

Monthly Update

July 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Monthly Update again addresses issues that occurred at GC2016 and summaries offered by some of our partners in the renewal movement. Also, in honor of the upcoming 4th, I want to share what I had previously published in an Update but which is instructive:

The 4th of July: What Happened to the Signers?*

They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. What kind of men were they? 24 were lawyers and jurists, 11 were merchants, 9 were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well educated, but they signed the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured. Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

- Five signers were captured by the British as traitors, and tortured before they died.
- Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. 2 lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured. Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.
- Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts, and died in rags.
- Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him, and poverty was his reward.
- Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge, and Middleton.
- At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.
- Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.
- John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished.

Some take our liberties for granted, but we shouldn't. Remember: freedom is never free!

“At the heart of America is freedom and for those that are willing to fight for it....the price is high, but freedom is a wealth that no debt can encumber.” – LTC C.J. Bryant

Don't forget to thank the veterans you know for their service to our country. After all, if it were not for the brave, there would be no land of the free. All of us here at Concerned Methodists wish you a happy, safe, joyous holiday. And please – pray for our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris, Executive Director

* Reprinted from the book This 'N' That by Allen Morris.

July 2016 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Face the Flag, Son

Face the Flag, Son, and face reality.

Our strengths and our freedoms are based in unity.

The flag is but a symbol, Son, of the world's greatest nation,
And as long as it keeps flying, there's cause for celebration.

So do what you've got to do, but always keep in mind,
A lot of people believe in peace...but there are the other kind.

If we want to keep these freedoms, we may have to fight again.
God forbid, but if we do, let's always fight to win,

For the fate of a loser is futile and it's bare:
No love, no peace...just misery and despair.

Face the Flag, son...and thank God it's still there.

– John Wayne, from his album “America-Why I Love Her, 1977”

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The Good Stuff.

+ Two personal items of Interest from last month's edition of The Update: At the Concerned Methodists' exhibit at General Conference 2016, I was talking with a lady from a church in Western Pennsylvania. An African delegate walked by, so I thanked her for her strong Biblical position on the votes as she and the other Africans had done. She came over to where we were and, in the ensuing discussion, we learned that the Pennsylvania Church had sponsored 14 people to come from Liberia. As it turned out, this lady had been one of them. They hugged each other, I took their picture, and posted it on Facebook.

A humorous note: at day's end after General Conference, I was on the light rail train headed back to where I was staying north of Portland when I engaged a young man in conversation. I asked him where he went to church; he was vague, so I started talking to him about Jesus. He was receptive. I gave him a Christian tract plus one of my Concerned Methodists cards and we talked some more. As we came to Parkrose Transit Center he said, “This is my stop.” He got up, turned around, shook my hand, and got off the train. As the train slowly started to move, he smiled at me and waved from the station's platform.

A second later I realized, “That was my stop too! I should have gotten off.” I rode the train north to the next stop, the Cascades, got off, crossed the tracks, and took the next train south back to where I was staying at Parkrose.

Fortunately, I did not see that young man there. I would have been embarrassed.

It's good to tell other people about Jesus – but we still need to remember where we're going too.

– AOM

+ The tallest cross. Even the mighty State of Texas is not exempt from the onslaught against religious freedom. Abundant Life Fellowship Church in Corpus Christi wanted to build the

tallest cross in America on their campus, but an atheist activist, Patrick Greene, objected. Greene filed suit in district Court, insisting that the 230-foot cross to be erected off of Interstate 37 gave preference to religion. Abundant Life Fellowship had to explain in court why it was perfectly constitutional to build a cross on church grounds; fortunately, Judge Missy Medary agreed and tossed out the claim....

– As reported by Chaplain Klingenschmitt.

+ Valley Forge. Valley Forge “...feet and legs froze till they became black...often necessary to amputate them.”

Washington lost the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, and was forced to retreat toward Philadelphia. British General Burgoyne’s troops marched down from Canada through New York, but were amazingly forced to surrender to the Americans at the Battle of Saratoga, October 7, 1777. British General Howe struck back in a fury, driving the patriots out of Philadelphia. In a panic, the Continental Congress evacuated Philadelphia, even taking the Liberty Bell with them so the British could not melt it into bullets. Congress’ last order, December 12, 1776, was: “...until Congress shall otherwise order, General Washington shall be possessed of full power to order and direct all things relative to...the operations of the war.” The 11,000 American soldiers were forced to retreat 25 miles from Philadelphia and set up camp at Valley Forge on December 19, 1777. Meanwhile, another 11,000 Americans were dying on British starving ships. Yale President Ezra Stiles recounted May 8, 1783: “‘O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears,’ that I might weep the thousands of our brethren that have perished in prison ships--...in one of which, the Jersey, then lying at New York, perished above eleven thousand the last three years--while others have been barbarously exiled to the East Indies for life.”

Soldiers at Valley Forge were from every State in the new union, some as young as 12 and others as old as 60. Though most were of European descent, some were African American and American Indian. Among them were:

- Marquis de Lafayette,
- Colonel “Mad Anthony” Wayne,
- Future Chief Justice John Marshall,
- Lutheran pastor turned Major-General John Peter Muhlenberg, and
- George Washington’s Jewish physician, Dr. Philip Moses Russell.

