

Monthly Update

November 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

We are including in our regular November Update a supplement containing historical celebrations of Thanksgiving going all the way back to the earliest days of our country. Someone has once said, “In order to know where you are going, you need to know where you come from.” While that is not good grammatical English, in its folksy way, it does tell us a truth. We do have many reasons for concern these days – but we need to also remember that we have many reasons to be thankful to a very gracious, infinitely kind God who knows each one of us by name. This puts things in perspective.

This edition of the Monthly Update contains more information on the fallout from the consecration of Karen Oliveto, a self-professed lesbian, as bishop of the United Methodist Church. Make no mistake about it, this is something that has shaken world-wide Methodism to its core. On behalf of Concerned Methodists, I met with Bishop Bruce Ough at his office in Minneapolis, Minnesota to discuss concerns in this area and the impact it will have on our worldwide connection; I had recommended that “special 2018 General Conference” be called to take up the special commission’s recommendations, but defer all decisions until the 2020 General Conference. In addition, I assured him that we in Concerned Methodists oppose any schism in our United Methodist Church but are committed to working out our differences within the structure as it exists. I sensed that he is aware of the serious implications for our denomination. Then I flew to Chicago to participate in a meeting of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, evangelicals standing for our orthodox doctrine. It was good to see Dr. Jerry Kulah and others from Liberia.

During this very dangerous time for, not only our beloved United Methodist Church, but also for our country and the world, we need to be much in prayer. In a little over a week, we will have our elections that will determine who will lead our country. I firmly believe that this will be possibly the most important election in the last 150 years, if not the entire history of our nation. The American Family Association, founded by United Methodist pastor Don Wildmon, is calling for a day of prayer and fasting on Monday, November 7th for the voting in the next day’s election, especially for the next president of our country.

In addition I would ask that you keep our servicemen in your prayers for their continued service, especially those who are in harm’s way overseas against one of the most vicious enemies the world has ever known. I would again commend to you Psalm 91, that you would open your Bible to that chapter, and read it out loud as a verbal prayer to God of protection around the United States of America against all enemies – foreign and domestic. Assuredly, we do live in perilous times – but it may be that we are called “for such a time as this” to be living witnesses for our Lord Jesus Christ.

I do thank you for your support and prayers. They are an essential part of our ministry as we continue to “contend for the faith” as we are called.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

November 2016 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Closed because of Matthew. Thankfully, Mark, Luke, and John are behaving themselves.

– Sign in a LifeWay Christian Store, seen during the recent Hurricane Matthew

* * * * *

The Good Stuff

+ ***Hurricane Matthew***. “Our week of distribution has sadly come to an end. I want to send a shout out to all of the staff and students that spent their week in service. We saw first hand what God can do when we work together in unity as the body of Christ. To God be the glory! Just a few special facts from the week...

1. We served 425 families thru the on-site distribution center.

2. We distributed relief supplies to: Agape Crisis Pregnancy Center, Balm in Gilead, Operation Blessing, Bladen County United Way, The Gray's Creek Community, The Lumberton High School Rescue Shelter, East Lumberton Baptist Church, Nurses on shift at Lumberton Hospital, NC Baptist Men's Disaster Relief/Red Cross, Fayetteville Animal Protection Society, Habitat for Humanity, Nazerene Disaster Response.

3. We received donations from: The Mormon Church Ladies, The Fort Campbell Kentucky Community, Spartanburg, South Carolina, Charlotte, North Carolina, Manna Church, Refuge Church, A Woman's Place, Total Government Contract Solutions and over 150 individual families.

4. We received over \$3500 in cash and gift card donations.

5. We signed in 290 volunteers including students and adults from: FCS [Fayetteville Christian School], FTCC [Fayetteville Technical Community College], Methodist College, 71st High School, WestOver High School, Western Harnett Middle/High School, Overhills High School, Pine Forest High School, St. Pauls Middle School, Home School [Association], LaFayette Baptist Church, 9 of my immediate family members and our wonderful FCS staff!!

