

Monthly Update

June 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We thank you for your prayers of support for what was accomplished at the recent General Conference of the United Methodist Church in Portland, Oregon (GC2016). For the conference itself, we sent multiple mailings to bishops, members, and delegates to GC2016. This letter communicated to some 864 delegates from around the world what we considered were key issues:

To our 2016 General Conference Delegates

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I would like to present you with a copy of the book *The Issues @ Hand* put together to serve as a resource on some of the things you will be addressing at the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon...I would ask that you take the time, ascertain the truth behind the issues on which you are deciding and consider our rich heritage. I ask that you decide on the basis of:

1. Our Wesleyan faith. Our orthodox biblical Christian heritage for over 200 years is solid.
2. The Bible as really God's Word, reflecting truth and having answers to issues we face today.
3. Sexuality. Support our church's present definition of marriage and sexuality within marriage as being between a man and a woman. From Genesis to Jude, God calls us to purity in this area.
4. Separation or division of our United Methodist Church. We oppose all plans that call for division in any way. We can work out our differences within our existing structure.
5. Restructure. Please defeat all measures to reorganize our denomination in any way that would separate the United States into a different conference.
6. Accountability Covenant. Please support this to hold our bishops accountable.
7. Immigration. Please do not support any measures that call for illegal immigration through nice sounding words such as "welcome the stranger," etc.... There is abundant evidence that terrorists are using illegal immigration...to enter the United States, as demonstrated by intelligence information and Islamic prayer rugs found in the desert on paths from Mexico through our border states. The precedent for the need to secure our borders against those who would harm our country was set over 2,000 years ago when Nehemiah left the service of the King of Persia to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its wall to protect it from Israel's enemies. We need to protect our country from our very dangerous enemies at this time.
8. Doing away with Elder tenure. This is not a good idea at this time and any efforts to do so should be defeated. We must first establish true accountability for the bishops in our church.

9. "Global warming." Well over 750 renowned scientists to include the founder of "The Weather Channel" find that human-caused global warming is based on false data and not valid.

10. Overseas conference apportionment. Please oppose this; it would drain money from them.

At GC2016 we evangelicals lost some of the smaller battles but won the most significant ones. This has been an extremely busy time, but I believe that a great deal was accomplished.

However, these efforts were not without cost, especially from production of the book *The Issues @ Hand*. After we reviewed our finances, we are currently \$10,080.09 in debt. May we ask you to help us with our shortfall? Can you send us your most generous gift this month?

We thank you for any help that you can provide. We would also ask for your continued prayers for our United Methodist Church into the future.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris

Executive Director

June 2016 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

You had the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor, so now you will have war.
– Winston Churchill to Neville Chamberlain before World War II.

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The Good Stuff

+ Son takes Mom to the Prom. With his high school prom approaching, Dylan Huffaker knew there was only one girl he wanted on his arm: his mom. So the 17-year-old headed to the hospital where his mother Kerry, who was diagnosed with stage 4 brain cancer earlier this year, was undergoing radiation treatment. There, he called her over and opened a box of doughnuts. “Will you go to the prom with me?” the icing on the doughnuts read. As a family video shows, the mom didn’t know what to think -- but eventually accepted the request before hugging her son.

After Kerry accepted her son’s invitation, the community of Twin Falls, Idaho sprang into action.

Dylan turned to Mountain States Tumor Institute social worker Melissa Rowe for help. She contacted a local car dealer, Middlekauff Ford Lincoln, whose owner, Gregg Middlekauff, “not only agreed to donate the vehicle but also purchased her dress for her and paid for their dinner,” Rowe told InsideEdition.com. Lovely Nails in Twin Falls donated a free mani pedi, while Jeni Boisvert at The Brink Studio agreed to take photos of the duo before their night out.

On April 30, after posing for their photos, the mom and son were driven to the dance at the Canyon Ridge High School prom by Mike Fenello, the CEO of St. Luke’s Magic Valley Hospital.

At the prom, the dance floor cleared so they could dance alone as the DJ played Garth Brooks’ “The Dance.”

Kerry learned in February that she has just nine to 20 months left to live. But Dylan can now look back at the prom and how he went with his perfect date. “That was the most beautiful I think I’ve ever seen her,” Dylan told ABC News. “I thought about it and I can look back after years and years and remember who I went to the prom with. I’ll know it was someone I loved who meant something to me.”

“It was absolutely amazing to watch this night unfold,” Rowe told InsideEdition.com. “I feel like this hospital and this community came together to help ensure everyone has the opportunity to hear what a special bond this mother and son have... and she will always be remembered.”

+ “As we celebrate Memorial Day this weekend we rightly give thanks for the sacrifices of those who gave all to defend our country and our freedoms. Gratitude and humility are the only just responses when one learns of the tremendous sacrifices of our military and their families. A further response demanded of us, however, is courage and perseverance. We owe it to those who died for these freedoms, those who enjoy what remains of them today, and those who will come after us, to fight for them however we can, given our state in life. Let us first, however, pray for wisdom and peace -- the true peace of Our Lord, Jesus Christ -- to be our goals.”

– As reported by Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt, PhD, The Pray In Jesus Name Project, PO Box 77077, Colorado Springs, CO 80970.