Lacking food and supplies, soldiers died at the rate of twelve per day. Over 2,500 froze to death in bitter cold, or perished from hunger, typhoid, jaundice, dysentery, and pneumonia. In addition, hundreds of horses perished in the freezing weather. A Committee from Congress reported on the soldiers: “Feet and legs froze till they became black, and it was often necessary to amputate them.” Of the wives and children who followed the army, mending clothes, doing laundry and scavenging for food, an estimated 500 died. President Calvin Coolidge told the Daughters of the American Revolution, April 19, 1926: “We have been told of the unselfish devotion of the women who gave their own warm garments to fashion clothing for the suffering Continental Army during that bitter winter at Valley Forge. The burdens of the war were not all borne by the men...” Dr. Benjamin Rush, Surgeon General of the Continental Army, was tending wounds and treating soldiers at Valley Forge. Two days before Christmas, George Washington wrote: “We have this day no less than 2,873 men in camp UNFIT FOR DUTY because they are barefooted and otherwise naked.” Washington wrote “...that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place... this Army must inevitably... starve, dissolve, or disperse, in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can.”

The Continental Congress talked of replacing General George Washington with General Horatio Gates, but the Maryland delegate Charles Carroll, the only Catholic to sign the Declaration, helped persuade Congress not to. Hessian Major Carl Leopold Baurmeister noted the only thing that kept the American army from disintegrating was their “spirit of liberty.” A farmer reportedly observed General Washington kneeling in prayer in the snow. President Ronald Reagan stated in a Radio Address, December 24, 1983: “The image of George Washington kneeling in prayer in the snow is one of the most famous in American history.” The Boy Scout Handbook, 5th edition (1948), in the section ‘Duty to God’: “You worship God regularly with your family in your church or synagogue...faithful to Almighty God's Commandments. Most great men in history have been men of deep religious faith. Washington knelt in the snow to pray at Valley Forge.” President Dwight Eisenhower broadcast from the White House for the American Legion’s Back-to-God Program, February 7, 1954: “We remember the picture of the Father of our Country, on his knees at Valley Forge seeking divine guidance in the cold gloom of a bitter winter. Thus Washington gained strength to lead to independence a nation dedicated to the belief that each of us is divinely endowed with indestructible rights.”

On April 21, 1778, General Washington wrote to Lt. Col. John Banister: “No history...can furnish an instance of an army’s suffering such uncommon hardships as ours has done, and bearing them with the same patience and fortitude – ...To see men without clothes to cover their nakedness, without blankets to lay on, without shoes, by which their marches might be traced by the blood from their feet, and almost as often without provisions... marching through frost and snow, and at Christmas taking up their winter quarters within a day’s march of the enemy, without a house or hut to cover them...and submitting to it without a murmur, is a mark of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be paralleled.”

Despite these conditions, soldiers prepared to fight.

In February, 1778, there arrived in the camp a Prussian drill master, Baron Friedrich von Steuben, who had been a member of the elite General Staff of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia. Baron von Steuben, who was sent with the recommendation of Ben Franklin, drilled the soldiers daily, transforming them from volunteers into a disciplined army.

Lutheran Pastor Henry Muhlenberg, whose sons Peter and Frederick served in the First U.S. Congress, wrote in *The Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman*: “I heard a fine example today, namely that His Excellency General Washington rode around among his army yesterday and admonished each to fear God, to put away wickedness... and to practice Christian virtues.” Rev. Muhlenberg continued: “From all appearances General Washington does not belong to the so-called world of society, for he respects God’s Word, believes in the atonement through Christ, and bears himself in humility and gentleness. Therefore, the Lord God has also singularly, yea, marvelously preserved him from harm in the midst of countless perils, ambuscades, fatigues, etc., and has hitherto graciously held him in his hand as a chosen vessel.”

Washington successfully kept the army intact through the devastating winter, and gave the order at Valley Forge, April 12, 1778: “The Honorable Congress having thought proper to recommend to the United States of America to set apart Wednesday, the 22nd inst., to be observed as a day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, that at one time, and with one voice, the righteous dispensations of Providence may be acknowledged, and His goodness and mercy towards our arms supplicated and implored: The General directs that the day shall be most religiously observed in the Army; that no work shall be done thereon, and that the several chaplains do prepare discourses.” On May 2, 1778, Washington ordered: “The Commander-in-Chief directs that Divine service be performed every Sunday...While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers, we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the

higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of Patriot, it should be our highest Glory to laud the more distinguished Character of Christian.”

President Dwight Eisenhower stated December 24, 1953, lighting the National Christmas Tree: “George Washington long ago rejected exclusive dependence upon mere materialistic values. In the bitter and critical winter at Valley Forge, when the cause of liberty was so near defeat, his recourse was sincere and earnest prayer... As religious faith is the foundation of free government, so is prayer an indispensable part of that faith.”

During the crisis of the Great Depression, President Herbert Hoover stated at Valley Forge, May 30, 1931: “If, by the grace of God, we stand steadfast in our great traditions through this time of stress, we shall insure that we and our sons and daughters shall see these fruits increased many fold.....If those few thousand men endured that long winter of privation and suffering...held their countrymen to the faith, and by that holding held fast the freedom of America, what right have we to be of little faith?”

– Bill Federer. Permission granted by Bill Federer; www.AmericanMinute.com

Of Interest. Post-Christendom and Global Christianity. The two most important developments in the church of our time is the movement of western civilization into post-Christendom and the equally dramatic emergence of global Christianity.