6. Lastly.....I apparently became the sponsor for one young man's Eagle Scout project. :)

I personally was blessed to watch each of you flowing in your natural giftings....the organizers, the leaders, the helpers, the cleaners, the care givers, the worker bees...what a joy to see His people at work! Thank you all again for an amazing week!”

– Posted on FaceBook by Ms. Crissy Parker, music instructor at Fayetteville Christian School, Fayetteville, North Carolina. Editorial note: Fayetteville Christian School was cited by the *Fayetteville Observer* newspaper as being one of two local organizations that took an active role in assisting area victims immediately after Hurricane Matthew pummeled the East Coast, and especially North and South Carolina. – AOM

+ With the call for prayer and fasting for our upcoming presidential elections issued by the American Family Association

(AFA) as mentioned in our cover letter, I thought it might be good to include a similar call by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, on March 30, 1863, when he “proclaimed a National Day of Humiliation, Fasting

and Prayer” for the state of the country. I believe that the words he formulated back then are as applicable today as that time:

“...We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven. We have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown.

But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us!

It behooves us then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

How can we as Americans in 2016 do any less? AFA is joining countless churches, organizations, and individuals in calling for a national day of prayer and fasting. It is time that we, as Christians, recognize our need to repent of our own wickedness and cry out to the Lord for forgiveness - and that He might heal our broken land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

We should heed the voice of President Lincoln. He was the man who steered our nation through its greatest crisis, and he knew that God was the only one who could save us. AFA has designated Monday, November 7, as a day when I am asking you to join me in seeking God's face. However you participate – one meal, two meals, all day – please join me and others who will be crying out for mercy. Encourage your church’s clergy, your fellow church family members, neighbors, friends, and relatives to join in.

Sincerely, Bert Harper, Director of Marriage, Family, and Pastoral Ministries, American Family Association

Of Interest. *Hurricane Matthew – Recommendations.* Here in North Carolina we are recovering from Hurricane Matthew, but those in Haiti still face severe problems. A few things that I learned in growing up along the Texas Gulf Coast where we got hurricanes in every year and that I have done are:

1. Keep a medium size cooler filled with drinkable water.
2. Any space in my refrigerator that is not taken up by food is used to store water, as many one gallon jugs as possible, with the rest being 20 ounce bottles.
3. Any space in my freezer that is not used for food is used for ice, with one gallon jars of water frozen.
4. I have flashlights, candles, army heat tabs and matches in addition to can food. That way, for extended power outages, I can still fix meals to supplement the canned meat that does not need to be heated. With the modest lifestyle that I have, I don't see a need for a generator.

I learned the hard way the value of steps #2 and #3. One time when I was on travel and a hurricane hit my home, we had a power outage that lasted for several days. At that time my freezer was filled with venison and alligator meat. I lost it all. The value of steps 2 and 3 is that if you keep the doors closed to your refrigerator and freezer, the insulation will keep the food cold for at least three days, and possibly longer.

Human Sexuality.

+ *The UM Council of Bishops has announced the membership of the Commission on a Way Forward.*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The United Methodist Council of Bishops has announced the membership of the Commission on a Way Forward. “After three months of diligent and prayerful discernment, we have selected 8 bishops, 11 laity, 12 elders and 1 deacon to serve on the Commission,” said Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the Council of Bishops. “This group is representative of our theological diversity.” Ough said the makeup of the 32-member commission is roughly comparable to U.S. and Central Conference membership. All members of the Commission have already indicated their willingness and availability to serve. The team of moderators, Bishop Ken Carter, Bishop Sandra Steiner-Ball and Bishop David Yemba, will soon convene the Commission to begin to organize their work and finalize their meeting schedule.

The Commission’s mission is to “bring together persons deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church, with an openness to developing new relationships with each other and exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional and central conference actions.” The 2016 General Conference gave a specific mandate to the Council of Bishops to lead The United Methodist Church in discerning and proposing a way forward through the present impasse related to human sexuality and the consequent questions about unity and covenant.