+ At East Liverpool High School in Ohio, graduating students were refused the ability to sing the Lord's Prayer in their commencement ceremony – a 70-year tradition. The Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation, forced the removal of the prayer from the program. Courageously, Valedictorian Jonathan Montgomery ignored the totalitarian mandate and led his classmates in the prayer. The response of the school board president is to have a non-denominational service next year. – As reported by Chaplain Klingenschmitt.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

+ Father Shenan Boquet writes for LifeSiteNews:

“After decades of catastrophic birth rates -- the consequence of birth control and abortion, disdain for the natural family, the rejection of God and natural law, and population decline paralleled by an aging society -- Europe is facing a cultural, demographic, and economic crisis. This does not only impact the lives of Europeans; it also has far reaching global repercussions... The United States has, even at the local level, unfortunately embraced the secular mentality of western and central Europe.” – As reported by Chaplain Klingenschmitt

+ Withdrawal from RCRC. It comes as a surprise to many members of the United Methodist Church that ours is, unfortunately, the largest pro-abortion denomination. In several books that I have authored, I trace the history of our advocacy all the way back to 1969; at that time the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries called for removal of abortion from the criminal code. In October 1972 the Women's Division and Theresa Hoover filed a “Friend of the Court” brief in support of total freedom for abortion in the “Roe versus Wade” case before the Supreme Court (page 109 of my latest book *The Issues @ Hand*). During that same time frame, Jessica Blockwick, former director of the Population Control Department at the General Board of Church and Society, was one of the founders of an organization called the “Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights” (RCAR) after the Supreme Court rendered its decision in “Roe versus Wade” in 1973. RCAR strongly advocated for abortion. Later, RCAR changed its name to the “Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice” (RCRC) which gave it a more appealing name, but the group function never changed; there was no change in its push for abortion, only a change of its name.

Since 1992, we in Concerned Methodists have advocated against issues such as this that are harmful to our church, and continue to do so up to the present time (and through the recent 2016 General Conference that was held in Portland, Oregon.) We are so thankful for the GC2016 Delegates who voted to end our participation in RCRC.

I pray for the day when not \$1 will go to support abortion from any United Methodist.

I urge every single member of the United Methodist Church to educate himself as to the reality in this area.

(UM) Bishops. Opposition to the passage of House Bill 2 (HB2) by the North Carolina Legislature.

With the motto – “Healthy Congregations and Effective Leaders in Every Place Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World” this is from the United Methodist Bishops in North Carolina: “A More Excellent Way”:

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

We write to you to express our deep gratitude for life together in the United Methodist Church here in the state of North Carolina. With you, we love our state and yearn for our lives to reflect the more excellent way described by Paul in I Corinthians 13.

We share your deep concern in regard to the increasingly divisive nature of life in North Carolina. We urge United Methodist people to cultivate community that is welcoming and nurturing to all people.

Our founder, John Wesley, described the humility that is appropriate for life together when he said that “Methodists may not think alike but that we do love alike.” It is essential that we live into the world with the willingness to engage, to listen and to speak the truth in love. We are called to live the hospitable welcome of God in a world with increasing boundaries, borders, fences and walls.

Our faith gives us courage to trust the power of grace, mercy and love. We dare not add to the increasing levels of fear, suspicion and divisiveness in our state and in our nation. Our calling to welcome, to forgive, and to love both God and neighbor is our powerful gift to the world. We observe the hurried passage of House Bill 2 (HB2) and its resultant harm to North Carolina – to individuals, to our economy, to our engagements with other states and nations, and to our future. We call for the repeal of HB2 as the legislature returns to Raleigh today.

We urge all United Methodists to engage in prayer, in study of the issues, in patient listening and persevering conversation with others who hold differing opinion, and in courageous advocacy for what is right, just and good for all people in North Carolina.

[Note: To summarize, the NC legislature passed this bill to protect businesses, especially in Charlotte, from being forced to open all of their bathrooms to “transgenderers” – and thus endangering women and little girls from male deviance, yet the bishops have set themselves against this action. One wonders at their sense of morality and standards. – AOM]

– The NC Conference website; April 25, 2016.

(UM) General Conference – 2016. Before I start the summary of the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon (GC2016), I must say a word about the folks from Good News and other renewal groups: a masterful job; I cannot speak too highly about all of their contributions. Assuredly, renewal in the United Methodist Church (UMC) is a team effort by all of our groups, American evangelicals, overseas evangelicals – and most especially the delegates from Africa. – AOM

+ Rule 44. As had been mentioned in my FaceBook post early on, in considering the rules under which GC2016 would operate, rule #44 presented severe problems in that it would stifle meaningful discussion and give control to unelected “monitors” and neutralizing legislative action on sexuality. Rule #44 was soundly defeated, as it should have been.

Sexuality issues:

1. Adopted a proposal by the Bishops to not discuss sexuality issues at GC2016 but establish a commission to explore how we will move forward, to be addressed at a special called section of the General Conference or at GC 2020. This presents interesting possibilities.
2. “A Third Way” which was a plan fraught with problems and supported by the denominational leadership – it lost.
3. The UMC’s current position with its solidly orthodox definition of sexuality within marriage is unchanged.

Abortion:

1. Withdrawal from our RCRC.
2. Reaffirmed the UMC’s opposition to gender selection abortion.
3. RCRC’s resolution defeated by a significant margin.

Accountability:

1. The Council of Bishops is allowed to place an errant bishop on involuntary leave or involuntary retirement.
2. The vote for term limits for bishops was 61%, an improvement over past votes. We see that subsequent votes for this will continue to improve until we can pass it. This will be key to establishing accountability for the Bishops.
3. There is a forceful push for accountability for the bishops coming from several sources, especially some in Uganda, stemming from a controversy surrounding Bishop Wandabula and approximately \$700,000 of unaccounted money.

