way beyond Gosnell in Philadelphia. These...heinous acts must stop. Leading medical experts have testified that unborn children can feel pain as early as 20 weeks after fertilization -- roughly four and a half months into a pregnancy. Doctors who perform prenatal surgeries give unborn babies anesthesia. As expert Dr. Kanwaljeet Anand testified before the Judiciary Committee: "The human fetus possesses the ability to experience pain from 20 weeks gestation, if not earlier and the pain perceived by the fetus is possibly more intense than that perceived by term newborns or children." This legislation is an essential step in the right direction to restore the sanctity of human life and stop the painful killing of unborn children at 20 weeks or later.

..., We need to pray. We need God to move in the hearts and minds of our leaders so that they would have a burden to stand boldly for the unborn!

Sincerely, Joshua Duggar, The Family Research Council Action
– E-mail received from the Family Research Council Action, March 09, 2015.

+ *Should Our Churches Celebrate Promiscuity and "Thank God for Abortion Providers"?*

Dear United Methodist Friend,

Should the United Methodist Church celebrate "polyamory" - the practice of multiple sexual partners?

In defending biblical standards for sexual self-control, we at UMAction have sometimes highlighted the striking refusals of advocates for liberalizing our church's standards on homosexual practice to draw clear lines against premarital sex or multiple partners. In a recent attempt to refute such "slippery slope" arguments, our denomination's main liberal caucus group ended up refusing to "just say no" to multiple partners, being less than completely clear on consensual incest, and bizarrely digressing into talking about marrying extra-terrestrials. Meanwhile, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is using the name of our United Methodist Church to "Thank God for abortion providers," and describe their deadly work as "important ministries." Even among folk who would consider themselves "pro-choice" on abortion, few would share RCRC's un-nuanced enthusiasm for celebrating elective abortion as a positive good and, in their words, "holy work." IRD President Mark Tooley reports on this, and on the growing momentum for the United Methodist Church to follow other denomination's example in ending our scandalous affiliation with RCRC.

And...contributor Joel Watts offers some good thoughts on why you should oppose a "Centrist Movement" petition that may be coming to your annual conference this spring.

Together for the Gospel,

John Lomperis, M.Div., UMAction

Director

– Received from UMAction, Washington, DC

(UM) General Board of Church and Society.

+ ***Church Official Draws Sharp Criticism.*** By Walter Fenton. Dr. Bill Mefford, a senior official at The UM's General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), recently drew widespread criticism for appearing to mock marchers at their annual pro-life gathering in Washington D.C. The marchers have traditionally gathered to protest the United States Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade, which was handed down on January 22, 1973. While attending the march as a spectator - not far from his office at the stately United Methodist Building across the street from both the Supreme Court and U.S. Capitol – Mefford found a marker and a piece of poster board and scrawled out the statement, "I March for Sandwiches." Later, Mefford posted to Twitter a picture of himself holding the sign and smiling for the camera.

The denunciations of his actions were swift and sharp. First Things' blogger Matthew Schmitz wrote, "I am not sure what the sign is supposed to mean, but Mefford's blithe comparison of the moral weight of fetuses and sandwiches reflects the abortion lobby's deep unwillingness to face facts." Schmitz went on to write, "I cannot see how he has any business representing either human rights or a Christian church unless his intent is to drag both into disrepute."

Mefford, whose official title at GBCS is Director of Civil and Human Rights, later posted an apology for his actions on his personal blog. "Making folks laugh," he wrote, "was my sole intent - it really was! It was afterward when this started making the rounds on social media that the hurt and anger began to rise. I understand why people are angry. So, I am deeply sorry for the hurt and anger that this has caused people since the event."

The day after the event, the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of GBCS, issued a statement [link] that read in part, "A recent action involving a staff member of GBCS did not reflect our culture of respect, openness and hospitality. Appropriate conversations and action have been taken. We at GBCS recognize the special responsibility we have to cultivate respect, trust and hospitality among those who hold a variety of opinions on social issues."

