

Monthly Update

May 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This edition of the Update contains information on Islam, since that continues to be an important factor affecting world security, and the upcoming 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon starting on the 10th of this month. I would ask that you to continue in prayer for what will happen there. You may be assured that those of us in Concerned Methodists have worked and shall continue to do so, to influence what happens there to the greatest possible extent. It promises to be “interesting” in what we predict will happen.

Of especial interest are some of our areas of concern and structure we would like to see revised in our church. We have an article on the issue of “guaranteed appointments” that has been on the table for several years. While on the face of it, implementation of this measure would be good as far as getting rid of ineffective clergy, we oppose it at this point in time – not until we have a credible means of getting rid of aberrant bishops, those clergy who are tasked with leading our church. If implemented, this measure would be used to coerce otherwise orthodox clergy into going along with bishops who are bent on pushing a theologically liberal agenda, and specifically to normalize homosexuality.

Starting on page 2, I have included fifteen recommendations (“A Call for Denominational Changes”) that are in our latest book *The Issues @ Hand*. We believe these would pave the way to reform our church, and help to get us back to our orthodox Wesleyan roots – onto the path to restore faithfulness to our biblical, Christian doctrine. This in turn would facilitate denominational growth. While “numbers” are not our ultimate goal, they are an indicator of how successful we are in providing the spiritual nurture that people need. Everyone has a spiritual vacuum that begs to be filled – and something will find its place there. That is one reason that so many individuals are getting into cults, strange religions, or Islam. I can’t help wonder that if we as Christians had stood more firmly for our faith and been eager to share it with others, would we have so many problems in our country today? After all, the freedoms that we enjoy today were won from Great Britain at a great price – and came about in no small measure because of the “Black Robed Regiment” as the English referred to the clergy in the American “colonies” of the 1700s.

We in Concerned Methodists say “thank you” for continuing to partner with us. We also ask that you would pray for our efforts at GC2016. Specifically, please continue to pray a Psalm 91 hedge of protection around the United States, around our United Methodist Church – and around us as we “contend for the faith” in Portland – that we stay focused.

Powerful, earnest prayers are needed; we would covet them during the next three weeks.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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May 2016 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

You had the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor; therefore, you will have war.

– Sir Winston Churchill to then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, 1938

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The Good Stuff

+ **The Real Jesus.** Twenty years ago, Emory University's Luke Timothy Johnson was in the right place at the right time. His 1996 book, "The Real Jesus," became a blockbuster of the Lenten season, making the kind of national media splash that biblical scholars and theologians can only dream of today. Johnson, the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Emory's Candler School of Theology, was already a widely recognized biblical scholar, but as he recalled recently, it was "The Real Jesus" that took his career on a different path. "There's no question that the book had an unanticipated impact both on me and on a lot of readers," says Johnson, adding that he wrote the manuscript in three months, "the quickest book I've ever written."

With publication of "The Real Jesus," Johnson became a leading figure opposing the research and scholarship of the widely publicized Jesus Seminar, a group of some 200 biblical scholars who sought to verify or disprove sayings and actions attributed to Jesus through historical review and analysis. Johnson, who had written a series of negative reviews of books on the so-called "historical Jesus" movement, was approached by a publisher who had read the reviews and asked him to write a book. Things moved swiftly from there. The book was snapped up by both scholarly and general audiences—a mountain of copies disappeared at the annual American Academy of Religion meeting. Cover stories quoting Johnson on the historical Jesus debate and the Jesus Seminar appeared in TIME, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report. He also was featured in The New York Times and interviewed by ABC, CBS and CNN. One consequence of "The Real Jesus" for Johnson personally, he says, was "a taste of notoriety that I've never wanted to recover, partly because I realized how intoxicating it was."

"I didn't like it that I liked it too much," recalls Johnson, adding that his sudden fame "distanced me from my students. I had students respond to me as a celebrity rather than as their teacher. It was alienating me from the social context I treasured. "The scariest thing is that for some students, I was more real and authoritative because I had been on TV," says Johnson. Because of the media firestorm and its aftereffects, Johnson says he has since eschewed celebrity. Yet his influence continues to be widespread: he is author of 31 books, more than 70 scholarly articles and more than 200 book reviews (yes, he still does them). In 2011, Johnson won the prestigious Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion, which carries a \$100,000 prize. This TIME cover story from April 8, 1996, was one of several publications that quoted Luke Timothy Johnson on the historical Jesus debate and the Jesus Seminar.