The Commission is a group appointed by the Council of Bishops to assist the Council in fulfilling this mandate. As such, the Council has appointed bishops from across the global connection to serve on the Commission alongside laity and clergy. While clergy and laity will vote at a General Conference on these matters, the bishops have the responsibility to lead the church. Thus, the Commission is designed to inform the Council’s leadership of the General Conference. After hearing concerns that the proposed composition did not include enough laity, three additional laypersons were added from the original pool of more than 300 nominees.

– UMNS release, October 24, 2016.

+ **Bishops name commission members.** The Council of Bishops has announced the 32 United Methodists who will serve on the commission charged with bridging the denomination’s deep divisions on homosexuality and fostering church unity. “After three months of diligent and prayerful discernment, bishops have selected eight fellow bishops, 11 laity, 11 elders and two deacons to serve on the commission,” said Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the Council of Bishops, in a statement. “This group is representative of our theological diversity.” The number of laity marks an increase from the eight the bishops initially planned to appoint. Even before names became public, some United Methodists called on bishops to consider adding more laity to the commission. More than 500 people signed an online petition urging just that, which the bishops received on Laity Sunday, Oct. 16. The bishops’ statement said they added the laity after hearing the concerns. The bishops chose the commission members from a pool of more than 300 nominees. Three additional bishops will serve as moderators of the Commission on a Way Forward. They are Florida Area Bishop Ken Carter, West Virginia Area Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and Central Congo Area Bishop David Yemba. Carter is set to become Council of Bishops president in 2018.

The new Commission on a Way Forward is forming just as the intensified debate related to homosexuality threatens to splinter the denomination. General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking assembly, in May authorized the bishops to form the commission just a day after rumors of a potential split reached a fever pitch. General Conference called on the commission to completely examine and possibly recommend revisions of every paragraph in the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s law book, related to human sexuality.

But more than just discussions about homosexuality and biblical interpretation will be on the commission’s agenda, bishops have said. The commission will examine new ways to be in relationship across cultures and

church structures. The body also will look at ways to redefine what it means to be a connectional denomination. “The commission will design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible,” Ough wrote in July.

Eleven of the group members, including four bishops, come from central conferences – church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. Specifically, seven are from Africa, two from the Philippines and two from Europe. About 40 percent of the denomination’s 12.4 million members live outside the United States. Fourteen members, including two bishops, are women. The commission will be dealing with a denomination that, the bishops attest, is in a fragile state. The Book of Discipline since 1972 has proclaimed all people are of sacred worth but “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” The denomination bans the ordination of “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy and the officiation of same-gender weddings. Church members have debated these policies. However, that disagreement has intensified as openly gay individuals have gained more public acceptance in much of the world, more countries including the United States have legalized these “same-gender civil marriage” and more UMs have openly defied the bans.

In recent months, more than 100 United Methodist clergy and candidates have come out as gay, multiple conferences have urged noncompliance with church prohibitions related to homosexuality, and the Western Jurisdiction has elected and consecrated Bishop Karen Oliveto, who is openly gay and married.

Meanwhile, The Wesleyan Covenant Association, a new group started to boost the denomination’s evangelical voice, has put the commission on notice against any break with current church teachings. The group’s Oct. 7 statement says any form of “local option” that leaves questions of ordination and marriage up to congregations or conferences is unacceptable. It also says that the commission needs to find a way to hold clergy accountable for violations or prepare for a denominational split.

Two of the commission members, the Revs. Jessica LaGrone and Thomas Lambrecht, are on the association’s leadership council. Two other members lead advocacy groups seeking to influence church policy related to homosexuality. Matt Berryman is the executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, an advocacy group that urges the denomination to include LGBTQ individuals in all aspects of church life, including ordination and marriage. He also is openly gay. Meanwhile, Patricia L. Miller is the executive director of the Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church, an advocacy group that urges the denomination to hold the line on homosexuality teachings.

Any recommendations from the new commission would need the approval of General Conference.