This article will focus on the emergence of post-Christendom. By Christendom, I am referring to the special relationship which the church in the western world has enjoyed with civil society. In Europe it manifested itself through a full Church-State partnership enshrined in law. The King or Queen had, among their many titles, “The Defender of the Faith.” In the USA, Christendom was manifested in the form of “civil religion.” We maintained a quasi-separation between church and state, but there were dozens of ways that Christianity received a privileged place in the USA. State funerals are still held in the national cathedral, the next President of the United States will almost surely take the oath of office with his or her hand on the Bible, etc. Even these tiny reminders of Christendom will soon be gone. Let me say as clear as I can that I welcome post-Christendom. This is one of the best gifts the church could receive, as painful as it is. The reason Christendom was so deadly to the church is that Christendom, throughout history, from Constantine to the present, has always had one deadly side effect: Christendom produces vast numbers of nominal Christians. In fact, that’s what Christendom does best. Millions of people who have never really heard the gospel, and certainly have not experienced its saving power, call themselves Christians because that is the “culturally comfortable,” or the “culturally normative” thing to do. The other legacy of Christendom is that Christians do not intentionally catechize new Christians (and their own children) into the faith because they lived under the false assumption that the wider cultural values were Christian values, so the faith would be “caught” naturally, rather than given through formal instruction.

The mainline churches have experienced the greatest membership losses precisely because nominalism was already quite high in those movements. The evangelical churches have been more explicit about the gospel, but still operated in a Christendom mode and brought people into the church on the most minimalistic basis possible. In this minimalistic, what-is-the-least-one-has-to-do-to-become-a-Christian approach, what genuine faith is present is not sustainable because these new believers are not equipped to pass down the faith to their own children. There is considerable documentation to support this. Tragically, even the Catholic Church, the traditional “gold standard” in terms of their commitment to catechesis, has struggled in recent years to maintain their catechesis.

The legacy of this is that it is way too simplistic to reduce the church’s current problems to a “progressive” vs. “conservative” struggle. That struggle is there and shouldn’t be ignored, but

that is not the point of this article. My point is that all Christian movements in the West have struggled with the transition to post-Christendom. We have reacted in different ways: The mainline churches have said, "Let's accommodate the church's doctrine to the latest cultural social demands and maybe they will like us again." The evangelicals have said, "Let's preach part of the gospel, downplay the negative, costly side, and keep our services lively and entertaining, without a lot of demands." But neither "solution" is sustainable. We need robust Christian identity, transformed lives, a kingdom vision for society, all linked with a deep commitment to catechesis. The "bar" must be raised, not lowered.

There are, thankfully, wonderful and inspiring examples of mainline, evangelical, Catholic and Pentecostal churches who are charting what the church might look like in a post-Christendom time. Churches as diverse as the Truro Anglican church in Washington, D.C., Covenant United Methodist Church in Winterville, North Carolina, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, and the Severna Park Evangelical Presbyterian Church are examples of churches who are working to break free from a Christendom model.

Pablo Richard in his landmark book *Death of Christendoms, Birth of the Church* argues that the only path to the rebirth of the church is fully allowing Christendom to die. The church which emerges from the ashes will, in the end, be post-Christendom, post-denominational, post-institutional, post-hierarchical, post culture wars, etc. Post-Christendom will produce grassroots networks of believers. We will meet quietly and be widely misunderstood and mistrusted. We will not be prominent in the halls of Congress, nor sit on the boards of influential businesses and banks. We will be subject to various lawsuits. In short, we will be back where we started. You see, a post-Christendom world is a lot like a pre-Christendom world. It is in this environment that the church of Jesus Christ prospered. And Jesus said, "I will build my church."

We must see that the current dismantling of what we thought of as church is necessary for Christ to do the work of rebuilding his church. But, praise the Lord, God's rebuilding is always greater than God's dismantling.

Are we ready for this change?

– Timothy C. Tennent; Posted: 09 Jun 2016.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

5 Objections to Assisted Suicide.

In early June of this year, the culture of death will celebrate another milestone in their efforts to destroy the inherent dignity of life, as legalized physician assisted suicide and euthanasia laws will go into effect in California and Canada. My heart breaks to see politicians and judges approving and creating laws that undermine the sixth commandment: Do Not Murder. With each state and country that legalizes the imposition of death on the vulnerable, it becomes harder to keep it illegal and to stop the momentum of Right-to-Die advocates.

California will join Oregon, Washington, Vermont, and Montana, each of which have made it legal for a physician to prescribe a lethal dose of barbiturates so an individual can intentionally end his or her life. Similar laws are currently being considered in 19 additional states' legislatures.¹ Canada will join Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Colombia, and the Netherlands in allowing doctors to end the lives of their patients via euthanasia. This momentum calls us to intercede now before it is too late. Here are five practical reasons why people must work to prevent Aid-in-Dying proponents from gaining further legislative ground.

1. Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia laws are sold on the premise that everyone should have the right-to-die when they choose. However, where aid-in-dying is offered, medical care and support services often are denied to patients, and they instead are encouraged to pursue assisted suicide. Barbara Wagner's case is a well-documented example of this, and there is nothing written into

these laws to prevent this subtle form of coercion.² In addition to concern of being denied healthcare, some patients may also fear becoming a burden to others, which may create pressure for a vulnerable person to request lethal drugs. The right-to-die ideal becomes a duty-to-die requirement.

2. These laws are not written to prevent abuse, especially towards the elderly, disabled, and terminally ill. There is no administrative oversight of the requests to die or over the drugs once the prescription is filled. If the patient changes his or her mind and decides he or she wants to live, nothing prevents a care-giver, family member, or anyone who may profit from the death from mixing the contents of the pills with applesauce and feeding it to the unsuspecting patient -- or any person, for that matter.