And although he has continued to lecture and write on historical Jesus issues, and on the literary, moral and religious dimensions of the New Testament and early Christianity, the media circus surrounding the Jesus Seminar—and in many ways the theological debate—has moved on, perhaps permanently. "On the larger issue of the state of historical Jesus studies, the book accomplished something," says Johnson. "I think it broke the momentum of what appeared to be at that time an irresistible force that was perceived as academically approved and ecclesiastically embraced." That Johnson, an already well-known biblical scholar, would publish a book...saying "no, this [historical Jesus scholarship] is bad history; this is bad theology" modified the movement, he says. "From then on, my position had to be taken into account." He points to the 2009 book, "The Historical Jesus: Five Views" as emblematic of the sea change. "As so often happens, the book included essays by four historical Jesus researchers—and me. There was a time before 'The Real Jesus' when that voice would not have been heard in that volume. So it altered me, and it altered the state of the conversation." Where historical Jesus research tends to flourish these days is among a segment of believers, which is ironic, given that in Johnson's view, historical Jesus research is still "bad history and bad theology."

It's clear that even 20 years on, Johnson still affirms the book's assertion that "the state of biblical scholarship within the church is in critical condition." What he sees today also does not bode well for the faith. His 2003 book, "The Creed," was his response to the observation that some Christian believers "seem so little aware of how sloppy thinking erodes and makes ludicrous what is supposed to be the fundamental commitment of their lives. "If we call the historical Jesus movement and the Jesus Seminar the supreme Enlightenment project," says Johnson, "then my reaction to it and others' reaction to it may also be called the last manifestation of creedal conscience and a sense that the stakes are very, very high. "Either you're doing real history, in which case everything is up for grabs, or you're doing fake history in which you just make it come out alright," says Johnson. "In either case you're neglecting the genuine grounds of why you are a Christian or a theologian," he says. "It does not have to do with what Jesus did as a first century 30-year-old male Jew living in Galilee, but has everything to do with God exalting him and making him life-giving spirit to transform human existence."

– Received from an associate.

+ ***RISEN: THE MOVIE. Atheist sees Jesus Raised from Dead.***

[Note: A second take from the March Update on this movie. – AOM]

I highly recommend you GO SEE THE MOVIE RISEN..., in theatres nationwide. The...movie is written from an Atheist viewpoint, about a Roman Centurion who does not believe in Christ but sees him raised from the dead. Starring award-winning actor Joseph Fiennes who plays Clavius, the Roman Centurion tasked by Pontius Pilate to investigate the disappearance of Jesus' body from the tomb, the mystery/thriller movie is set in ancient Jerusalem.

I had the high privilege of interviewing Rich Peluso, the Hollywood producer behind RISEN...Rich explains why he selected the script, how they chose the actors, and what it's like to make a movie about Jesus Christ.

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

+ ***The Royal Mint.*** Once I was asked by a Lebanese business man to arrange for the minting of £10 million in new 1oz gold 'Cedars'. I was going to make my fortune but the civil war put a stop to it. I never heard from my friend again. As I was praying about this the Lord showed me the minting process. Gold blanks are put onto the base plate of the press. A ram then comes down with a die of the sovereign's head. If the base plate remains firm then the sovereign's head is imprinted on the blank. If not, the ram has to come down time and time again until the sovereign's head is imprinted.

In the same way God puts us, like gold blanks, onto His minting press and brings down the ram of circumstances upon us. If we stand up to the pressure, we will be marked with the image of Christ. If we run away from the trial it will have been in vain. God will have to put us through the same process all over again. Some blanks, who resist the pressure, get only a faint impression of Jesus in their character because they will not take the pressure.

It reminded me of all the times God has humbled me. I had the choice to run away or to accept it with praise and thanksgiving. Only when I did the latter was there any lasting transformation.

– Written by John Wright, as received from Douglas Raine – FGBMFA VP Outreach and Training.

+ ***Day 33: Ellen Rose.*** Late in 1969, following exams at Meredith College, my divorced mother informed me she was financially unable to pay for my last semester of college. I'd need to drop out, work awhile, and hopefully return "on my own dime." With deep regret, I knocked on my advisor's door to deliver the sad news.

Dr. Leslie Syron was an especially gifted and devout saint, who taught all her students to always ask, "What else is true?" Her sage advice challenged me through years of service as a mental health professional and child of God, to explore all sides of a situation. This woman, who lived meagerly, looked straight into my eyes when I delivered the news and responded, "Oh, no, you won't drop out. I'll pay your tuition and you will finish on time!"

She did, and I did. Thirty-seven years later, upon my graduation from Campbell University Divinity School, Dr. Syron sent a personal note of congratulations; she had seen the announcement in the local paper and wanted

me to know she was proud of me. Had her gift of \$600, (which at the time may as well have been \$60,000 to my mom) not been offered, who knows how different my life would be?

– NC Conference of The UMC, 700 Waterfield Ridge Place, Garner, NC 27529; communications@nccumc.org

(UM) General Conference – 2016 (GC2016).