The Council of Bishops, set to hold its fall meeting Oct. 30 to Nov. 2 at St. Simons Island, Georgia, will make a decision about possibly calling a special General Conference in 2018 to take up the commission’s recommendations. The bishops also will review a plan to conduct complementary work in conferences designed to broaden the conversation with hundreds of lay and clergy members. It is not yet announced when or where the new commission will first meet.

Commission Membership. Commission members, listed in alphabetical order by last name, are: The Rev. Jorge Acevedo,

USA, Florida, elder, male; The Rev. Brian Adkins, USA, California, elder, male; Jacques Umembudi Akasa, Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, laity, male; The Rev. Tom Berlin, USA, Virginia, elder, male; Matt Berryman, USA, Illinois, laity, male; The Rev. Helen Cunanan, Philippines, elder, female; David Field, Europe, Switzerland, laity, male; Bishop Ciriaco Francisco, Philippines, bishop, male; Bishop Grant Hagiya, USA, California, bishop, male; Aka Dago-Akribi Hortense, Africa, Côte d’Ivoire, laity, female; Scott Johnson, USA,

New York, laity, male; The Rev. Jessica LaGrone, USA, Kentucky, elder, female; The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, USA, Texas, elder, male; Myungrae Kim Lee, USA, New York, laity, female; The Rev. Julie Hager Love, USA, Kentucky, deacon, female; Mazvita Machinga, Africa, Zimbabwe, laity, female; Patricia Miller, USA, Indiana, laity, female; The Rev. Mande Guy Muyombo, Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, elder, male; Bishop Eben Nhiwatiwa, Africa, Zimbabwe, bishop, male; Dave Nuckols

USA, Minnesota, laity, male; The Rev. Casey Langley Orr, USA, Texas, deacon, female; Bishop Gregory Palmer, USA, Ohio, bishop, male; The Rev. Donna Pritchard, USA, Oregon, elder, female; The Rev. Tom Salsgiver, USA, Pennsylvania, elder, male; Bishop Robert Schnase, USA, Texas, bishop, male; The Rev. Jasmine Rose Smothers, USA, Georgia, elder, female; Leah Taylor, USA, Texas, laity, female; Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett, USA, Alabama, bishop, female; Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Europe, Germany, bishop, female; Alice Williams, USA, Florida, laity, female; Bishop John Wesley Yohanna, Africa, Nigeria, bishop, male; and The Rev. Alfiado S. Zunguza, Africa, Mozambique, elder, male.

– By Heather Hahn, UMNS, Oct. 24, 2016. Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for UMNS. Contact her at: newsdesk@umcom.org. <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/bishops-name-commission-members>.

+ ***Meeting of The Wesleyan Covenant Association in Chicago.*** “I am convinced God is doing a new thing among those of us who claim the historic, orthodox, evangelical, Wesleyan expression of our faith,” said the Rev. Dr. Jeff Greenway, lead pastor of Reynoldsburg (Ohio) United Methodist Church, in his presentation on the group’s purpose. “I believe we are planting seeds today – that when full grown – will bear the fruit of a vital Wesleyan witness and a dynamic Spirit-filled Methodism across the globe.” The inaugural gathering was a high-energy mixture of affirmative messages on the Lordship of Jesus, the Wesleyan drive to transform the world through Christian discipleship and social holiness, and the centrality of the Scriptures in the life of the Church.

The Chicago event was also a show of solidarity to orthodox clergy and laity in sections of the church that no longer adhere to the global United Methodist views on marriage and sexuality. The new United Methodist evangelical group urged bishops and other church leaders to find a way to hold clergy accountable on matters of sexuality or prepare for a denominational split. The day-long event culminated with a communion service overseen by two United Methodist bishops. “We don’t live on the world’s wisdom, we do not exist on the world’s power,” said Bishop Mike Lowry of the Fort Worth Area of the Central Texas Conference, during his communion homily. “You know and I know it is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. What is at stake for us in this struggle we are in is not ultimately the issue of human sexuality; what is at stake for us is who is Lord, who rules, who saves us. We preach Christ and Him crucified.”