3. Polling data shows that people support assisted suicide because they believe it is necessary for those who suffer from extreme pain. However, physical pain is better alleviated not by killing the patient but by using medications to manage pain. Medical advances in pain control can help patients get relief from pain without resorting to killing themselves. Additionally, pain is not the most common reason for people to choose assisted suicide. According to data collected by the State of Oregon, “quality of life is the driving force behind patients seeking Physician Assisted Suicide. Loss of autonomy, or not being able to care for oneself and make one’s own decisions, is reported in 100% of cases of PAS in Oregon. Closely following are the loss of one’s dignity and the loss of being able to participate in enjoyable activities.”³

Many healthcare providers do not support assisted suicide and euthanasia laws but are being told they must fulfill a patient’s request to die or refer the patient to a doctor willing to help the patient. Doctors are being denied their right to refuse to help people kill themselves without fear of punishment or loss of job.⁴

4. Affirming the right to kill yourself implies approval and acceptance of suicide as a solution to life’s challenges. It undermines efforts to prevent suicide, especially amongst young, impressionable people. While current US laws only apply to adults over the age of 18, proponents of euthanasia and assisted suicide believe people of all ages should have the right to die. There is no age limit in the Netherlands, and Canada has already acknowledged the “need” to lower the age once the law is established to give equal access to younger patients. Sadly, suicide is already the third-leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24, surpassed only by homicide and accidents, according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Additionally, suicide in general is on the rise for all ages across the board. Suicide rates have increased 24% from 1999 to 2014, increasing roughly 1% a year from 1999 through 2006, then 2% a year from 2006 through 2014.⁵ If suicide rates have increased so much since 1999—the year after assisted suicide became legal in Oregon—imagine the rise in the trend nationwide if assisted suicide legislation is passed.

5. We all will someday face the end of our earthly life, and many more of us will see old age and, likely, physical decline, as many of us have seen in our parents and family members. This can be a scary thought for many -- no one likes thinking of suffering and dying, even for those of us who have faith in eternal life. But that fear cannot allow us to perceive assisted suicide and euthanasia as merciful or dignified. I encourage you to make a stand for natural death, that we as God’s people would honor and protect the lives of the elderly and vulnerable and speak out against efforts to normalize killing them using these five reasons.

– By Deacon Georgette Forney. Websites are referenced above as sources:

1. <https://www.deathwithdignity.org/take-action/>
2. <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=5517492>
3. http://dying.about.com/od/physicianassistedsuicide/a/why_PAS.htm

4. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/03/canada-declares-war-on-christian-doctors-and-nurses>

5. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db241.htm>

(UM) General Conference – 2016.

+ Protest interrupts afternoon plenary. A protest today disrupted business at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in Portland Ore. Soon after Bishop Micheal Coyner called this afternoon’s plenary session to order, shouts were heard in one corner of the hall. A few protesters held a banner emblazoned with the hashtag all #BlackLivesMatter,” along with the rainbow flame logo of Reconciling Ministries Network, an organization that lobbies for full inclusion of LGBTQI people in the United Methodist Church. For 18 minutes, about 150 protesters walked the floor, chanting slogans, including “No more hate,” and “Hey, hey, ho, ho, homophobia has got to go.” Organizers said it wouldn’t be the last time there was a protest at the 2016 General Conference. “We are not going to be quiet this General Conference,” said the Rev. Pamela Lightsey, who helped lead the event. “This is about the intersection of oppression.” She noted that today’s event was a joint effort “This was a coalition of forces,” she said. “LGBTQ people are sometimes also black and brown people, and that matters.” Discrimination, she said, hurts all people on the margins. “This hurts black people, brown people, poor people, and women. We won’t stand for this,” she said. Lightsey is the associate dean for community life at Boston University’s theological seminary. She also leads lifelong learning and is a clinical assistant professor of contextual theology. She spoke to the media immediately after the protest outside the plenary hall.

Other items of note: The protest began soon after Bishop Michael Coyner told delegates that General Conference costs \$1389/minute. By our clock, that means today’s event “cost” slightly more than \$25,000. Dr. Susan T. Henry-Crowe used the phrase ‘all lives matter’ in her report on the global social principles as protestors left the plenary hall. She issued a statement apologizing for the remark. “I apologize for my comment using the phrase ‘all lives matter,’ It is necessary for our church and its leaders to unequivocally declare that Black Lives Matter.” Crowe apologized in person in the second half of the today’s plenary session.

[Note: This seems to be an occurrence at each of the quadrennial meetings of the various general conferences. I believe that it was Bishop Coyner who was in charge at GC2012 in Tampa when demonstrators invaded the floor. This is little more than mob force, but it should be addressed and controlled. Again, this has nothing to do with “discrimination” or “homophobia” but more to do with a calculated tactic and resembling a childish temper tantrum. Also, it should be noted that there was the symbolic presence of “#BlackLivesMatter” signs. This appeared to be using this as a manipulative tool and was used to add this symbol to what was clearly the usual pro-homosexual “Reconciling” movement. – AOM]

– By Laura Harbert Allen; May 16, 2016. Laura Allen is an independent public radio and multimedia producer, and past communications director for the West Virginia Conference of the UMC.