Friction has long existed between GBCS's more left leaning staff and board and the majority of United Methodists who tend to characterize themselves as moderate to conservative on social and political issues. "Unfortunately," said the Rev. Rob Renfroe, president of Good News, "the leadership at Church and Society has often shown an alarming lack of sensitivity to the views of the people who pay their salaries. In spite of Mr. Mefford's apology, his actions will only feed the lack of trust and confidence people have in our church's leaders."

– Good News, PO Box 132076, The Woodlands, TX 77393-2076. Walter Fenton is a United Methodist clergy person and analyst for the ministry.

+ ***GBCS Awards \$120,000 in Grants***. During its spring meeting in Chevy Chase, Md., the GBCS approved nearly \$120,000 in grants to ministries around the world, and heard the agency's chief executive, Susan Henry-Crowe, identify five challenges the denomination faces. The meeting included education on Native American issues, sexual- and gender-based violence, the history of the UM Building on Capitol Hill, and a report on the six Social Principles consultations convened in Africa, the Philippines, Europe and the U.S. in the fall of 2014 and the winter of 2015. The grants went to Ethnic/Minority Local Church ministries and to programs related to The UMC's Special Sundays for Human Relations Day and Peace with Justice. Seven programs split \$53,280 in ethnic local-church grants: a youth development workshop by the UM Hispanic caucus (MARCHA); Ebola-stigma fighting in Liberia; Human Relations Day grants totaling \$46,193 divided among seven programs including ministries in Nigeria, Mozambique, Congo and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. Peace with Justice grants amounting to \$20,000 were awarded to four programs in the U.S.

Henry-Crowe identified five challenges facing the denomination: (1) creating culture[s] of trust, respect, connection and engagement within and among the churches; across communities, societies and cultures...annual conferences and boards; (2) maintaining the UM connectional identity by articulating theological grounding and Methodist identity, missional coherence, cultivating appreciation, and building trust at all levels; (3) communicating ethically and effectively in a social-media age; (4) accomplishing ministry and mission for the transmission of the Christian faith and Methodist identity in caring for the institution itself; (5) speaking forthrightly with a religious voice in a broken and hurting world.

Meeting at the National 4H Youth Conference Center, the board members continued their journey toward repentance and reconciliation with Native Americans, participating in a learning experience at the National Museum of the American Indian on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The board also allotted plenary time for members to share reflections on the visit. The Social Principles consultations provide insight into how the denomination understands the significance of these denominational statements on social concerns. The consultations identified ways theology, history, moral and ethical teaching are understood or need to be enhanced as the denomination supports ministry in local contexts around the world. A seventh consultation is scheduled for this month in Nigeria. The board of directors approved preparing a report to the 2016 General Conference to propose steps to create more globally inclusive and relevant Social Principles.

Overall, the board considered more than 100 petitions, mostly related to existing Social Principles and resolutions. The board members evaluated whether to let them expire, delete or rewrite them, and whether new subjects need to be addressed. At the conclusion of the meeting, they had reduced the total number of petitions related to GBCS by 40%.

In other business, the board voted to formally...endorse the USAgainstAlzheimers coalition, which is committed to ending the affliction by 2020 through effective leadership, collaborative advocacy and strategic investments.

[Editorial note: It is interesting that Henry-Crowe identified one of the challenges facing the denomination as “creating culture[s] of trust” – yet the different causes that had received GBCS financial support are questionable. In looking at what the recipients of UM dollars does, one can only wonder at GBCS’ priorities. Again, where in all of this is the priority to win people to Jesus Christ? It seems that we are guilty of “straining out a gnat to swallow a camel.”– AOM]

– Wayne Rhodes, GBCS, as reported in the vol. 43, issue 12, edition of UMNewScope, March 25, 2015

(UM) General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM).