The gathering drew mostly people from the United States but also some UMs from across the African continent. The multinational United Methodist Church has about 12.4 million members in North America, Africa, Asia and Europe. “We believe it is imperative for the commission to propose a plan that calls for accountability and integrity to our covenant, and restores the good order of our church’s polity,” the association’s statement said. If the commission decides such a plan is impossible, the association says the group “should prepare a plan of separation that honors the consciences of all the people of the church and allows them to go forward in peace and good will.” The Rev. Chris Ritter, one of the association’s organizers and directing pastor of a multi-site United Methodist congregation around Geneseo, Illinois, introduced the statement to those assembled. He said it calls for the virtues of integrity and accountability. “If we are one church, we need to stop acting like two churches,” he said. “If we are two churches, we need to stop pretending we are one. I say this as someone who has worked for unity of the church.”

Nicene Affirmation. Interspersed between messages calling for a revitalized Wesleyanism, WCA leaders crowd-sourced affirmation of its theological underpinnings, purpose, and moral principles. “We are reciting the Nicene

Creed today without crossing our fingers behind our backs,” said Dr. Bill Arnold, professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, before leading the group in the ancient affirmation of faith.

It also christened a new leadership team through audience affirmation by applause and “amens.” As the council members began their work together they elected Dr. Jeff Greenway as the group's chairperson; the Rev. Carolyn Moore, pastor of Mosaic United Methodist Church outside of Augusta, Georgia, as vice chairperson; the Rev. Madeline Carrasco Hennes, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Luling Texas, as secretary; and Ferrell Coppedge, lay leader of Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church in Marietta, Georgia, as treasurer. With more than 1,800 participants, the Donald E. Stevens Convention Center near O’Hare Airport in Chicago was flooded with enthusiastic United Methodists from every conference across the denomination in the United States and from ten conferences in Africa.

Chicago Statement. Through a “Chicago Statement” that was affirmed by a standing ovation and cheers, the group asked the Council of Bishops to “swiftly name the members” of the Commission on the Way Forward and “approve the call for a special General Conference in early 2018 to enable resolution of the conflict that divides us before further harm is done to United Methodist members, congregations, conferences, and ministries.” [Note: I disagreed with that step.] “We believe it is imperative for the commission to propose a plan that calls for accountability and integrity to our covenant, and restores the good order of our church’s polity,” states the Declaration. “If the commission determines no such plan is possible, then we believe it should prepare a plan of separation that honors the consciences of all the people of the church and allows them to go forward in peace and good will.”

Preparing for Change. In the midst of dissension and uncertainty within United Methodism, leaders of the Wesleyan Covenant Association say the group was formed in order to bring a unifying voice of hope and encouragement to evangelicals and traditionalists as they face the future. “We don’t know what the future will bring,” said the Rev. Rob Renfroe, pastor of adult discipleship at The Woodlands (Texas) United Methodist Church, during his message to the group. “We are not here to promote schism. But we are not here to be naïve either. Change is coming to the United Methodist Church. We all know that. The bishops know that and many have said so publicly.”

The Book of Discipline, the denomination’s book of teachings and law, has stated since 1972 that all individuals are of sacred worth but the practice of homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian teaching.” A majority of delegates to

General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking assembly that typically meets every four years, has consistently voted to keep that language. Over the years, the lawmaking body has increased restrictions related to homosexuality. The Wesleyan Covenant Association’s membership regards United Methodist teachings on homosexuality as biblical orthodoxy and supports the denomination’s ban on same-sex unions and the ordination of “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy. Given that track record, Renfroe described the new association as the “true centrists” within the denomination.

The Rev. Dr. Jerry Kulah, the West Africa Central Conference Coordinator of the UMC Africa Initiative, reminded the group about the importance of choosing the right way when two divergent paths are presented at a crossroad. “The only sustainable path to global unity of the people called United Methodist is total submission and loyalty to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and an exclusive obedience to the Word of God as primary authority for faith and Christian living,” said Kulah, the dean of the Gbarnga School of Theology (United Methodist) in Liberia. “While we live within diverse cultures and religious worldviews, it is important that we love and embrace everyone, but we must continually live within God’s parameter of grace defined by Scripture.”