+ Rule 44. Rule 44 may have died at the hands of the 2016 General Conference delegates, but its “holy conferencing” tenets were behind the creation of the Council of Bishops’ proposal for “a way forward” for The United Methodist Church. Now that some of the Portland dust has settled, a fascinating – perhaps even disquieting – irony has emerged: there’s a parallel between the fracas over the alternative decision-making practice known as Rule 44 and the conversations orchestrated by Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. that led to the Council of Bishops’ document known as “A Way Forward.” Specifically, Bishop Brown and his cohorts used a similar, if not

the same, “holy conferencing” process outlined in Rule 44, but few General Conference delegates and observers realized the implications in the heat of the moment in Portland. Conservatives’ major objection to the Rule 44 alternative process was that it placed too much power in the hands of a small, select body known as the Facilitation Group. The facilitators’ role was to have taken reports from the smaller groups discussing sensitive legislation and compile them into consensus recommendations that would have come back to the full General Conference for action. After 2-1/2 days of parliamentary maneuvering, Rule 44 was voted down. [Note: As it should have been voted down. It was controlling and detrimental in the extreme. – AOM]

Once General Conference asked the Council of Bishops for leadership, it came to light that a process resembling Rule 44 already had been under way clandestinely for about two months prior to the May 10-20 meeting in Portland. Outgoing Council of Bishops’ president, Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. (Sacramento, Calif., Area), had called together leaders of various unofficial United Methodist groups and legislation sponsors to consult about the UMC’s future, particularly the threat of schism. Among other things, this ad hoc group – first publicly acknowledged by Bishop Bruce Ough (Dakotas-Minnesota Area) when the bishops’ proposal was announced – discussed the formation of a special commission to examine the deep divide in United Methodism. This divide’s presenting issue is the debate over human sexuality, but that’s the tip of the iceberg. The full conflict roots in sharply opposing theologies, especially over the authority and interpretation of the Holy Bible. As if the talks themselves, so like Rule 44’s small groups, weren’t irony enough, those whom Bishop Brown called together include some of the most elite among United Methodist movers and shakers. In other words, they were a small group. While Bishop Ough declined to name those in the ad hoc group during General Conference, one of the participants, the Rev. Don Underwood of Plano, Texas, disclosed the names in his report to the June 5-7 session of the North Texas Annual Conference. Involved in the talks were:

- The Rev. Rob Renfroe, minister of discipleship at The Woodlands UMC in the Houston suburb of The Woodlands and president of the unofficial Good News “evangelical” caucus;
- The Rev. Maxie Dunnam, president emeritus of Asbury Theological Seminary, co-founder of the Confessing Movement, and longtime opponent of LGBTQQI acceptance;
- The Rev. Tom Lambrecht, vice president and general manager of Good News;
- Patricia Miller, executive director of the Confessing Movement;
- The Rev. Mike Slaughter, senior pastor of Ginghamburg UMC in Tipp City, Ohio, and co-sponsor of the original “A Way Forward” proposal to give “local option” to conferences and congregations regarding adherence to the UMC’s LGBTQQI stances;
- The Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of Church of the Resurrection (United Methodist) in Leawood, Kan., and co-sponsor with Slaughter of the “local option” legislation;
- The Rev. Tom Berlin, lead pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Va., and frequent collaborator with the Rev. Lovett Weems of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership at UMC-related Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.
- The Rev. Don Underwood, pastor of Christ UMC in Plano, Texas, and longtime General Conference delegate;
- The Rev. W. Scott Campbell, former senior pastor of Harvard-Epworth UMC in Cambridge, Mass., longtime social justice activist, and frequent advocate for clergy put on trial for opposing the LGBTQQI stances in the Book of Discipline;
- Dr. Randall Miller, assistant professor of United Methodist Studies, Ethics and Leadership at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif., longtime activist with Reconciling Ministries Network and Affirmation, and outgoing member of the General Commission on the General Conference.

– Matt Berryman, executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network.

[Note: This group does make for interesting “bedfellows” and it will be interesting to see what transpires. – AOM]

+ **Two amendments.** The 2016 General Conference adopted two amendments to the constitution of the church in the course of their business today. In both cases, the proposals were adopted by large margins.

1. Gender Justice (60659-IC-00-C-G) was amended as follows: This petition deals specifically with the equality of women with men, and includes this language: “The United Methodist Church recognizes it is contrary to Scripture and to logic to say that God is male or female, as maleness and femaleness are characteristics of human bodies and cultures, not characteristics of the divine.” This motion was with 746 votes for and 56 votes against.

2. The second amendment clarifies that delegates to the General Conference must be elected and not appointed by the bishop: Amend ¶34. Article III as follows: “¶ 34. Article III. The annual conference shall elect clergy and lay delegates to the General Conference and to its jurisdictional or central conference in the manner provided in this section, Articles IV and V.69 Such elections shall include open nominations from the floor by the annual conference and delegates shall be elected by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast.” – Laura Harbert Allen.

+ **Two other issues.** Two other issues on the table are:

1) The reunification of Korea; little thought is given to the fact that North Korea is one of the most brutal, repressive dictatorships on earth that represses Christians while in the South it is vibrantly growing in a free market society.

2) Illegal immigration is being pushed as a “justice” issue with pictures of marches and Bishop Minerva Carcaño, who is, reportedly the daughter of illegal immigrants and active in that area. For my part, my godmother was from Mexico and I myself speak Spanish; she was a good, productive lady and came to the USA legally. We also need to consider the crimes perpetrated by illegals and the harm done to their victims, the harm to our economy, and the fact that this compromises our legal system and disrupts our society.

+ **Health care.** A piece of legislation approved by the 2016 General Conference calls for The United Methodist Church to advocate for the improvement of health care in the United States. The legislation outlines a plan for the church to work with U.S. government officials to improve health care coverage for all citizens, specifically including ethnic minorities. “This resolution continues the historic commitment of The United Methodist Church to advocate for quality healthcare for all people.” [Note: Our UM employees will be advocating for this – healthcare for illegal aliens. – AOM]

– The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe on healthcare legislation passed by General Conference. United Methodist News Service (UMNS).