Africans:

1. More effectively organized during this General Conference.
2. 5 new African Bishops in 2020.
3. Increased funding for theological education.
4. Increased representation on committees, more commensurate with their numbers.

Social issues:

1. Added a new Social Principals paragraph that makes being involved in pornography a chargeable offense.
2. Actions calling for divestment from companies supporting Israel were defeated, as they should have been. Efforts to pass measures to compel the General Boards of Pensions to divest from companies doing business with Israel failed. (i.e., Hewlett Packard, Caterpillar, etc.) There is increasing resistance to such measures.
3. All calling for divestment from companies involved in fossil fuel production failed, receiving strong opposition from African delegates and evangelicals in the United States. The debate over fossil fuels was interesting; one man from Texas made the point to the delegates that, "When you leave General Conference, you will get in your SUVs and drive home, or you will get in an airplane and fly back home. In doing so, you use fossil fuels."

As added information to the debate over fossil fuels, concern is expressed by some people that we will deplete them in the near future. During the last major action in which I was involved in my military career, Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf, one oil company employee told me that there are proven reserves in the world to last for 200 years with present consumption. Since that time, "fracking" has been developed and is being used extensively to extract even more oil. After I had posted this on Facebook, someone else with experience in Alaska posted that there were abundant reserves just in that state alone to last sixty years, I believe is what he had said.

Elections:

1. University Senate: of 4 vacancies, 4 evangelical candidates were elected.
2. The Judicial Council: of 5 vacancies, 5 evangelical candidates were elected.
3. The commission on the general conference: of 10 vacancies, 6 evangelical candidates were elected.

+ Conference pleads with bishops for leadership.

PORTLAND, Ore. GC2016 Delegates asked the Council of Bishops to lead the church out of the "painful condition" it is after an address by Bishop Bruce Ough that called for unity but did not address full inclusion of LGBTQ people. The Rev. Mark Holland, a delegate from Great Plains,

said the May 17 call for unity did not provide a path forward. He asked the Council of Bishops to meet today and bring back a report tomorrow. His motion passed 428-364. The bishops do not have a vote at General Conference, but they can call for a special session of the General Conference. “This morning, Bishop Ough said that at General Conference, the role of the bishop was to preside,” said the Rev. Tom Berlin, Virginia Conference. “Quite frankly, bishop, we think it’s your role to lead. We are asking for your leadership.”

As delegates returned to the plenary, a large group of LGBTQ supporters were singing, “Blest Be the Tie that Binds,” as they held up hands bound in rainbow stoles while others were bound hand and foot on the floor. The initials stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, “questioning” (queer)....

“You have the right to call a special General Conference to focus on this particular issue of how do we reorder our life so that we have a chance to move forward, whatever that looks like,” said the Rev. Adam Hamilton, Great Plains Conference. Hamilton pleaded with the bishops to help. “We are in a stuck place at this General Conference. We in theory could find ourselves leaving on Friday still stuck and wounded. I’m pleading with you. Please help us.” The Rev. Jerry Kulah, Liberia Conference, speaking against the referral, said, “I would like for us to follow the rules and not compromise the integrity of our General Conference.”

The bishops responded to the pleas, beginning closed-door meetings at 4 p.m. PDT that after a dinner break they expected to last long into the evening. “There have been some wonderfully meaningful conversations where people are sharing at a very deep level their hopes and yearnings for the church,” Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory Palmer told United Methodist News Service (UMNS). “There is biblical and theological reflection. There is historical reflection, and there is some practical dreaming. We got here in an interesting way, but I’ve been inspired by the depth of the yearning that we be one.” Los Angeles Area Bishop Minerva Carcaño, after the dinner break, told UMNS that she and other bishops consider the delegates’ invitation “a gift.” “None of us can remember a previous General Conference that asked for the advice of the Council of Bishops,” she said.

Earlier in the day, she and 27 other bishops joined in signing “A Pastoral Response” to the more than 100 United Methodist clergy and clergy candidates who have come out as LGBTQ. [Note: The General Conference delegates have voted to accept a statement by the Council of Bishops (COB) statement entitled “An offering for a way Forward” that asks for a delay on debating petitions dealing with sexuality issues until they, the COB, appoint a special commission to “study the issue and conflicts within” the Book of Discipline (the governing document of the United Methodist Church). My initial view - - that decision is a mistake. The other side wants to delay in the hopes that they will gain an advantage. The Bible is clear on this area. The Book of Discipline has a very balanced statement that was originally crafted in 1972. The Book of Discipline asserts that “all people are of sacred worth, but the church views the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teaching.” This is a balanced, compassionate view. As I had written above in my original analysis “that decision is a mistake” at General Conference – I have since changed my perspective. I believe that it can be worked to the good. – AOM]

– By Kathy L. Gilbert and Sam Hodges, UMNS; May 17, 2016; newsdesk@umcom.org.

+ Bishops in no rush to form sexuality panel. United Methodist bishops say they worry more about getting the new human sexuality commission right than getting the group appointed fast. That means the bishops have yet to set a timetable for when they expect to have the commission up and running. They also have not decided how many commission members there will be. However, they already are talking about the kind of qualities they would like commission

members to have.