[Note: This comes from the latest book entitled *The Issues @ Hand*, published by Concerned Methodists, and is included here for your information. It reflects the thinking of this ministry as to what is needed in the UMC. – AOM]

A Call for Denominational Changes

- 1. Stewardship.** The mandatory apportionment needs to be eliminated in favor of the voluntary, freewill offering. When pressure is exerted on members of local churches to make compulsory payment to support unbiblical activities or for expenses by a bloated denominational hierarchy, the laity have a right to not be compelled to support it.
- 2. Accountability.** If church employees and leaders will not abide by the Bible nor the *Book of Discipline*, and fail to provide leadership for maintenance of the connection, they should not expect churches and individuals to support their activities through coerced giving.
- 3.** The UMC’s denominational bureaucracies need to be downsized to the minimum functional level and commensurate with the support they receive from freewill offerings. One example of this need is the huge General Board of Global Ministries staff that outnumbers the total full-time UM overseas missionary force. Brazilian Methodists took a radical step in their church, getting rid of the overhead it supported and almost “starting over.”³ We need to do the same.
- 4.** The prioritization of the ministry needs to be the local church. We need to recognize that this is the basic field of outreach in our denomination and is the UMC’s main interface to the secular world. Focus of ministry needs to be from the local church to the general church, a “bottom-up” as opposed to a “top-down” approach. Requirements should originate at the church, and all other parts of the UMC should support the local church. General Superintendents need to facilitate district superintendents in supporting their local churches.
- 5.** Local churches need to have greater flexibility in determining the ministries they will support and how they will engage in mission.
- 6.** In a church the function of the pastor should be to provide biblically spiritual nurture and authentic pastoral care to his congregation, and which should be considered a sacred trust from God.
- 7.** Title to the property of a local church needs to be held by the local church. When a church building is constructed, financed, and cared for by the people in a congregation, they should own it.
- 8.** Local churches need to provide direct support to missionaries and overseas conferences. The bureaucratic machinery drains too much out of the giving dollar to provide for effective world-wide missions.
- 9.** Money from the UMC’s “Ministerial Education Fund” to the seminaries should “follow the student” and be used to pay expenses as he/she attends school, so that there will be no post-graduate debt. Also, since Asbury Theological Seminary graduates more men and women who become United Methodist pastors than does any of the thirteen “official” seminaries that receive apportionment money, it is not cost-effective to continue supporting church education in this way.
- 10.** Jurisdictions should be financially self-supporting. Evangelical Jurisdictions pay a disproportionate share of money supporting the general church since areas that espouse liberal theology lose members and are in decline. Of especial note is that some in decline are also those U.S. annual conferences and the Western Jurisdiction that had called for the open defiance of the church’s teachings on marriage and sexuality issues after the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Florida. The question is asked by some evangelicals, “If some parts of the United Methodist Church are openly advocating disobedience to our Book of Discipline and the teachings of the Bible – and as a result are experiencing decline and financial hardship – why should we who are true to our Orthodox Christian faith support them with our finances?”

11. Eliminate the office of bishop. If such a supervisory position is needed, it can be replaced by that of General Superintendent, who would be the senior district superintendent in the conference.
12. All expenses for the General Superintendent are to be borne by his own conference and his district; all expenses for the district superintendent are to be borne by his own district, thereby increasing accountability.
13. Provide that General Superintendents would serve for a maximum of two 4-year terms, then returned to the pastorate, or retire if eligible.
14. Provide for the effective recall of General Superintendents. If they will not abide by the teachings of the United Methodist Church, or if they publicly oppose its teachings, they need to be removed immediately. It is unconscionable that they should continue to be in positions of authority, represent the UMC, and receive church money to undermine its teachings and that of the orthodox Christian faith.
15. Money from the UMC's "Episcopal Fund" should be used to either supplement or to pay for the salaries and other expenses for the bishops in those overseas conferences that do not have the financial resources to support this function. The churches in the conferences in the United States should undergird the financial support needed for this, and can view this as a form of supporting worldwide missions.

+ ***Guaranteed appointment debate to resume at GC2016.*** Ending guaranteed appointment for ordained elders in The United Methodist Church was, like restructuring of the denomination's agencies, a high-profile effort that passed at the 2012 General Conference only to be overturned by the Judicial Council. And, like restructuring, it will be back on the agenda when the 2016 General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking assembly, meets May 10-20 in Portland, Oregon. This time the push to end guaranteed appointment is coming from the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders. "It's a matter of accountability and a matter of empowering our bishops to do what they think they need to do with each and every appointment," said Lonnie Brooks, lay leader for the Alaska Conference and legislative committee chair for the lay leaders' association. But the strategy for passage this time requires first changing the denomination's constitution – a high hurdle. And the opposition has hardly gone away. "There's value in having security of appointment for all clergy, in particular for those who have been marginalized," said Frederick Brewington, a lawyer and lay delegate from the New York Conference who successfully argued the guaranteed appointment case before Judicial Council. The lead-up to the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Florida, featured much discussion about the need for change in the denomination, given declining membership in the United States.