+ **Preparing for GC2020.** Most United Methodists in Portland, Oregon, were focused on General Conference 2016, but a dozen Minnesota and Dakotas United Methodists were looking ahead to General Conference 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Christa Meland reports for the Minnesota Conference. – UMNS

+ Bishops issue post-General Conference letter to the church. Reviving a tradition that is more than a century old, the United Methodist Council of Bishops sent this letter today to the people of

The United Methodist Church following the 2016 General Conference, held in Portland, Oregon, May 10-20. The letter reads as follows:

“To the people of The United Methodist Church:

The Council of Bishops brings you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has called us to be servant leaders of the church. In 1812, Bishop Francis Asbury, Bishop William McKendree and General Conference Secretary Daniel Hitt sent the first letter to churches following General Conference. This letter seeks to revive that tradition. Many bishops will also be communicating individually in their own areas.

Hundreds of lay and clergy delegates from around the world gathered in Portland, Oregon, along with bishops and pastors, church members and staff, volunteers and visitors, to engage in Christian conferencing, to make decisions for our church’s future, to affirm our global connection, to worship and to celebrate God’s faithfulness.

We celebrated the success of our Imagine No Malaria initiative, which seeks to raise \$75 million in the fight against malaria, a disease that takes the life of a child in Africa every two minutes. We celebrated our ecumenical partnerships as we move into full Communion with the Uniting Church in Sweden and toward full Communion with the Moravian church. We celebrated our heritage: the 250th anniversary of our oldest church, John Street United Methodist Church, the 200th anniversary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the 150th anniversary of United Methodist Women, the 25th anniversary of Africa University and others.

We continued in our acts of repentance with a presentation from the Cheyenne & Arapaho tribes about the Methodist involvement in the 1864 Sand Creek massacre. We shared in the consecration of deaconesses and home missionaries and the commissioning of missionaries. We moved toward a global Book of Discipline and global Social Principles. We voted to add five new bishops in Africa after 2020, and approved a churchwide study on our ecclesiology.

The Episcopal address set the tone for the event, focusing on humility and lifting up our accomplishments. We heard from our laity an invitation to members to be more involved in making disciples and getting involved in ministries to bring the love of Christ to others. We heard our young people say they “are engaged in Christ’s journey with energy and love.” We also heard them say clearly that they do not want a divided church and urged us to “be in unity even if we do not have unanimity.” They give us hope for our future.

The body had difficult and challenging work before it as we acknowledged our differences over human sexuality. Amidst those differences, the delegates affirmed they want their bishops to lead and we found ourselves with an opportunity for a holy moment. We spoke candidly about what divides us and what our church might look like in the future if we dared to consider new possibilities. We offered a way forward, postponing decisions about sexuality matters and committing to having a different kind of global conversation that allows all voices to be heard.

Our differences do not keep us from being the body of Christ. They do not keep us from doing good in the world. They do not keep us from making a difference – and so we set forth bold new goals: to make a million new disciples of Jesus Christ; to engage 3 million new people to make a difference in the world; to transform 400 communities for vital abundant living; to reach a million children with lifesaving health interventions; and to double the number of vital congregations.

Most importantly, we affirmed our commitment to stay united. We proved that we are more than debates and divisions, more than rules and resolutions. We stood together as the body of Christ. As we reflect on our time in Portland, our prayer is for unity in the church for the advancement of our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As John Wesley reminded us, “Best of all, God is with us.”

Signed on behalf of the Council of Bishops,

Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the Council”

– By UMReporter Staff; May 23, 2016: <http://unitedmethodistreporter.com/2016/05/23/bishops-issue-post-general-conference-letter-to-the-church/>

+ **Council of Bishops meets post-General Conference.**

Portland, Oregon: The United Methodist Council of Bishops met on May 21 following the close of General Conference for worship and prayer for the ongoing unity of The United Methodist Church. The Saturday meeting was planned prior to presenting “An Offering for a Way Forward” to the 2016 General Conference, but recognizing the importance of moving forward with the proposal, the council utilized the opportunity to discuss the possible framework for forming a commission and identify some of the qualities and characteristics needed among its membership.

Meeting in executive session due to the sensitive nature of the discussion, the council processed the conversations over the previous ten days and identified next steps. The council charged the executive committee with designing the process for forming a commission and creating a timeline for the proposal, recognizing the need to take time to make conscientious decisions yet not delaying the process. The executive committee agreed to have ongoing conversation and plans to schedule a meeting before the regularly scheduled meeting in July.

“We pledge to take great care in choosing the membership of the commission,” said council president Bishop Bruce R. Ough. “We will work deliberately, intentionally and in a conscientious and prayerful manner to insure the commission reflects the diverse opinions and commitments of the body.”

The bishops determined that the proposal required further clarity, purpose and vision and agreed to appoint a small group to provide the clarity needed. The council also agreed to form a communication team that will keep the church regularly informed at each step of the process.

– Diane Degnan; UMCOM; May 24, 2016.

+ **Evangelical and orthodox United Methodists** are not merely holding the line, but steering their global denomination in a more conservative direction. The second-largest Protestant denomination in the United States has taken firm steps towards steering the 12.1 million-member global denomination away from the path that its mainline Protestant peers have taken in recent years. Delegates to the United Methodist Church’s May 10-20 General Conference repealed 40-year-old language affirming the Roe v. Wade court decision that struck down state laws restricting abortion, mandated that church agencies disaffiliate from an interfaith coalition that opposes all abortion restrictions, and (for the second conference in a row) did not consider changes to the church’s prohibitions on same-sex marriage and non-celibate gay clergy.