The Council of Bishops met May 21 for the first time to discuss the commission since it won General Conference approval. Many United Methodists see the commission, part of the bishops' "Offering for a Path Forward," as a last-ditch effort to prevent the multinational denomination from splitting. The bishops' meeting, already scheduled months before General Conference, was closed to the press shortly before it got under way. "We spent most of our time trying to evaluate the relative merits of doing it quickly or making sure we do it well," Bishop Bruce Ough, the Council of Bishops president, told United Methodist News Service. He also leads the Dakotas-Minnesota Area. "The sense was we need to do this very well. And if it takes a little longer than many people would like, it's better to make sure we have a commission that represents all the voices of the church and will bring the wisdom to the table to find our way through a very difficult situation." Ough said that he is hoping commission members will bring more than various perspectives to their task but also "wisdom." By that...he wants commission members who are open to the "in-filling of the Holy Spirit."

The commission has the charge of completely examining every paragraph related to human sexuality in the Book of Discipline, the church's governing document, and possibly recommending revisions. The bishops also are considering calling a special General Conference in 2018 or 2019 to take up the commission's work. The bishops act as the denomination's executive branch while General Conference is its legislative branch. For now, the Council of Bishops executive committee has the task of devising the process and other details of the commission, he said. The group plans to meet before its regularly scheduled meeting in July.

Hopes for the panel. In the lead-up to the 2016 General Conference, the denomination's long-simmering debate over how to minister with gay and lesbian individuals seemed to be reaching a boiling point. Meanwhile, bishops who disagree themselves have been trying to keep this theologically and culturally diverse denomination in the same pot. At the start of the denomination's big legislative gathering, bishops met in secret with leaders of various advocacy groups as well as U.S. megachurch pastors in an effort to find a way forward together.

But late on May 16, rumors broke out on social media that the bishops were preparing for a possible schism. Ough publicly squashed those rumors the next day, and at General Conference's unprecedented request, the bishops worked late into the night on a plan to move forward. The commission is at the heart of that plan.

In forming the commission, Ough said, he and his colleagues are "very, very sensitive to the fact that we will need voices that ultimately bring significant constituencies along." He said that means reflecting the voices who have already been part of this discussion. He added that the bishops also want to make sure the commission includes voices from central conferences – church regions in Africa, Asia and Europe. He also said the bishops want to include newer, younger voices "who reflect where people are yearning to go in the future."

During General Conference, a group of youth and young adults presented a statement on unity, which the denomination's Global Young People's Convocation and Legislative Assembly adopted in 2014.

Ohio West Area Bishop Gregory Palmer echoed Ough's call for younger voices on the commission. Palmer, a former Council of Bishops president, will chair the bishops' Leadership Discernment Team in the coming four years. Starting in July, he will serve on the bishops' 17-member executive committee. Palmer said he wants commission members to "be biblically and theologically grounded" and be people with a track record of working through people's differences.

What about complaints? But even as the bishops move forward on the commission, questions remain about how they will carry out church's judicial processes. At the bishops' request, General Conference deferred any debate and thus did not alter the denomination's ban on same-sex unions and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.

In proposing the commission, the bishops said: "We will continue to explore options to help the church live in grace with one another – including ways to avoid further complaints, trials and harm while we uphold the Discipline." In the Great Plains Conference, the Rev. Cynthia Meyer faces a complaint after she came out to her congregation as a lesbian who shares her life with another woman. Great Plains Area Bishop Scott Jones said in a statement to the conference that the complaint process continues but at every stage of that process, the possibility of resolution exists. The conference encompasses Kansas and Nebraska. Immediately before General Conference, the Rev. David Meredith – pastor in the West Ohio Conference – married Jim Schlachter, his boyfriend of 28 years. Palmer, who was still going through his files after General Conference, said he did not know if Meredith now faces a complaint. He noted that bishops cannot constrain people from making complaints. "How they are managed is partially a different story," he said. "I have tried on every complaint no matter the subject to have my first recourse be a just resolution."

Meanwhile, the Northern Illinois Conference's (NIC) Board of Ordained Ministry this month announced that it does not consider sexual orientation and gender identity in the clergy candidacy process. The board's policy follows similar statements from the Baltimore-Washington, New York and Pacific Northwest conferences. Chicago Area Bishop Sally Dyck said the Northern Illinois board "has a long history – long before I got here – of addressing fitness and readiness for effective ministry rather than based on sexual orientation. I believe that they are seeking to add their voice to other boards of ordained ministry across the church where the United Methodist stance on human sexuality is a detriment to our witness to God's grace and love for all humanity." [Note: Bishop Dyck's comment attacks biblical morality. – AOM] [Note: It is a good thing that the bishops are not in a rush. This is a time when they know they are in the spotlight; they need to be very, very careful how they conduct this. They understand that the time of stacking a board or commission with those favorable to the homosexual agenda is past. They also understand that they need to be scrupulously fair in who they choose for the board and in how they proceed. This does present great opportunity – and great risk. – AOM] – By Heather Hahn, UMNS; May 26, 2016. Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for UMNS. newsdesk@umcom.org.

How we got here. The Book of Discipline, the denomination's governing document, since 1972 has proclaimed all people are of sacred worth but "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." As a consequence, The United Methodist Church bans same-sex weddings and bans the ordination of "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy. But increasingly U.S. United Methodist clergy, including a retired bishop, have publicly defied the wedding ban as more countries, including the United States, have legalized same-sex civil marriage. On the eve of General Conference, more than 100 clergy and clergy candidates in the U.S. and one in the Philippines came out as gay. Advocates for greater inclusion of LGBTQ members in the church indicate they will act if the church bans do not exist. [Note: The initials stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer. – AOM]

Meanwhile, advocates for keeping the church's current teaching have raised the possibility of "amicable separation" along theological lines unless bishops and others enforce church bans. They have also pushed for letting churches disaffiliate while keeping their property.

