

Monthly Update

August 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Monthly Update again addresses issues resulting from the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon. We are devoting a great deal of space and attention to those meeting on behalf of “A Way Forward” and their efforts to carry out the requirements that have been given to them – and the framework in which they are to work. More about that later.

I was involved in meetings and conferences in the Western North Carolina Conference, the Indiana Conference, the Mississippi Conference, and the Wisconsin Conference. All were productive and very well received.

One of the issues that has been much in the news is about the handicapped baby born in the United Kingdom – Charlie Gard. This is of especial concern to those of us who are pro-life. As Christians, we are familiar with the Scripture verse from John where Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life...” All life is sacred and we should do what we can to preserve it. This English couple was trying to do all they could to get their baby stabilized but were hindered by the hospital itself and then by the government. We are already familiar with what is happening in the Netherlands where assisted suicide is legal. This is a slippery slope on which life itself is trivialized. This, in turn will mean the killing of children, “old people” and “undesirables” – and will lead to an expanded list of those who are “candidates” to have their lives terminated. We need to always come down on the side of life and fight these trends with every measure at our disposal.

On a positive note – the Western Jurisdiction had petitioned the United Methodist Church’s Judicial (JD) to reconsider their decision in the Karen Olivetto case regarding her lesbian relationship – and the larger homosexual context; the JD declined to do so – unanimously. This was a strong affirmation of their decision – for which we are thankful.

Now, back to those meeting on behalf of “A Way Forward” and efforts to carry out their mandate: I don’t want to be premature but I am skeptical that they will arrive at a productive solution. This seems like their using bureaucratic measures to arrive at a solution that is – in the main – moral and spiritual. The Bible has spoken in this area.

Once again, I want to thank you for your standing and partnering with us by your prayers, information, and your gifts. Without you, we would not be able to do what the Lord has called us to. I would ask you to continue to pray for us, our United Methodist Church, and our country (Psalm 91). Remember – we are called to pray for those in authority. Please pray for our national leaders – that God would guide their decisions in what has become a very dangerous world.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

August 2017 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

A family can survive without a country, but a country cannot survive without the family.

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Of Interest.

+ *Satan's Meeting*. Satan called a worldwide convention of demons. In his opening address he said, "We can't keep Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth....We can't even keep them from forming an intimate relationship with their SAVIOR. Once they gain that connection with JESUS, our power over them is broken. So let them go to their churches; let them have their covered dish dinners, BUT steal their time, so they don't have time to develop a relationship with JESUS CHRIST. "How shall we do this?" his demons shouted. Satan answered, "This is what I want you to do":

"Distract them from gaining hold of their SAVIOR and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!"

"Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered....

"Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow."

"Persuade the wives to go to work for long hours and the husbands to work 6-7 days each week, 10-12 hours a day,

they can afford their empty lifestyles."

"Keep them from spending time with their children."

"As their families fragment, soon, their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work!"

"Over-stimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice."

"Entice them to play the radio or I-Pod whenever they drive." To keep the TV, DVDs, CDs and their PCs going

constantly in their home & see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-biblical music constantly."

"This will jam their minds and break that union with CHRIST."

"Fill the coffee tables with magazines and newspapers."

"Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day."

"Invade their driving moments with billboards."

"Have their noses in their 'Smartphones' checking Facebook or their text messages. Post! Text! Post! Text! Post!.."

"Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, mail order catalogs, sweepstakes, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services and false hopes."

"Keep skinny, beautiful models on the magazines and TV so their husbands will believe that outward beauty is what's

important, and they'll become dissatisfied with their wives."

"Keep the wives too tired to love their husbands at night. - - - Give them headaches too! If they don't give their

husbands the love they need, they will begin to look elsewhere. That will fragment their families quickly!"

"Give them Santa Claus to distract them from teaching their children the real meaning of Christmas."

"Give them an Easter bunny so they won't talk about HIS resurrection and power over sin and death..."

"Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. - - - Have them return from their recreation exhausted."

"Keep them too busy to go out in nature and reflect on GOD'S creation. Send them to amusement parks, sporting

events, plays, concerts, and movies Instead. Keep them busy, busy, busy!"

“And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled

consciences. Crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from JESUS. - -
- Soon
they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause.”

“It will work!”

“It will work!”

It was quite a plan!

The demons went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busier & more rushed, going here & there: having little time for their GOD or their families; having no time to tell others about the power of JESUS to change lives. I guess the question is, has the devil been successful in his schemes? You be the judge!!!!

Does “BUSY” mean: B-eing U-nder S-atan’s Y-oke?