+ *Does U.S. Theological Education Have a Future?* UM theological education in the U. S. is in crisis; and a longtime scholar says if trends persist, the modern way of training pastors could disappear altogether. The Rev. M. Douglas Meeks sounded that alarm at a meeting of nearly 40 theology professors and UM scholars to discuss the future of theological education Feb. 26-28 at the Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville. “There is a great shortage of people who will be the teacher of the teachers,” said Meeks, Cal Turner Chancellor Professor of Theology and Wesleyan Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, who was one of the organizers of the conference. “Whenever we have a search for a president, a dean or a faculty member in our theological schools, the lists are miserably short,” he told the gathering.

The event brought together representatives from most of The UMC's 13 U.S. seminaries as well as Vanderbilt, Asbury Theological Seminary and Hood Theological Seminary, an African Methodist Episcopal Zion school in Salisbury, N. C. Also on hand were staff members from The UM Publishing House (UMPH) and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). Meeks spoke to an intergenerational group that included long-tenured professors and recent Ph.D. recipients struggling to make a living as theological instructors. Their experiences show that the pipeline for UM professors has some serious clogs. Meeks said he fears U.S. UMs could end up like the Methodist Church in Britain, which no longer has any theological schools to call its own and must depend largely on ecumenical relationships for clergy training. Some of the younger scholars juggle multiple courses as adjunct instructors at universities while also teaching courses of study for licensed local pastors. Others serve in a local church and take whatever additional teaching posts they can find. Almost all labor with massive student-loan debt accumulated after years of required postgraduate study. A big part of the problem, Meeks and other conference speakers said, is that over the years, universities have responded to financial downturns by reducing the number of full-time faculty positions. Universities increasingly rely on far less expensive adjuncts-who work on contract with no health or retirement benefits-to fill the breach.

Meeks and other conference participants are working on a paper about their discussions to be presented to UM bishops and agency executives. They also are working with GBHEM to form an association of U.S. UM scholars who can collaborate and exchange ideas. The denomination already has similar associations in Africa and Asia, Meeks noted.

[Editorial note: With the priorities that our church employees have and by ignoring key spiritual issues such as preaching about salvation through Jesus Christ, it is no wonder that we question the future of UM theological education. – AOM]

– Heather Hahn, UMNS, as reported in the vol. 43, issue 12, edition of UMNewScope, March 25, 2015

+ *UM Schools Commit to Justice*. Top executives of UM schools in the U.S. have committed to “give leadership on behalf of social justice and human dignity.” Specifically, members of the National Association of Schools and Colleges of The UMC pledged to sponsor conversations on justice concerns and to assess institutional practices in [this area]. [Editorial note: As Christians “justice” should be second nature and there should be no need to have a

focused issue to do it. This shows how we have gotten off track and are focusing on issues that should be innate to our character. – AOM]

– UMNS, as reported in the vol. 43, issue 12, edition of UMNewScope, March 25, 2015

(UM) General Conference – 2016. How YOU Can Most Help United Methodist Renewal Today!

Dear United Methodist Friend, as our regular readers are well aware, these are troubled times in the life of our beloved United Methodist Church. As IRD President Mark Tooley reports...this year marks the FIFTIETH year of unabated U.S. membership decline for our denomination. Mark also reflects... on how it is really not that difficult to see the difference between the false teaching and shallow liberalism that is such a recipe for church decline, vs. the boldly biblical faith that characterizes truly vital congregations.

Which will be the overall future of our beloved denomination?

Will our denomination's deep problems with unfaithfulness and corruption we have extensively documented only continue, and even get worse, so that United Methodism will only have a bleak future of continued decline? Or will our denomination choose to correct longstanding problems and set United Methodism in a new direction of renewal in faithfulness, Scriptural holiness, and missional energy?

Will we finally make structural reforms to make our top-heavy denominational hierarchy more representative of faithful members like you and me, once and for all end our denomination's scandalous affiliation with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), and ensure accountability for unfaithful clergy?