At the same time, the denomination is growing in Africa where homosexual acts are

criminalized in 38 of 54 African countries. That includes most of the African countries that sent delegates to General Conference. If The United Methodist Church ended its bans, Zimbabwe delegate Betty Katiyo told Religion News Service she fears her country would ban the denomination.

In short, the commission has its work cut out for it.

– By Heather Hahn, UMNS; May 26, 2016.

+ Rev. Adam Hamilton Backs Possible “Reordering” of UMC. Well-known Methodist minister Rev. Adam Hamilton has backed a proposal that could lead to a three way split of the United Methodist Church (UMC), based on congregations’ views on homosexuality. Hamilton, who serves as the senior pastor at the megachurch Resurrection UMC based in Leawood, Kansas, made the remarks to a group of seminarians in Portland on Tuesday morning before General Conference began its seventh official day of proceedings. He said the plan emerged after speaking to Methodist leaders from across the political spectrum at General Conference about “reordering” the UMC.

The proposal, if supported by the General Conference, would first create a commission. The commission would then form a plan for “reordering” the UMC. As Hamilton outlined this plan: “That plan for reordering would create, out of one United Methodist Church, potentially three United Methodist Churches. And one would be the conservative Methodist church. “One would be a church for those who are progressive, who only want to be in a church with people who are progressive, and will allow nothing less than full inclusion on everything and for everybody. In other words, that every pastor needs to be doing same-gender weddings – every pastor, every church needs to host same-gender weddings. So if that’s where you are and you say, ‘That’s a justice issue and we really can’t be with other people who are not like us on this.’ “And then a church for what I perceive to be the vast majority of United Methodists, which are somewhere in the middle, who are able to say, ‘We’re going to allow churches and pastors with these convictions to be able to officiate same-gender weddings, annual conferences to make decisions about who they will ordain. (This was basically the ‘third way’ proposed by the Connectional Table.) And we are going to also recognize that there are faithful Christians who have a more conservative interpretation, and provided that everybody is seeking to love with justice, we are not going to force those churches to adopt policies that don’t line up with their conscience.”

Hamilton said he thought the “middle” United Methodist group would constitute “75 percent of our churches.” As he met with other Methodist leaders, Hamilton said he felt like he was going “to throw up” at the prospect of a split. But he said he didn’t see “any other way that we’re going to break past the gridlock.” Yet this prospect also “excited” him. Hamilton said this could afford the middle Methodists the opportunity for “rebirth” through having a “new church start with the denomination.”

“What would happen if we rebirth that and we wrote a brand new book of discipline; we didn’t keep trying to adopt a 1968 Book of Discipline,” Hamilton asked. “What would happen if we could order our boards and agencies in such a way that they were perfectly missionally designed for the 21st century, not trying to tweak the ones that were designed for the middle of the 20th century?”

After lobbying against a split for the past three years, Hamilton described how he changed his mind. “What began to change for me was watching first of all Rule 44. We spent a day and a half debating whether we could have meaningful Christian debate about this.” He said this process showed “such a lack of trust” on both sides of the debate. He said “moderates and progressive” anticipated seeing “a little bit of movement” during legislative committee process “that allows some tension to be relieved in the system. But instead the votes continue to be for

things that were even more regressive than what we've had in the past," Hamilton said. "So mandatory penalties if you officiated a same gender wedding." [Note: Emphasis added. Hamilton terms "votes to maintain our Biblical morality" to be "regressive." He is one who a few years ago had presented himself as "evangelical." Indeed, I have been to his church in Leawood, Kansas and heard him speak. However, after the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Florida, I had lost confidence in his leadership when he and another "evangelical" had proposed legislative action that was deceptive and designed to set our church on a path that would have led to our homosexual acceptance, i.e., "the camel getting its nose under the tent." – AOM]

Earlier Hamilton noted that he had expected delegates at the General Conference to formally "agree that we disagree" about homosexuality in the Book of Discipline, to "soften the language that says that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching," and to take officiating same-gender marriages "off the list of chargeable offences" for clergy. Later in the day, Council of Bishops President Bruce R. Ough spoke for the majority of bishops opposing a split. "We are not advancing or advocating any plan for separation or reorganizing the denomination," Ough said in a speech to General Conference. On Wednesday morning, again speaking on behalf of the Council of Bishops, Ough asked the General Conference to back a plan to defer legislation on sexuality to a special general conference at an unspecified later date. Hamilton supported this proposal on the floor of General Conference around 11:30 am on Wednesday.

– The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), Washington, DC; May 18, 2016.

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

+ "Sexuality demonstrations." The floor of the General Conference, shown in one of my pictures on Facebook, was invaded by protesters. Instead of having them evicted as he should have done, the bishop who was presiding over the session, told the body of people that delegates should listen to the "grievances" of the protesters (which are in no way valid). For those of us who support biblical morality, we are accused of "hating" others, a word used by those supporting neither Biblical morality nor the moral position of our United Methodist Church; it is they who use harsh language.

There were various "symbolic moves" by members pushing the homosexual agenda to register their displeasure over the UMC's stance against normalizing that practice. One UM pastor had a tent outside of the convention center with a sign that read, "Sleeping outside to demonstrate that the church is closed to some people." It turns out that he is from Michigan and had presided over the same-sex service for his daughter and her girlfriend.

There was a group of people who marched around the convention center once a day to symbolize "marching around Jericho" so that the "walls of exclusion against the LGBTQ people" would come falling down.

The Rev. Will Green lay on the floor of the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, Ore., with his hands and feet bound to protest the denomination's policies on human sexuality. Delegates returning from their lunch break passed by protestors on the floor and lining the entry to the meeting area.