The Study of Ministry Commission pointed to guaranteed appointment – also known as security of appointment – as a problem. The commission, in its report, said job tenure for elders limited the church's ability "to respond to the primacy of missional needs" and created a financially unsustainable oversupply of clergy in certain conferences. Some commission members more bluntly said guaranteed appointment protected ineffective clergy.

In Tampa, the Ministry and Higher Education Committee amended the commission's legislation to provide more oversight in appointments. But to the surprise of many, the final committee vote for ending guaranteed appointment was lopsided enough to get the petition on the consent calendar. Efforts before the full General Conference to reconsider the item failed, and it passed in a group with other petitions that had enjoyed overwhelming committee support. But General Conference also agreed to ask the Judicial Council – the denomination's high court – to consider whether the legislation violated the church constitution. Trouble emerged before that review [took] place. The Rev. L. Fitzgerald "Gere" Reist II, secretary of the General Conference, told the Council of Bishops in June 2012 that guaranteed appointment had not been eliminated after all. He noted that while delegates had changed the language of Paragraph 337 of the Book of Discipline, requiring appointment of elders in good standing, they had left intact similar language in Paragraph 334. Others disputed Reist's interpretation, but the Judicial Council rendered all debate moot on Oct. 26, 2012 by declaring that the petition to end guaranteed appointment was in fact unconstitutional. The council acknowledged that the denomination's constitution didn't directly state a right to appointment, but said the right was implicit in the constitution's Restrictive Rules III and IV, which protect the "itinerant general superintendency" and clergy's right to trial. In The UMC, elders are itinerant –they go where their bishops appoints them. The council also

noted that church law apart from the constitution had spelled out the right to security of appointment since 1956, and described the principle as “historic” in Methodism.

To Brooks, the council’s linking of guaranteed appointment to itinerancy and right to trial was “just absurd.” He and others particularly objected to describing as historic a principle first articulated in church law in 1956, given that Methodism dates to the 18th century. But the only option for fighting the ruling was to seek to change the constitution.

The lay leaders’ association’s petition is nothing if not direct, seeking to have the constitution state that a presiding bishop “has the authority, but not the obligation” to appoint a clergy member, and that Restrictive Rule IV does not mean right of trial equals guaranteed appointment. To the association, job tenure may work in academia, but it isn’t something a denomination declining in the United States can support. “The church is not immune,” said Steve Lyles, lay leader for the North Alabama Conference. “There has to be some accountability.” But others, like Brewington, see guaranteed appointment as a justice issue, providing protection for all elders – particularly women and minorities – from capricious or otherwise unfair actions by bishops. (Brewington is married to an elder.)

The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, vice president and general manager of Good News said ending guaranteed appointment would give bishops too much power and hurt recruitment of young clergy. “There is already a process to deal with (clergy) ineffectiveness in the Book of Discipline, one that includes the safeguards of ‘due process,’” Lambrecht said by email. “I have heard that some consider the process ‘too cumbersome’ and hence will not use it. The process of safeguarding fairness and justice is sometimes more work, but is consistent with our Christian values.”

The Rev. Ken Nelson, coordinator of clergy services in the South Carolina Conference and delegate to General Conference 2016, said congregations are harmed when ineffective clergy are simply “passed around.” But he believes the church has an obligation to work with clergy to increase their effectiveness in a fast-changing church environment, and often fails to do so. While he would be open to ending guaranteed appointment if rock-solid monitoring guarantees were in place, to make sure no groups were being “exited” disproportionately, he’s wary otherwise. “I am in support of security of appointment in the sense that I believe it was, in part, a tool that created opportunity for women and people of color,” he said. Progress has been made on that front, but more needs to be done, Nelson added.

The Study of Ministry Commission leading to this General Conference did not propose legislation regarding guaranteed appointment. Greater Northwest Episcopal Area Bishop Grant Hagiya, commission chair, was asked about that about that at the pre-General Conference Briefing. He noted that a lawyer for the Council of Bishops had advised that the Judicial Council ruling was too big an obstacle. Hagiya added: “We did not know that the lay leaders were going to take it up, and we’re glad that they did.” But changing the constitution requires at least a two-thirds vote of General Conference delegates. Then at least two-thirds of total voters across the annual conferences must endorse the change.

Brooks points out that the association’s petition would, if successful, only remove the constitutional barriers by the Judicial Council. More legislation would be needed to end guaranteed appointment. “We’re just paving the way so that if that is the will of the church, it can happen,” he said at the briefing. Brooks believes support for ending guaranteed appointment has increased since Tampa, but acknowledges that winning a super-majority on the plenary floor is daunting.

“I would say we have about a 50 percent chance,” he said.

– By Sam Hodges, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), March 29, 2016. Hodges is an UMNS.