Tamed by Culture. “Wesley’s great fear was that the Methodist movement would – in a process that had happened again and again over the centuries – be tamed by the culture until it was nothing more than a docile lapdog,” said the Rev. Dr. Andrew Thompson, a Wesley scholar and pastor of First United Methodist Church in Springdale, Arkansas. “He was afraid that Methodism’s engagement with the culture would dilute it until it was a shell of its former self.”

In his opening sermon, the Rev. Kenneth Levingston, senior minister of Jones Memorial United Methodist Church in Houston, said that the “core of our struggle” is when men, women, and the Church attempt to put other things in God’s rightful place. “Salvation without sacrifice is a false god. Sanctification without submission is a false god,” he said. “Mercy and grace without truth and transformation are false gods. Social holiness without Scripture is a false god. Forgiveness without faithfulness is a false god. Redemption without renunciation of sin is a false god. Unity without covenant is a false god,” concluded Levingston.

Throughout the day, many of the speakers exhorted United Methodists to live out a vibrant form of Wesleyan Christianity, one that envelopes deep spirituality, passionate worship, and meaningful outreach for people of all walks of life, especially the downtrodden. “We meet not just to find a way forward, but to remember how we found The Way, the Truth, and the Life in the first place,” said the Rev. Jessica LaGrone, Dean of the Chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary. “And to remember that to fully know life is not just to be rescued from something, but to be rescued for something. To become the rescued and transformed means to be those intent on the rescue and transformation of others.”

– By Heather Hahn (Chicago), UMNS. Oct. 7, 2016. E-mail sent by an associate.

(UM) Judicial Council. *Judicial Council takes up gay ordination issue.*

[Note: At the time of this news release, the Judicial Council meeting had not yet occurred. It is important to follow these actions and those of the Judicial Council at its meeting in the Spring relating to the consecration of Karen Oliveto, a self-professed lesbian, as “bishop” by the Western Jurisdiction, in violation of United Methodist Church law. If they rule that it violates church law and is therefore, “null and void” they will risk a major disruption in that the Western Jurisdiction might seek to separate itself from the rest of the United Methodist Church. If they fail to rule that the action is unconstitutional, major disruptions will occur and we may find that our United Methodist connectional system is in fact broken. Assuredly, the decisions made by the UM Judicial Council will be of extreme importance. – AOM]

NEW YORK (UMNS) – A controversial decision by United Methodists in New York last June to commission and ordain openly gay clergy candidates is one of the 11 items on the agenda of the denomination’s top court this month. The fall meeting of the United Methodist Judicial Council will take place Oct. 25-28 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Lisle, Ill., in the Chicago area. Oral hearings are scheduled on two docket items. This is the first deliberative session of the 2016-2020 Judicial Council, which includes five new members elected in May during General Conference 2016 in Portland, Oregon. The council will review two separate cases – from New York and Northern Illinois – regarding a bishop’s decision of law over whether the conference board of ordained ministry “is required to ascertain whether a candidate meets the qualifications for candidacy and ordained ministry, including whether or not she or he is exhibiting ‘fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness’ or is a ‘self-avowed practicing homosexual.’ The UM Book of Discipline has long stated that all individuals are of sacred worth but the practice of homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

In the New York case, the request for a ruling from Bishop Jane Allen Middleton, submitted by Steven M. Knutsen, also asked whether the board of ordained ministry can legally recommend candidates that its members believe to fit those descriptions. He asked whether such candidates are even eligible to be candidates for any stages of the ordination process or for appointment as a United Methodist clergy member. He also questioned

whether a bishop commissioning and/or ordaining an ineligible candidate is “a valid act of ministry.” In her decision of law, Middleton wrote that it would be “improper” for a bishop to make a decision related to the authority “reserved to other organizations, bodies and divisions in the Constitution.” She also found questions relating to a candidate’s eligibility to be “hypothetical” in the absence of specific facts and ruled them out of order.