Will the new bishops we elect be boldly faithful Christians who fear God more than they fear man?

Or will our most influential new bishops instead be some of the same sort of radical bishops, of which we have already had too many, who abuse their offices to spread unbiblical false teaching, shamelessly encourage disobedience to our denomination's biblical standards on marriage and sexual self-control, openly pander to self-described "radical sexual liberationists" disrupting church meetings, and bully and mistreat biblically faithful United Methodist congregations, pastors, and members?

Very key decisions on all such questions will be made in 2016, at the global General Conference and then the five U.S. jurisdictional conferences!

And for most of the country, the delegates to these important gatherings, the delegates who will be making such decisions for our entire denomination, will be elected THIS spring!

This is where YOU come in! Our denomination is divided into regional units called "annual conferences," of which there are about five dozen in the USA. Each one has a yearly business meeting called the "annual conference session."

A few conferences already elected their 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates last year: North Alabama, Central Texas, North Texas, Southwest Texas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Northern Illinois, Wisconsin, West Michigan, New York (just the greater NYC metro area - not upstate), California-Pacific (basically Southern California, Hawaii, and some other Pacific islands).

However, the rest of the country is electing THIS May and June! And if you live in the rest of the country, YOU may be able to help decide what sort of delegates YOUR annual conference sends to General and Jurisdictional Conference! The members of the spring annual conference session, the people who actually vote on which delegates to elect, consist of every minister in the conference and at least one lay member selected to represent each local church. Your own church's lay member to annual conference was likely already chosen months ago. But since voting members of annual conferences are required to have equal numbers of laity and clergy, every annual conference also has a significant number of "equalization lay members" to balance out all the clergy who are retired or doing something other than pastoring a congregation. In some places, becoming an equalization member is as simple a matter as calling up the office of your local district of the UMC (a smaller geographic area into which all annual conferences are sub-divided) and respectfully asking how you can serve in this way. In some areas there are formal hoops to jump through, but in others, the person who answers the phone in the district office will be thrilled to hear from you, [since] you will give them 1 less slot to fill.

Amidst all the turmoil and challenges facing our denomination, it is easy to feel powerless, and wonder, what can one member like me possibly DO? Well, THIS is your chance to take some very concrete action to make a difference. Specifically, you can commit to in the next week doing the following:

Call your district office to ask about the dates of your area's annual conference session. You can obtain the phone number from your district by asking anyone on your church staff or else by going online here.

If it is at all possible to make room in your schedule, ask the staff of the district office how you can be an equalization lay member to this spring's annual conference session. Some conferences even offer partial compensation for the lodging and meals of equalization members. Remember to ask about that.

Recruit several other like-minded, biblically grounded friends from your church to make the same call to serve as equalization members. You can save on hotel costs if you share your room with your spouse or a friend. You could make this whole experience a fun outing for folk in your Sunday school or small group!

Along with others you recruit to serve, commit to doing your research on the different candidates running to be delegates, so that you only vote for delegates who are committed to our faithful values on key issues like the authority of Scripture, the urgency of reaching the lost for Christ, and upholding biblical standards for sexual self-control, establishing better accountability for clergy who willfully violate our biblical standards, promoting non-violent alternatives to abortion, etc.

– Received from the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Washington, DC
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God doesn't require us to succeed, he only requires that you try. — Mother Teresa

Global Outlook

A Candle Loses Nothing by Lighting Another Candle.
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Congo. *An Update on Imprisoned UM in Congo.* “My brother has turned something very, very dark into something beautiful,” the Rev. Kiboko Kiboko told the Rev. Arthur McClanahan, director of communications for the Iowa Conference. His brother, Vano Kiboko, has been imprisoned in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since Dec. 29 for speaking out for human rights. McClanahan shared that he is witnessing to his faith.

– UMNS, as reported in the Vol. 43, Issue 10 / March 11, 2015, edition of UMNewScope
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Consensus is the absence of Leadership! – As quoted by Jack Ramsey