+ General Conference prayer observance – A 131-day prayer observance. A 131-day prayer observance for the General Conference of The United Methodist Church (#UMCGC) began December 31. The quadrennial legislative event begins 131 days after the New Year; by coincidence, there are 131 annual (regional) conferences in The United Methodist Church. The Council of Bishops invited each of the annual conferences to host a 24-hour prayer effort on a specific date, with the intent of creating a groundswell of prayer in the days leading up to the General Conference. Each conference chose an available date and will design their own format for the prayer effort. As the spiritual leaders of The United Methodist Church, the Council of Bishops conceived the plan for a

prayer vigil in the months before the event as a meaningful way to focus spiritually on the experience, as well as to surround the delegates and church leaders with prayer for a General Conference that inspires us in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. “United Methodists from all over the world will come together in the spirit of Christian conferencing in Portland,” said Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett of the North Alabama Conference and chairperson of the “Council Life Together” team, which helped initiate the idea. “We want those attending to know that their United Methodist family is praying for them and with them -- that God will lead them in the decisions that they will make for the future of our church and that the event will be a positive Christian witness in how we conference together.”

“We are encouraging people to pray for God to guide delegates and church leaders as they prepare for General Conference,” said Bishop Al Gwinn, who chairs the Council’s prayer subcommittee. “We hope they will pray that God would give them an understanding and loving heart; that all will have a spirit of humility and a desire to do God’s will; and that the fruit of the Spirit would be evident in such a way that all who observe would sense that true Christian conferencing will take place.” – Originally from Dec. 2, 2015 UM Communications press release.

+ *Addressing immigration issues at GC2016.*

[Note: This is included because it will be a “hot button” topic at GC2016. Notice the rhetoric of personal interest stories and also the extent of UM involvement in this issue. What is not mentioned is the threat posed by terrorists coming into this country posing as illegal immigrants, nor the financial burden that threatens to sink our country economically. – AM]

...People crossing U.S. borders without proper documentation are breaking the law. For people of faith, is it a choice between what is right and what is legal? A petition before the 2016 General Conference would add [to the Social Principles]: “We oppose all national immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children.”

Keeping families together has long been at the heart of the church’s mission with refugees and immigrants. The National Justice for Our Neighbors (JFON), a United Methodist network of free legal clinics for immigrants, just filed a brief before the U.S. Supreme Court urging it to uphold President Barack Obama’s expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans program. Those executive orders focus on preventing families from being separated by deportation, said Rob Rutland-Brown, director of the National Justice for Our Neighbors. United Methodist Women members support the brief. UMW is among several of the church’s general agencies that are submitting new or updated resolutions on immigration to General Conference. Their proposed new resolution, “Stop Criminalizing Communities of Color in the U.S.,” addresses immigration enforcement as well as mass incarceration and criminalization of U.S. citizen communities of color, said Carol Barton, UMW executive for community action.

What kind of desperation must make a mother send her child to face the dangers of crossing the border alone? That is the question asked by the Rev. Fred Morris, pastor of North Hills United Methodist Church in Los Angeles. His church has a ministry with 48 children who were among the minors crossing the border in California. “We are helping them get legal representation, medical care, food assistance; it’s very minimal, but important,” Morris said. In San Antonio, retired United Methodist pastor the Rev. Albert Clayton and his wife Janice, a retired English professor, are helping the mothers and children who end up “dumped” at the bus station. The Claytons are members of the International Welcoming Committee formed in San Antonio by faith groups concerned about the people flooding across the border.

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño shared letters of encouragement with Regino Enrique at the immigrant welcome center at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in McAllen, Texas, in August 2014.

St. Francis of the Foothills United Methodist Church in Tucson, Arizona is one of 50 United Methodist churches that are part of the Sanctuary Movement that offers a safe place to live for undocumented workers under threat of being deported. The Sanctuary Movement is an ecumenical, faith-based movement that started in the 1980s and was re-formed in 2014. The Rev. Jim Wiltbank, pastor of St. Francis of the Foothills, said his

church was part of the movement in the 80s. “It is in our DNA, this church has always helped those overlooked and treated unfairly.” North Hills in Los Angeles is also part of the Sanctuary Movement.

[The Rev. Javier Leyva at the immigrant welcome center at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in McAllen, Texas] pointed out over half of the states have some form of proposed legislation to deter acceptance of refugees, particularly Syrian refugees. “And this is the most vetted group of immigrants that there are,” he said. “It is unfortunate that we are in the position of not wanting to welcome the most vulnerable class of individuals in the world who are seeking protection. It is not in our Christian tradition to turn them away.”

Rutland-Brown said it has been gratifying to work with United Methodists and other faith groups. “Many United Methodist churches and faith coalitions are resisting the inhumane, illegal treatment and flawed approaches to law enforcement,” the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, top executive of the Board of Church and Society wrote in an Ash Wednesday column. “Groups such as the United Methodist Immigration Task Force, the Sanctuary Movement, Church World Service and Justice for Our Neighbors are all actively engaged in caring for and aiding our neighbors.”

United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño, California-Pacific Conference, has been at the forefront of striving for a just immigration law for many years.