The last day of General Conference, a part of the "rainbow coalition" supporting the LGBTQ cause, made themselves visible by marching through the conventions center and by the plenary floor singing "You are not forgotten" over and over and over during discussions by the delegates on the floor dealing with other matters. Bishop Streiff (from Germany) talked over them and continued presiding – which was the right thing to do. Delegates continued with the business of the day and ignored the demonstrators, but it was disconcerting and rude.

+ The sophisticated communication and electronic voting system continued to be a source of problems that caused confusion in the legislative process. On the first day of voting, a representative from Liberia had recommended that we delay the use of these devices until 2020, but his recommendation was ignored. – AOM

+ While we applaud giving money to pay for mosquito Nets to prevent the spread of malaria, we are disappointed that along with the nets we do not send a clear message that the people need Jesus Christ as Savior. – AOM

+ In addition to sending materials and communicating to people in other countries by UM Communications, we could be sending the clear message that people need the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. – AOM

+ United Methodists Approve New Geographical Structure for Southeast Asia.

[Note: This is seen as a good measure, although care must be taken to not include only Communist-dominated “show churches” that give the illusion of religious freedom while being controlled by the state. – AOM]

In a historic action, the United Methodist Church’s legislating General Conference, meeting here, approved a new geographical provisional unit – called a “central conference” – for Southeast Asia and Mongolia. The move is needed in order to equip new mission-founded churches to achieve organizational maturity.

The Provisional Central Conference, the first established in many decades, responds to the growth of United Methodist congregations in the areas it covers. Methodism is becoming a significant religious movement in parts of Southeast Asia. It is also growing in Mongolia, notably among young adults.

In response to concerns of existing Methodist churches in Asia, the denomination’s chief mission executive told the General Conference that The United Methodist Church “is not attempting to extend our territorial range in Asia at the expense of others or to initiate mission outreach without consultation with others in the region.” Thomas Kemper said the central conference is essential for the organization of annual (regional) conferences through which missions can “achieve maturity and accountability” and set up processes for certifying their own clergy. United Methodist polity does not allow annual conferences outside of the central conference system, which corresponds in Africa, Europe, and Asia to a jurisdictional organization structure in the United States.

The Asian Methodist Council and the World Federation of Chinese Methodist Churches had raised questions about the intentions of the United Methodists in proposing the new provisional central conference. Asia has numerous national or regional Methodist churches that grew out of both American and British mission work in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of those are autonomous (free-standing) churches. The one major exception is the Philippines, which is a central conference and a full participant in United Methodist life and governance. Kemper apologized for not having made the reasons clear earlier. “Our goal is to provide structural means whereby expanding communities of Methodists can maximize their potential, grow in faith and witness to Jesus Christ, and find their ways into full participation in our global connection, whether that eventually is as United Methodist conferences or as autonomous Methodist denominations.” The people in the local conference will make that eventual decision, said Kemper, indicating that no new annual conferences are immediately projected. – By

Elliott Wright May 24, 2016, UMNS.

<http://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2016/may/0524southeastasia#sthash.NgZnJZ1O.OykJaQzE.dpuf>

+ Single payer public health system. Despite strong verbal opposition, the General Conference adopted on a vote of 581 to 295 a resolution supporting a single payer public health system in the United States. Government is the single payer in such systems. The lengthy resolution, entitled “Health Care for All in the United States,” surveys the systems of health delivery in the USA and opts for incremental steps toward a single payer system. “We recognize that much of the cost savings of ‘single payer’ flows from the virtual total elimination of the health insurance industry. We cannot wait to overcome the current barriers to a single-payer plan, and therefore support all initiatives that move segments of our population closer to a single-payer system.” Those opposing argued that the church should not address a matter with such political implications. Supporters asserted the need for Christians to support measures to extend health care to the greatest number. The resolution was a revision of a measure first adopted by the 2008 General Conference. It was drafted and submitted by the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS).
– UMNS

[Note: This is an area that clearly has political implications and is thinly-disguised for a socialistic society, as are so many of the priorities that the GBCS espouses. The reason cited was “the virtual total elimination of the health insurance industry” which was a predictable result of government involvement in this area. This problem comes out of something that UMC staffers helped cause: the passage of the “Affordable Health Care Act” and gutted the best medical care system in the world. Something that would be more meaningful is what some Christians are doing – advocating “medical cost sharing” whereby they share medical costs with other Christians. In addition, this plan is a way to pay for the health care of illegal immigrants, further causing greater financial hardship on an already overly-burdened national budget. – AOM]

+ “Israel to stop the encroachment.” Nearing adjournment, the General Conference adopted a request to government leaders of the United States to appeal to Israel to stop the encroachment of an illegal settlement on the land of Wadi Foquin, a Palestine village with which the denomination’s mission board has ties. The measure specifically asks that letters be sent to the US president, secretary of state, and the consul in Jerusalem requesting that Israeli authorities intercede on behalf of Wadi Foquin, located in the Bethlehem District of the occupied West Bank. However, a successful effort in floor debate deleted a portion of the resolution urging the US to withhold foreign aid to Israel until human rights are restored to the village. Wadi Foquin is being destroyed, according to visitors to the area, by the destruction of homes, fields, and orchards to make room for expanding Israeli settlements. A support organization called Friends of Wadi Foquin is based in the California-Nevada Annual Conference. The General Conference petition on Wadi Foquin came from an individual in that conference.
– UMNS