– *Received from Mr. Martin Rasmussen.*

+ The Rev. John Grenfell, Jr. died Sunday, June 25, 2017. He was 86 years old. John was one of those United Methodist pastors who never really retired. He played ice hockey into his mid-60s, and always gave as good as he got. The passion he exhibited on the ice was an extension of how he lived his life: full-tilt, fearless, and filled with intensity. “John Grenfell’s life and ministry have had a profound influence on The United Methodist Church,” said the Rev. Dr. James V. Heidinger II, president emeritus of Good News. “Faithfulness to the message of the gospel remained the top priority for John. He was a pastor and church leader of unquestioned integrity – acknowledged even by those of a more liberal persuasion.” He had offered advice and assistance to pastors and churches all the way from Florida to Alaska.

– Multiple sources to include Rev. Walter Fenton.

A Way Forward.

+ ***Way Forward gets input on church future.*** The feedback to the Commission on a Way Forward gives a sense of the task ahead. The commission asked various United Methodists to describe their constituency’s “preferred future for our denomination regarding the nature, conditions and extent of the inclusion of LGBTQ people within the church.” The 32-member commission will sift through the responses when it meets starting July 19 through July 21. The group’s fourth meeting is closed to the public and takes place at an undisclosed location in the Chicago area.

General Conference in 2016 authorized the bishops to form the commission with the goal of finding “new forms and structures” that would allow unity in a church deeply divided over homosexuality. The commission is charged with completing an “examination and possible revision of every paragraph in our Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality.” Among those asked for feedback were unofficial advocacy groups and the 13 general church agencies as well as various local church pastors, lay leaders and seminary students. The commission sent out questionnaires and in some cases held focus groups. Each central conference – church regions in Africa, Asia and Europe – decided its own process for gathering input. The responses that groups released publicly or shared with United Methodist News Service show the different visions members have for the church they love. For some United Methodists, the future requires nothing less than enforcement across the board of the denomination’s bans on same-gender unions and “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy – no local variation. Good News, which has long advocated for maintaining those prohibitions, said in its statement that leaving such matters up to local congregations, conferences or jurisdictions “is not a viable solution.”...“It may be hard for progressives and centrists to understand, but many, if not most, traditionalists cannot participate in a church that allows its pastors and bishops to promote something they believe to be sinful even if they themselves are not required to do so,” the group’s statement said. The newly formed Wesleyan Covenant Association, echoing a statement from its first meeting in October, urged 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.” For

other United Methodists, the denomination's future requires nothing short of full inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in all aspects of church life, including ordination and marriage. Love Prevails, in its statement, said, "The only proper and Christian corrective to the unjust and prejudicial treatment our people have received at the hands of The United Methodist Church is the full and complete removal of all language in the Book of Discipline which categorically discriminates against LGBTQ people." The Queer Clergy Caucus, which has about 195 members, echoed that message in a video to the commission. Specifically, the group took issue with a ruling by the denomination's top court that says a same-sex marriage license can be seen as evidence of sexual activity. The Rev. David Weekley, speaking on behalf of the group, said its preferred future for LGBTQ people in the denomination is the same as its "preferred future for all – to fully and authentically respond and embrace the prevenient grace of God through baptism, membership in community, and response to vocational call." Reconciling Ministries Network, another group that has long advocated full inclusion, also responded to the commission with a video. Like the clergy caucus and Love Prevails, Reconciling Ministries Network calls for an end of "punitive practices" against LGBTQ individuals and allied pastors. "As equals at the table, we look forward to communion and conversation with all in a church where everyone is free to pursue ministry according to their convictions and context," the video said. "We believe God will be faithful to us all, sustaining us in new ways of doing ministry and being church that will lead to fresh expressions of God's expansive love." Dave Nuckols, a network board member, and Matt Berryman, the network's former executive director, are both commission members. The commission has at least three openly gay members, including Berryman. Still other United Methodists insist the commission cannot reconcile such divergent views and should move ahead to plan some form of separation. The Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church puts forth that view in its statement. "The commission must free itself of thinking of unity in terms of the denomination if it is to accomplish its purpose to 'move us beyond the impasse over the nature, conditions and extent of the inclusion of LGBTQ people within the church,'" the group said. "If we affirm Scripture and tradition on the issues that divide us, we may live in communion but not under common governance," the group added. The Wesleyan Covenant Association and Good News also raise the possibility of separation. Good News suggested some form of connection might be possible including a shared pension board, publishing house and United Methodist Committee on Relief.