[Note: Leyva’s statement that, Syrian refugees are “the most vetted group of immigrants that there are” is, simply put, not true. The overwhelming majority of “Syrian refugees” are military-age males, with over 99% being Muslim. In addition, Bishop Carcaño has been at the forefront of this effort for years and active in pushing legislation that would legitimize this area. Her salary is paid out of the Episcopal Fund, which in turn is paid from UM Apportionments. – AOM]

– By Kathy L. Gilbert, March 18, 2016 (UMNS).

Homosexuality. *Allstate promoting a lifestyle that puts children at risk.*

Dear Supporter,

Allstate Insurance has produced a new 2-minute video about a little girl who will never know what it is like to have a mother. “Here’s to Firsts: Family” documents two gay men who reflect on getting “married” and adopting an infant girl in 2015. With one man’s arm around his male “wife,” one of them says about the child, “The second we held her, we knew that she was ours. We’re her dads,” he exclaims. The Allstate promotion does not share the reality that this child will grow up without the nurture that only a mother can provide. Nor does Allstate recognize the emotional trauma and questions this child will endure growing up in a home with two men.

Studies predominantly show that children raised in homosexual environments tend to struggle emotionally more than their peers, are highly more susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse, and often suffer severe depression as young adults. God has ordained that a traditional mother and father are the best for raising children. Allstate has abandoned God’s design for the family, and thus promotes a lifestyle that is not good for children.

If you are an Allstate customer, we encourage you to contact your local agent and share how disappointed you are.

– Tim Wildmon, President, American Family Association. The American Family Association, P O Drawer 2440, Tupelo, MS 38803. Tel: 662-844-5036. Received January 5, 2016.

Islam.

+ **Belgium.** United Methodists in Brussels safe after attacks.

[Note: You may wish to pass over this narrative, as others about Islam here. – AOM]

Two UM leaders and a mission team from the United Methodist East Ohio Conference are safe after traveling through the Brussels International Airport during the attacks, which have left more than 30 people dead and dozens injured. “I am thankful to God for the safety of our team,” said Bishop John Hopkins, East Ohio Conference. “I am praying for the people of Brussels as they recover from this terrible terrorist act.” Thomas Kemper, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, talked with Yeabu Kamara and Elvira Moises, agency board members who were in transit from New York to Africa through the Brussels airport. He tweeted that “both are safe in Catholic family’s home after traumatic experience at the airport.” Sierra

Leone Bishop John Yambasu said he heard about the attacks from United Methodist missionaries Clifford and Nancy Robinson, who were at the airport in Lungi, Freetown, on their way to the U.S. via the Brussels airport. “My guess is that Kamara and Moises, may not have been impacted, at least physically, by the attack ... The attack took place at the departure hall where passengers were checking in,” Yambasu said. “My heart goes to the more than 34 dead and over 170 wounded in the attack. The whole world needs to go on their knees and act for this inhumane carnage to stop in our world.”

United Methodist leaders who called for prayer spoke of remembering other violent attacks, including six gunmen who opened fire on civilians at a Côte d'Ivoire beach resort, a suicide car bombing in Ankara, Turkey, and more than a hundred incidents in various parts of the world just this year. “Thank you everyone for your prayers,” said Aaron Phillips of The Nehemiah Mission of Cleveland. “I experienced only the confusion of evacuation and police resolution. It's very weird.” Phillips was part of a five-person team returning from a 10-day mission trip to Ganta, Liberia, in West Africa. He and Paula Shaw of Hudson (Ohio) United Methodist Church were through security and near the departure gate when the deadly explosion occurred at the ticketing counter. Other team members were on a different flight from Brussels that departed before the explosion. Phillips and Shaw are currently “safe in Leuven looking for a new way home,” Phillips said in an interview with the East Ohio Conference.

The Conference of European Churches, which includes Methodists in Europe, condemned the violent attacks but urged “peaceful responses in the hours and days that follow.”

San Francisco Area Bishop Warner Brown Jr., the president of the Council of Bishops, said the news of this attack “comes on the heels of violence in other parts of the world, including Cote d'Ivoire earlier this month and more than a hundred incidents in various parts of the world just this year....”

– By Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS, March 22, 2016. Gilbert is a multimedia news reporter for UMNS. Linda Bloom, UMNS reporter in New York; Rick Wolcott, director of communications for the East Ohio Conference; Phileas Jusu, Sierra Leone; and E. Julu Swen, Liberia, contributed to this story. Contact Gilbert at (615) 742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org.

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). *Resurrection celebrated in town terrorists attacked.*

GRAND BASSAM, Côte d'Ivoire. United Methodist Bishop Benjamin Boni asked for God's blessings on this coastal town and every nation “going through the sad phenomenon of terrorism” during an Easter service in the town that was the site of a deadly terrorist attack that killed 19 people. The service was two weeks to the day after three gunman fired on beachgoers at the resort area that is popular with both tourists and locals. “Do not get into discouragement; do not let you go into anxiety,” Boni urged those attending a service at the Temple Eternity. “May the Lord help us promote life in a world marked by the culture of death. And Jesus told us to go everywhere and cultivate life, so that people can experience this abundant life that the risen Lord communicates to all men,” Boni continued.