In Northern Illinois, the Rev. Scott Field’s request for a bishop’s decision of law about what the board of ordained ministry is required to do also asked whether the board can “legally recommend to the clergy session a candidate whom they believe to be in violation of the fidelity, celibacy, or definition of marriage standard.” Bishop Sally Dyck ruled both requests “moot and hypothetical.” A motion made by Field on the first question, while discussed in the clergy session, was defeated, she wrote, so no action had occurred to warrant a decision of law. Because “no one knows for sure” if the board recommended candidates “who have a sexual identity, behavior, history or belief in violation of the stated disciplinary paragraphs,” the second question also was hypothetical, the bishop said. She pointed out that Field did not make a request for a declaratory decision, which would need a two-thirds recommendation of the annual conference/clergy session.

Another docket item involves a decision of law by Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar regarding a resolution passed by the 2016 New England Annual Conference. He ruled that parts of the resolution, “Action of Non-Conformity With the General Conference of The United Methodist Church,” violate church law.

Oral hearings. The council’s meeting begin Oct. 25 with two oral hearings, which are open to the public. The first hearing, at 8:30 a.m., is an appeal by the Rev. Errol Leslie of the decision of the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Appeals upholding a decision related to his Jan. 11-12, 2016, church trial by the Florida Annual Conference. The trial court found Leslie guilty of charges of sexual misconduct, immorality and disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church and terminated his clergy membership in the New England Annual Conference. In a related docket item, Judicial Council is asked to review of a subsequent decision by Devadhar of the New England Conference that the Book of Discipline supports the right of the Florida trial court to revoke membership in a different conference. A second oral hearing will focus on a request by the Texas Annual Conference for a declaratory decision on matters relating to the final disposition of a penalty for a church trial in 2012. The conference membership of the Rev. Carla Badgett was later terminated as a result of the trial. In a related docket item, Judicial Council is asked to review a decision by Bishop Janice Riggle Huie that a question about fair process rights related to the Badgett situation was an “improper request” because the episcopacy lacks the authority to make substantive rulings on fair process, judicial process or administrative process.

Members of the 2016-2020 Judicial Council are: Ruben T. Reyes, N. Oswald Tweh Sr., the Rev. Luan-Vu Tran, Deanell Reece Tacha, Lídia Romão Gulele, the Rev. Øyvind Helliesen, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, the Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko, and Beth Capen.

– By Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), Oct. 17, 2016. Bloom is a UMNS multimedia reporter based in New York. newsdesk@umcom.org. <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/judicial-council-takes-up-gay-ordination-issue>.

(UM) Women/Women’s Issues. *United Methodist Women Annual Meeting Focuses on Identity, Mission.*

[The leadership of the United Methodist Women met] in their first annual meeting of the UMW board of directors, Sept. 30-Oct. 2 at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City. They were briefed on their organizational responsibilities as board members tasked with setting policy that will guide United Methodist Women. “We are participating in training, preparing, decision making and thinking about particular tasks, but we are also focused on the bigger picture,” United Methodist Women General Secretary Harriett Jane Olson said in

her opening address to the board. “One of the roles of the board and the staff leadership is to hold the vision for why we do what we do and what we want to embody.” United Methodist Women mission priorities for the quadrennium are: Climate Justice [read “radical environmental activism”], Economic Inequality [read “socialistic priorities”], Maternal and Child Health, and Criminalization of Communities of Color and Mass Incarceration [read “no accountability for behavior”].

– By Julia Chance, Posted: 10/12/2016. Julia Chance is managing editor of *Response*.

* * * * *

Friends are like balloons; once you let them go, you might not get them back.

Sometimes we get so busy with our own lives and problems that we may not even notice that we've let them fly away. Sometimes we are so caught up in who's right and who's wrong that we forget what's right and wrong.

Sometimes we just don't realize what real friendship means until it is too late.