Efforts by liberal activists to divest church finances from companies that do business with Israel were defeated, as delegates instead encouraged the church’s missions agency to withdraw from the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, a group that criticizes the Jewish state as the only barrier to peace in the Middle East.

Delegates also defeated proposals to divest from fossil fuels.

IRD President Mark Tooley commented: “Evangelical and orthodox United Methodists are not merely holding the line, but steering their global denomination in a more conservative direction. At the denomination’s General Conference, liberal forces gave up even trying to remove the church’s prohibitions on same-sex unions or ordination standards.

“A growing Methodist majority made up of U.S. evangelicals and Africans is placing the denomination on a strikingly different trajectory than its mainline Protestant peers.

“Previous liberal-led ‘heavy-hitters’ such as the United Methodist Women’s Division have seen their influence reduced as the church’s membership shifts overseas.

“Legislative proposals that would have advanced sexual liberalism were effectively tabled and orthodox Methodists facilitated a major turnaround on life issues, among other achievements.”

[Note: We value the work done by the Institute on Religion and Democracy in “contending for the faith” and agree with this assessment. We have analyzed the trends and seen the efforts of the renewal groups. We have posited that time is “on our side” in the battle for the soul of the UMC. Furthermore, we believe that, barring any unforeseen tactics or unsound efforts on the part of the various renewal groups, the tide had shifted at GC2012 four years ago in Tampa. – AOM] – Jeff Walton; Press Release; Institute on Religion and Democracy; May 25, 2016.

+ United Methodist General Conference 2016, good or bad? Mostly on the whole, good! What had initially seemed potentially bad, the deferral of plenary votes on sexuality in favor of a bishops’ appointed commission, turns out likely to have been good. Plenary votes almost certainly would have ratified legislative committee recommendations to reaffirm the church’s teaching of traditional Christian morals, which are now anyway left in place untouched for another 4 years. Contentious and time-consuming debates, added to interminable parleys over parliamentary procedure, would probably have precluded the decisive votes disengaging the church from its over 46 years of abortion rights advocacy.

These decisive votes to withdraw United Methodism from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) and from support for *Roe v. Wade* revealed an evangelical-orthodox legislative majority. Some of us before General Conference calculated a 55% orthodox majority among delegates. The RCRC and *Roe* votes were respectively 61% and 59%, while the vote against Rule 44’s attempt to replace legislative process with table talks about sex was 57%, confirming this calculation. Most of this 55% majority was the Africans, who were 31% of total delegates. As the African church grows by 800,000 to 1 million members each quadrennium (their total membership is already 41% of global membership) their delegate representation will grow.

By the time of United Methodism’s first General Conference outside the U.S., in Manila in 2024, and certainly by the first scheduled meeting in Africa, Zimbabwe in 2028, the legislative debate over sexuality should largely be over, as Africans in membership and delegate count will have a majority on their own.

The African delegates comprised about half the vote removing United Methodism from abortion rights advocacy, which was momentous, and separates our church from the rest of declining liberal USA Mainline Protestantism. The Episcopal Church, United Church of Christ and Presbyterian Church (USA) (through its missions board) remain RCRC members. United Methodism’s release from RCRC seems like a spiritual liberation from a very dark captivity arguably even more at odds with orthodox Christian ethics than redefining marriage and gender. Over decades of votes about United Methodist membership, the United Methodist Women’s Division fiercely and successfully defended RCRC.

Behold the fall of the once mighty and unassailable United Methodist Women! Not many years ago few if any contended politically against its denizens with any success. Few ever tried. Once having over 1 million members and boasting to be America’s and if not the world’s largest women’s organization, the UMW has lost over half its membership and is now largely a convocation of the elderly, its New York headquarters dependent on still large but dwindling endowments. For decades UMW officially focused on social action instead of evangelism and discipleship. Predictably, its membership has shriveled faster than overall United Methodist USA

membership. I have many fond memories of my grandmother's UMW circle meetings, with lots of baked goods, and gracious WWII generation ladies, who faithfully served their churches unaware of the UMW elites' agenda. Alas, that generation is now almost gone, and was never replaced, which should be instructive for us all.

The intensely radical 1960s-1990s political activism (including support for Nicaragua's Sandinistas and other Marxist insurgency movements) of the New York-based United Methodist Women's Division, when previously a component of the General Board of Global Ministries, motivated my own entrance as a very young man into United Methodist renewal work. This General Conference voted decisively to step back from some of the church's intense political engagements. Besides the RCRC vote, delegates by a large margin urged Global Ministries and the Board of Church and Society to withdraw from the U.S. Campaign to End the Occupation, a group that exclusively faults Israel for Mideast conflict. Divestment aimed at firms doing business with Israel was decisively defeated in committee, not even reaching plenary. Hopefully, after decisive plenary rejections in 2012 and 2008, anti-Israel divestment is now dead for United Methodism. General Conference also overwhelmingly rejected divestment aimed at fossil fuels, despite a well OILED campaign. Many African delegates no doubt are aware that their own nations' escape from poverty depends on reliable access to electricity, requiring mostly coal and oil.

Unfortunately, the Africans did not get proportional representation on church agency boards from this General Conference, so the church's new emerging majority effectively remains disenfranchised in much of the USA-based church bureaucracy. But the Africans did get 5 additional bishops in 2020 and more funding for theological education. By all accounts, the Africans delegates, despite language barriers for many of them and lack of familiarity with USA parliamentary process, were more effectively legislatively engaged this year than ever before. A record number served as committee officers, joined by a possibly record number of USA evangelicals as committee chairs and other officers.