United Methodists who packed the church to overflowing cheered the bishop's message of hope.

The Temple Eternity, about 150 meters (164 yards) from the scene of the attack, was deliberately chosen for this solemn worship. It is the oldest Methodist church in Côte d'Ivoire. For the occasion, this place of worship could not contain all the faithful since some came from other churches like Israel and Azuretty United Methodist churches.

Boni's sermon focused on “The third day is for you,” from 1 Corinthians 15:4, where Paul said Jesus rose on the third day, according to the Scriptures. The emphasis of his sermon was on the first and the second days – the passion, crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ that were days of confusion, doubt and sadness for the disciples. Those days, Boni said, represent Christians bogged down in difficulties and trials. He exhorted the faithful and all people of Grand Bassam and Côte d'Ivoire to maintain hope and to “think about the third day when everything seems dark because with Jesus Christ, the desert bloom again.”

The faithful, encouraged by the message of victory, prayed earnestly for Côte d'Ivoire and peace in the world as well as for the body of Christ.

Boni had visited the site of the March 13 attacks in his role as third vice president of the National Commission for Reconciliation and Compensation for Victims of the Crises in Côte d'Ivoire. He led a delegation to the site

four days after the attack. The group visited the administrative and traditional authorities, among them His Majesty Tanoé Amon, king of Inzima Kotoko. The delegation also visited the hotels where the attacks took place to bring compassion and encouragement.

– By Hervé Koutouan, UMNS; March 28, 2016. Koutouan is a United Methodist and a journalist in Côte d’Ivoire.

Pakistan.

+ *From Empty Tomb to Children's Graves.*

[Note: The description of this is graphic. You may wish to pass over this narrative, as others about Islam here. – AOM]

A horrific attack on the holiest of days brought parents to their knees, as 29 Christian children and more than 40 others were massacred by the Taliban on Easter. Three hundred were injured -- many critically -- by the explosives detonated by a suicide bomber next to a park where people had worshipped the risen Christ. “The target,” said members of the Pakistani Taliban, “was Christians.” [This attack] killed twice as many as the Belgium terrorists. Local hospitals and, soon, graves, will be filled with the agonizing evidence that these were not just “citizens,” but Christians, murdered by radical Muslims. Now, a place often filled with children’s laughter is instead a place of mourning, as families weep over the blood that still stains the concrete under the park swings where their sons and daughters spent their last moments. Unlike the United States, Europe is forcefully condemning the faith-based genocide. Prime Minister David Cameron (who did not use a spokesman) urged Britons to stand up for Christian values after the bombing in Lahore. “There was human flesh on the walls of our house,” one man said somberly. And there is blood on the hands of nations who do nothing to denounce this brutality as anything but the attempted annihilation of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) fiercely decried the targeting. “The evil that is radical Islamism struck in Pakistan today -- the very day we celebrate the resurrection of the Prince of Peace -- in a shocking display of savagery,” said Cruz. “Once again we are reminded there are no holidays from this enemy, and no one -- not commuters going to work in Brussels, not mothers and children celebrating Easter in a park in Lahore -- are immune from its wrath. We must redouble our resolve to band with friends and allies to defeat it. Our prayers are with our brothers and sisters in Pakistan.”

With fresh urgency, FRC hopes to draw attention to this and suffering like it in a special emphasis, Sunday, April 17 was: “Stand with the Persecuted.” Together with churches across the country, Open Doors USA, the Institute for Religion and Democracy, [Concerned Methodists], and Voice of the Martyrs, FRC is encouraging congregations to devote time in their weekend services to prayer for those around the globe who have been targeted for no other reason than their faith in Jesus Christ. While believers face growing hostility in America, we have experienced nothing like the mistreatment, displacement, violence, rape, crucifixions, and beheadings experienced by followers of Jesus in Iraq, Syria, Libya, other parts of the Middle East and beyond.

Join us as we stand in solidarity with fellow Christians by visiting our website: FRC.org/Stand.

– Tony Perkins, Family Research Council (FRC), Washington, DC.

+ *Easter attack on Pakistan’s Christians.*

As Easter Sunday ended in Lahore, Pakistan, Bishop Sammy Azariah was still at a hospital visiting those injured by a suicide bomb attack in a public park where many Christian families were celebrating the holiday. Azariah – the moderator of the Church of Pakistan – reported that a number of people from the church were injured in the attack. Lahore is the historic center of Christianity in Pakistan. The official death toll stood at 70 on March 28, including at least 29 children. The Pakistani Taliban's Jamaat-ur-Ahrar faction claimed responsibility, according to Reuters, and said it was targeting Christians. “The continued experience of the cross is not only painful, but does strengthen (us) to move forward in hope for healing and reconciliation,” said Azariah, who noted he had met some of the victims at the Easter sunrise service. “Please continue to pray for peace, and wisdom upon the religious and political leaders of the world, especially Pakistan, to deal with this menace of religious extremism and violence in unity and with firmness,” he said.