However, the advocacy groups represent only a portion, albeit the most public, of the feedback to the commission. A number of pastors of large- and mid-sized United Methodist churches have expressed alarm at the prospect of such a split – especially if it means their congregations must vote on whether to align with a traditionalist or progressive side. In many churches, people with differing views on homosexuality attend church and do mission together side by side. In some cases, even married couples in these churches strongly disagree on the matter. The Rev. James Howell, senior pastor of 5,000-member Myers Park United Methodist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, wrote a blog arguing against such a divide. He was also among the pastors who responded to the commission. Though he can't remember his exact words to the panel, Howell told UMNS he sees churches like his can be models for a way forward. "We've been clear that we have a division of opinion on this issue, which we have aired openly, and are staying together quite well as a congregation embracing that disagreement," he said. "Our preference would be one, for the denomination to do what it's unlikely to do, and that is to acknowledge divergent approaches on this issue and let that be – as we do on dozens of other contentious issues, and so then two, not to be forced to choose."

The Rev. Adam Hamilton is the lead pastor of the best-attended United Methodist congregation in the U.S., Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. He also championed both the formation of the Way Forward commission and a proposal to let local churches decide whether to host same-sex unions and welcome gay clergy. "How have our lay people managed to stay in one church despite their differences over the question of same-sex marriage?" he told UMNS. "Love, mutual respect and enough humility to say, 'Though I don't think so, I could be wrong.' What unites us – our love for Christ, our theological convictions, and our living of the gospel – is much greater than what divides us." He added that he personally would like to see the Discipline changed "to recognize that United Methodists disagree on how we interpret the Scriptures regarding same-sex

relationships, and to create the space that allows pastors to exercise their pastoral ministry and ordination according to their conscience and convictions regarding same-sex marriage.”

Most agencies did not make their responses public. The Discipleship Ministries board plans to share its response with commission members visiting its quarterly meeting next week. United Methodist Communications, which encompasses UMNS, said in its statement that the agency strives to be objective and neutral in providing church members with information, news and resources “that represent the gifts and stories of the entire church.”...“As an agency, we hope to follow wherever the Spirit leads the church and tell the continued story of God’s work through our local churches while doing so,” the agency said.

Ultimately, anything the commission proposes will first go to the Council of Bishops, which will put together a report based on the commission’s proposals. The bishops have called a special General Conference to take up that report on Feb. 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis.

– By Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); July 19, 2017. UMNS Weekly Digest - Jul 28, 2017.

+ *The following is taken from the “A Way Forward” website.*

Information from the “Committee on a Way Forward” (COWF), July 25, 2017:

PRAYER: We pray together during the days we meet and covenant to pray for each other when apart.

STUDY: We study the Bible together.

LISTEN: We hear each other’s testimonies.

WORSHIP: We have spent time in worship.

HOLY CONFERRING: We engage in Christian conversation throughout our meetings.

COVENANT: We have a covenant that creates a Spirit-led structure for mutual accountability in love.

OUR CHARGE FROM THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS MISSION: “Exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination

in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional, and central conference actions”

VISION: “Maximize 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”

SCOPE: “Be open to new ways of embodying unity that moves us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality...Give consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality”

The Principles of a Way Forward:

Simplicity of Proposal

Allow for Contextualization of Structure

Fruitfulness in Mission is First

Creating “Space”

Multiplying Wesleyan Witness

Operating out of a “Heart of Peace”

Working with the Council of Bishops to prepare for General Conference

Resolution of Impasse

What Connects Us Now: Our Common Core; Jesus is the Vine; we are the Branches; The Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds; Articles of Religion/Confession of Faith; The General Rules; The Wesley Hymns; Disciplined Engagement with Scripture; Works of Piety, Mercy and Justice; Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist; Small Group Accountability and Support (Class and Band Meetings); A Connectional Way of Life that includes Superintendency, Itineracy, and Conferencing

Goals for the Final Report:

Driven by values of unity and mission

Common theological center

A new church will not look like the current church

Dynamic, flexible and contextual connectionalism

It may mean a way for groups to be in ministry separately while sharing some common ministry

Enable people with contradictory convictions to flourish

It may mean multiple versions of the Book of Discipline

Jesus' call to unity may look like associations or affiliated churches

Maintain global connection in loosely configured structure

Allowance for those who don't adopt a revised structure

Learnings about Contextualization:

The way forward cannot be an extension of our path of conflict

We need to escape our own assumptions about structure and polity

When you give people freedom, you get incredible creativity

Where we are: The Commission's work so far.