And as a result of 5 new Judicial Council members elected by General Conference, an African for the first time chairs the church's top court, which adjudicates many controversies over the church's prohibition on same sex rites and clergy sexually active outside male-female marriage. All five were quickly elected with support from evangelicals, leaving only one clear liberal on the court of 9. It's also the most diverse Judicial Council ever, with a Liberian, Mozambican, Congolese, Filipino, and Norwegian, comprising its first ever non-USA majority. Two other new members supported by evangelicals include a Vietnamese-American pastor and a female law school dean and former federal judge. This Judicial Council majority willing to uphold enforcement of United Methodist law will be very important in the years ahead.

Africans and USA evangelicals were also elected to the commission that organizes General Conference, previously the nearly exclusive preserve of USA liberals, who often tilted General Conference atmospherics, including the music and worship, in predictable political directions. Sermons by USA bishops at this General Conference often included barely disguised code aimed against evangelicals. One specifically chided Africans, prompting an African church leader in plenary to explain politely in response that the Africans think for themselves and are not, as USA liberals imply, the unwitting tools of USA evangelicals. Indeed, most USA evangelicals are probably less conservative than the Africans. Now a plurality among the church's contending factions, the Africans easily outnumber USA evangelicals, USA moderates and USA liberals. They are the church's rising power.

During the early part of General Conference a small group of leaders representing USA moderates, liberals and evangelicals, but no Africans or other non-USA persons, met with with two bishops, with the informal conversation raising the possibility of church division adjudicated

by a commission and special General Conference. Before the full Council of Bishops could discuss it the next day, an LGBTQ caucus publicized the idea at a videoed rally, and prominent neo-orthodox Kansas pastor Adam Hamilton touted the idea at a morning breakfast for students, his version suggesting a three way split, with USA centrists like himself having the largest numbers. The bishops quickly rejected the idea, and the conversation ended.

The commission the bishops are called to establish for review of sexuality teachings, the latest of many in United Methodist history, is getting a slow start. On Saturday, the bishops convened but declined to appoint the commission, delaying until their November 2016 meeting, which means the commission at best won't meet until early 2017, further making a special called General Conference less likely. If the USA bishops are true to form, they will appoint persons who will espouse what the USA bishops have touted for much of a decade: a new USA only central conference that can legislate without Africans and other internationals, plus some version of local option on sexuality. The 2016 General Conference, as in 2012, rejected the USA central conference idea, just as 60 percent of global annual conference voters, including 95 percent of Africans, rejected it in 2009, when two thirds were needed for passage. Whatever the bishops' commission proposes is likely to face rejection by the 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis.

Adam Hamilton's seeming embrace of a three-way church split, joined by several prominent liberals who blogged their openness to church division after the failure of any progress for LGBTQ causes at this General Conference, has resurfaced the idea of church schism. (Despite all the fears this year about disruptive LGBTQ demonstrators, who seemed to number in the dozens, their protests seemed smaller this year than at previous General Conferences.) At the 2004 General Conference prominent pastor Bill Hinson gained national headlines by suggesting schism at a breakfast for evangelicals, a segment of whom was typically almost alone in hoping for amicable separation, as USA liberals and moderates, plus Africans, opposed it. The idea went nowhere.

Before this General Conference I thought the chance of an eventual United Methodism formal schism was about 10 percent. After this General Conference, given the at least momentary, seeming support for it by some USA moderates and liberals, I think it is about 20 percent. It's still very hard to picture two thirds of any General Conference, where delegates are typically very committed to the institution, voting for the constitutional measures required for full ecclesial division. Even the majority votes required to permit local churches to quit the denomination seem unlikely, although a measure to allow liberal congregations dissenting from church teaching on marriage, did pass in committee. It perhaps would have passed in plenary had the bishops' intervention not tabled all sexuality issues.

Any church split would divide many thousands of local congregations (there are over 30,000 in USA), leaving lots of figurative blood on the floor, unseen since many Methodist church floorboards absorbed much literal blood when serving as hospitals during the Civil War. I don't think it will happen, and I hope it won't. A renewed, global church, even with a large USA dissenting minority, seems preferable to church warfare on the local level, much of it litigated in civil courts for years, which, after the smoke cleared, would leave many wondering if it were all worth it.

For now, United Methodism survives. This General Conference had several substantive accomplishments and reflected the growing global orthodox majority, fueled by African church growth, and perhaps eventually joined by the small but growing new churches of Southeast Asia. It's tempting to think that just as the republic is often safer when Congress adjourns, so is the church after General Conference closes.

By my calculation, United Methodism's over 12 million members globally make it perhaps the world's 9th largest Christian body. May it persevere for the good of the whole Body of

Christ.

– United Methodist General Conference Analysis; Mark Tooley; May 23, 2016.

<https://juicyecumenism.com/author/marktooley/>

Homosexuality. The trial of Cynthia Meyer will proceed. “There has been much said about what happened at General Conference regarding human sexuality, charges and trials. The fact is the official position of the UMC has not been altered. We continue to stand firm on the authority of Scripture and the official position of the church as stated in the Discipline. Bishop Scott Jones, in a letter to the people in the Great Plains Area, has stated it very well: The trial of Cynthia Meyer will proceed.” – Bishop Scott Jones; received from an associate; May 27, 2016.

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The founders of the United States understood that the military would be the rampart from which America would guard its freedom. George Washington stated, “By keeping up in Peace a well-regulated and disciplined militia, we shall take the fairest and best method to preserve for a long time to come the happiness, dignity and Independence of our country.”