[Note: This was one of the anti-Israel petitions that seeks to undermine that country’s stability. It is important to recognize that any activism in this area is consistently for the “Palestinians” and against Israel. On the other hand, FOSNA based here in Portland, Oregon takes an anti-Israeli position – that the Jewish people are “occupying Palestinian land” and are mistreating them – with little discussion as to suicide bombers and rockets coming in on Israel. One of the bright spots in the ministries here is that of this group that evangelizes among the Jewish people. – AOM]

+ New Comprehensive Resolution on “Caring for Creation.” In the closing hour of the General Conference, delegates adopted a comprehensive resolution on the care for creation. Submitted by the denomination’s General Board of Church and Society, “Caring for Creation: A Call to Stewardship and Justice” complements “Renewing God’s Creation,” a program related to the General Board of Global Ministries. An unsuccessful attempt was made in plenary to remove from the resolution an endorsement of the “Clergy Letter Project,” described as a “reconciliatory project between religion and science.” As amended in legislative committee, United Methodist clergy are urged to participate in the project.

“Caring for Creation,” the new resolution replaces and updates a group of statements on the subject contained in earlier editions of the United Methodist Book of Resolutions, a compendium of mostly social pronouncements from the policy-making General Conference over the past eight years. The text surveys United Methodist environmental concerns over the centuries, beginning with founder John Wesley in 18th century England. It summarizes environmental challenges relating to the protection of air, water, land, and climate and provides theological rationale for the care of creation.

Among other educational measures, the resolution proposes an annual World Environmental Day as a church festival focused on creation.

[Note: “Caring for Creation: A Call to Stewardship and Justice” is a nice-sounding theme that masks activism by some of the radical environmentalists. It is important that all of us should exercise moderation when it comes to using resources in our daily lives. As an Eagle Scout, I was mindful of the concerns of the Boy Scouts to not have a detrimental impact on the environment; we learned to leave a campsite better than we found it, and to try to make so that no one could even tell we had been there. But radical environmentalists’ efforts view human beings as blight on the earth and are destroying it just by living on the planet. The fundamental belief, if one is to investigate the source of this concern, is that the earth is overpopulated far beyond what they believe is a sustainable level – 500 million people. This belief does not stand the test of reason. One wonders what the reaction of the GBCS would be if we proposed a theme “Caring for Creation: A Call to Justice” on behalf of the unborn. They would not have the same level of enthusiasm; indeed, they would oppose it.

There was a picture of a couple of boys at the “Climate Vigil” during the General Conference who engaged in sidewalk art while speakers talked about the effects of a warming climate. The vigil, complete with lanterns, was sponsored by the Pacific-Northwest Annual Conference of the UMC. When I attended the “pre- General Conference” meeting in Portland this past January to prepare for the May event, I was given one of these lanterns with an “explanation” of what it meant. This is symbolism and the boys being pictured this way reeks of manipulation. – AOM]

– Elliott Wright, UMNS. Wright is a consultant with the GBGM.

+ 29 New Missionaries Commissioned. A new missionary class consisting of 29 New Missionaries was commissioned at the denomination’s top legislative gathering in Portland, Oregon.

– UMNS

[Note: While on the face of it, this is a positive sign, from over 20 years of monitoring the priorities of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), I would have several questions. Are these full time missionaries? Where are they serving? Are they true missionaries committed to winning the lost to Christ – or are they involved in political activism on behalf of a radical cause? These are questions that stem from our years of examining GBGM actions and priorities. – AOM]

+ The Rev. Dr. Mande Muyombo paid tribute to the retiring bishops of the DR Congo. The Rev.

Dr. Mande Muyombo paid tribute to the retiring bishops of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 2016 General Conference. Three of the four DRC bishops retire this year: Bishop David Yemba, Central Congo (DR Congo), who had a malaria relapse during the Portland meeting; Bishop Katembo Kainda, Southern Congo, and Bishop Nkulu Ntanda Ntambo, North Katanga. A standing ovation and sustained applause greeted a request from a delegate to recognize these three bishops. Each of these episcopal leaders has reached the conclusion of his active service.

“The DR Congo has experienced various conflicts and civil wars since its independence,” said the Rev. Dr. Mande Muyombo, a clergy delegate from the DR Congo. “The United Methodist Church in the DR Congo, through the leadership of the bishops, has worked for peace and development in a country that lost nearly six million lives. Each bishop who is retiring today contributed with his gifts and talents to church growth, peace, and development in the DR Congo. Bishop Yemba, a distinguished professor, provided leadership, doctrine, and church polity trainings. Bishop Katembo Kainda led the church to a new vision of becoming self-sustaining. Bishop Nkulu Ntanda Ntambo presented himself as pragmatic development leader and peacemaker.

“United Methodists in the DR Congo and general conference delegates are grateful to the bishops and their families for their faithful ministry and service.”

[Note: I am especially disappointed to see Bishop Nkulu Ntanda Ntambo retire. He, along with the other African bishops, has been a strong voice for our orthodox Christian morality in the debate over homosexual practice. – AOM]

– Mike DuBose, UMNS. <http://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2016/may/0524southeastasia#sthash.NgZnJZ1O.OykJaQzE.dpuf>

+ General Conference approves \$604 million budget. After a long session of conversation and debate, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church passed a budget for the next four years of \$604 million. This budget contains for the first time an apportionment for the Central Conferences of the church and includes \$5 million for educational efforts in the Central Conferences which was more than originally proposed. Moses Kumar, General Secretary of the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), and Jessica Vargo, chair of the Financial Administration legislative committee presented the calendar items related to the budget, and the conversation seemed to drag as they considered the budget for the World Service and Ministerial Education Funds. As has been true throughout the conference, the conference was slowed by continued parliamentary requests, delaying voting as a result. Given the pace of the debate, there was fear that the conference would be unable to complete their work on the budget if each fund was considered individually. A motion was made to combine the remaining calendar items into a single bundle for consideration. That motion passed; the budget was finally approved.