For Thomas Kemper, top executive for Global Ministries, the Easter Sunday attack evoked both prayers and “a sense of outrage” over the horror and inhumanity. Kemper expressed his sorrow to the families of those killed, the many injured and the Church of Pakistan. In a statement, he called for prayer in the face of “a never ending series of violence against the minority Christian community of Pakistan. Again and again we pray for peace, reconciliation, and safety for all the people of that troubled country. While we condemn their actions, we also pray for the perpetrators, asking God to lead them to the righteousness of nonviolence.”

The United Methodist Church maintains ties and ministries with the Church of Pakistan, a united Protestant denomination whose 1970 merger included Methodists. Currently, Global Ministries is helping support Insar Gohar, a church staff member, who is attending United Methodist Claremont School of Theology. Gohar lost two children and his mother when the All Saints Church in Peshawar, which dated from the 19th century, was bombed in September 2013. His wife, Uzma. Insar, was badly injured. Kemper said Christians in Pakistan have endured “decades of violence at the hands of extremist factions within the major Muslim population. They endure with a remarkable resilience that should be an example to followers of Jesus Christ everywhere, showing strength in the face of hardship and faith in the love of God in all circumstances.” Rachel Lampard, vice-president designate of the British Methodist Conference, visited the Church of Pakistan in Lahore earlier this month and posted a prayer on Facebook in response to the terrorist attack. “We hold before you the Christians and the Muslims who are working for reconciliation in Pakistan,” the prayer said in part. “Who bravely speak out against injustice, and demonstrate that Christianity and Islam are religions of peace.” The Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, head of the World Council of Churches, called the attack “particularly shocking” for its targeting of young children enjoying Easter Sunday afternoon in Gulshan-e-Iqbal park. “In the face of this brutality, the human family, all people of faith and of good will, must stand together to recommit to respecting and caring for one another, to protecting one another, and to preventing such violence,” he said in a statement. Tveit called upon Pakistan’s government to protect all people in Pakistan. “The principle of freedom of religion and belief for all people must be affirmed and protected in Pakistan, and throughout the world, as a fundamental ethical and legal responsibility of government.”

Azariah is a member of the World Council of Churches Central Committee. Earlier this month, he and the Church of Pakistan in Lahore hosted a conference, “Pilgrimage of Life towards Reconciliation,” which brought together representatives from all dioceses in Pakistan, as well as several international partners from Norway. The focus was on interreligious cooperation, both in Norway, with its minority Muslim population, and in Pakistan, with its majority Muslim population.

Marvin Pervez, the former director of the Afghanistan/Pakistan program of Church World Service who now leads Community World Service Asia, told United Methodist News Service that his team and their families were safe but in mourning. “Pakistanis all around the country are in shock at the barbaric attack at the children's park,” he said. “First, they came for Malala, who was an advocate for education and now they are attacking our schools, universities and parks,” Pervez added. “They are trying to hit us where it hurts the most, our kids. “But we, as a nation, have decided that we want a just, fair, equal and democratic Pakistan (and) these terror groups will not weaken our resolve,” he said. “We are grateful to friends and communities around the globe who are showing solidarity and praying for Pakistan.”

– By Linda Bloom,

UMNS, March 28, 2016.

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Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive. – C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*

Global Outlook

Every religion is, at its core, exclusivist. – Dr. Ravi Zacharias, Christian apologist from India

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Liberia. New mission station dedicated in Liberia.

BOPOLU CITY, Liberia. The United Methodist Church in Liberia dedicated a mission station in Gbarpolu County in northwestern Liberia on March 27. With three churches and three preaching points, the Bopolu

Mission Station is the denomination's fifth mission station in Liberia. The other four are Gbarnga in Bong County, Ganta in Nimba County, Weala in Margibi County, and Diecke in the Republic of Guinea, a provisional conference of Liberia.

United Methodist Bishop John Innis said the mission station was the church's way of showing love for the people of Gbarpolu County and all those who will benefit from the facilities. "We are now demonstrating our love for the people of Gbarpolu, especially the children who are now attending the school and will become future leaders of Liberia," Innis said. "This mission station is now providing jobs for residents of Bopolu City and individuals from other parts of the county," lay pastor Shaffa Seward said, noting more than 80 percent of the mission station staff are indigenous people from Gbarpolu County.

The 3.6 acre station includes a school, clinic, church and parsonage. The \$150,000 station was funded by several overseas partners, including churches in the United Methodist Virginia Conference.

– By E. Julu Swen, UMNS; March 29, 2016. Swen is communicator for The United Methodist Church in Liberia.

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Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God. – William Carey, May 1792