One of the issues of concern was a proposal to increase the funding for the Central Conferences Education Fund by an additional \$5 million from the \$599 million budget originally proposed by GCFA. That proposal passed, leading to the total budget amount of \$604 million.

Contained in the bundle was Calendar Item 422, which proposed an apportionment being made to the Central (non-U.S.) Conferences for the first time. Previously Central Conferences have made voluntary donations to the UM Episcopal Fund to help offset the cost of their bishops. Now the Central Conferences will be expected to contribute to the overall ministry of the denomination, using a formula developed especially for those conferences.

The budget does not contain the so-called “\$20 million dollar carve out” proposed in committee to establish a “Standing Committee on Strategy and Church Growth.” That proposal was ruled unconstitutional yesterday by the Judicial Council in Decision 1320.

[Note: I was especially disappointed to see Calendar Item 422 adopted. This provided for an apportionment being made to the Central (non-U.S.) Conferences. This was one of the things that we opposed and was an issue on which we lost. As stated, now the Central Conferences will contribute to the overall ministry of the denomination. We had opposed this since it is in Africa where the church is growing the fastest. We had pushed for this to be defeated since this measure would be a drain on the finances of the Central Conferences. Yes, we in the United States would have continued to pay the “lion’s share” of expenses in this area, but we should have done so while not requiring the Africans to and which we believed would have been a way of supporting “foreign missions” in those countries. – AOM]

–By Jay Voorhees, Executive Editor, UMNS, May 20, 2016.

+ Of especial interest – An Open Pastoral Letter to United Methodists: A Word of Clarification: Dear United Methodists,

Immediately following General Conference I wrote an Open Letter to United Methodists expressing my long term hope for a renewal in the global Wesleyan movement which was rooted not in ecclesiastical deliberations, but in grass roots faithfulness of the “people called Methodists.” I truly wish that I could have shared that message with each of you in person and face to face because it was written in tears over the intractable situation we are in.

Blog articles are a collection of words, and it is not always easy to convey one’s tone or emotions in a blog entry. Speaking honestly, despite the situation we are in, I would not describe my feeling as “anger” but more as “sadness.” I am a lifetime United Methodist. I love our Wesleyan heritage. Yet, my entire ministry has been conducted within the larger narrative of decline and cultural accommodation. The blog article garnered wide circulation. Some were distressed because I have not supported any movement towards separation. Others were distressed because they felt the letter seemed to have lost hope in the leadership of the United Methodist church.

There are many signs of hope amidst the rubble of destruction. I long for the day when United Methodists will re-capture the vibrancy which once characterized our movement. I am proud of all the ways Asbury Theological Seminary graduates, as well as many graduates from the official United Methodist seminaries, have remained faithful to the gospel in the midst of this massive cultural transition from a church in Christendom, to a church in a post-Christendom culture. I am also thankful for those bishops, pastors, and lay men and women around the church who stand unabashedly for historic faith and Wesleyan faithfulness.

I want to sincerely apologize for anything I said in that Open Letter that cast any indictment or disparagement on our episcopal leadership. I intended to express sympathy for their situation. The Council of Bishops can only speak with one voice, yet the makeup of the Council is so polarized it is difficult for a clear voice to be heard. I am, myself, under the appointment of a bishop who has been a great stalwart for historic Christianity. Indeed, I have great respect for many on the Council. I sincerely apologize for any hurt I may have caused any bishops who have given their lives to bringing faithful leadership to our beloved church.

I do know that in the wake of General Conference there are millions of United Methodists around the world who need to know that we have a future. In closing I want to reiterate my invitation to consider the New Room Network as a way of linking Wesleyans around the world. I believe that the millions of United Methodists who are distraught and discouraged may find in

the New Room a new space for hope. The New Room Network has nothing to do with dividing the church and everything to do with uniting Christians around the world in the work of awakening and renewal in the classic Wesleyan way. I think we can all agree we are in need of a great awakening in our time. That's what the New Room Network is all about—gathering, connecting and resourcing the global church to sow for a great awakening. You can learn more about that.

Finally, while I am a seminary president, I write as an Elder in the United Methodist Church. Like so many others, I am in pain. I feel betrayed. We have been in slow schism for decades, having lost millions and millions of members. I long to see us regain our focus on mission, discipleship, church planting and evangelism. That was the heart of my Open Letter. I also know that I am a “frail child of dust.” I am a sinner, desperately in need of the grace of God. I have never advocated separation from the United Methodist Church, though my reasons for that will have to wait for another time. I have never wavered in my faith that God is not through with us yet. May God's grace grant us a future and a hope.

— From Timothy Tennent; 23 May 2016. Dr. Tennent is the president of Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

General Conference 2016 adjourned at 6:30 p.m., Friday, May 20th.

As a post script, I wanted to add to the summary of the General Conference that was held in Portland, Oregon: The conference was interesting in that we heard the different languages: French (spoken by many African delegates), Portuguese (also spoken by delegates from Africa), Spanish, Tagalog (spoken in the Philippines), and Russian.

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You must not say that every mistake is a foolish one. — Cicero, Roman scholar, 106-43 B.C.