Learned Values

We value pushing the pendulum toward looser on structure and contextualization and tighter on naming the essentials of theology and doctrine.

We wish to honor differences in practices and non-essentials for the sake of contextual mission.

We value simpler structure and processes and a thinner Book of Discipline.

We value remaining connected in mission.

We support the freedom to contextualize.

We are exploring many creative ways of living together including "branches," "umbrella plans," "affiliated connections," "federated relationships," and more.

Our Global Context

Concerns and goals related to human sexuality vary widely across the globe.

The landscape in our Central Conferences is very different from the U.S. landscape.

Conferences are not of one mind on ordination and marriage of LGBTQ persons.

The global context is complex due to cultural, civic, and legal restrictions and freedoms that differ.

Some changes within the U.S. church may pose a potential threat to the vital mission of our Central Conferences.

Understanding and honoring the nuances of each central conference is critical.

The Essentials: What we have learned from love, wonder, and praise

A document produced by UMC's Committee of Faith and Order to Understand what it means to be the church.

The saving love of God is meant for all people

The saving love of God is transformative

The saving love of God creates community

It is a dynamic, relational unity, not a monolithic uniformity

We must differ in order to relate to context and realize particular gifts

We need forms of polity that are consistent with our core convictions

Honors scope of grace

Recognizes transformative nature of grace

Manifests the Love of Christ

Forms that serve the growth of community

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: The Colloquy at Emory University

Our History – Division, separation, mergers and branching out are part of our denominational history

Our Reality – The United Methodist Church is increasingly fragmented. Many believe some sort of separation is inevitable. We Don't Agree. Is the church's position on marriage and ordination an essential doctrine?

How Can the Past Inform the Future – Is there a historical or theological analogy to the current conflict?

Theological Diversity – Different lenses of liberation vs oppression and orthodoxy vs heresy.

Many advocated more geographical and cultural space between parts of the church

Identified Need – Identified the need to recover mission and passion of the church as a movement

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WHAT WE'VE HEARD: Listening and Feedback from the church*

Communion – The reality that we may live in communion but not under common governance

Context – Some envision a returning to a pre-1972 approach that allows for contextual ministry

Mission – Schism would be a tragic weakening of our mission while the current reality is also harming our mission

Heartfelt Convictions – Heartfelt differences between those who want a removal of current language and others who

affirm current language

Unity – What kind of unity can we provide so that we can live together?

Structure and Finances – We need enough structural freedom so that no one has to compromise their deeply held beliefs

Financial implications:

- pension liability
- support of Central Conferences
- support of hospitals, colleges, universities, etc.

* the church refers to feedback sent to the commission by individuals, churches, caucus groups, boards and agencies, laity, candidates for ministry, clergy, etc.

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WHERE ARE WE NOW?

JOHN 15 – The True Vine.

CONNECT WITH THE COMMISSION

[Note: Following are websites at which you may access information. – AOM]

www.umc.org/wayforward

wayforward@umcom.org

facebook.com/UMCforward

twitter.com/UMCforward

instagram.com/umcforward

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– United Methodist News Service

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues.

Charlie Gard Dies After Life Support is Switched Off. Charlie Gard passed away after his life support was switched off. Charlie was at the center of a massive international debate after the hospital where he was receiving treatment for a rare disease refused to allow an experimental treatment to help him and also refused transferring him to another hospital that would allow the treatment. Charlie's parents took their fight to numerous courts to protect his life but to no avail. Each of the courts and a British judge argued that it was in

Charlie's best interest to be removed from the life support. Charlie's mother, Connie, said: "Our beautiful little boy has gone, we are so proud of you Charlie."

Leading pro-life advocates mourned Charlie's death – saying it's a very concerning harbinger of things to come. The boy suffers from a rare mitochondrial disease and brain damage. On Monday, Connie Yates and Chris Gard decided to end the legal battle to get their son experimental treatment. Based on new evidence, the couple said Charlie's condition has deteriorated too much and there no longer is any hope of the experimental treatment working.

His parents and Great Ormond Street Hospital have been in a months-long legal battle over his treatment. Their final request to a judge this week was to be allowed to take Charlie home to die. On Thursday, a judge ruled that Charlie will be moved to hospice and his life support will be removed at a time not publicly disclosed. He will not be allowed to go home, as his parents wished. Charlie's parents have long expressed the desire to be allowed to take him home to die. However, their first choice was to take Charlie to the United States for an experimental treatment. They raised more than \$1.5 million for his medical care. His parents said they knew the chance of the experimental treatment working was slim, but they wanted to try anyway for Charlie's sake.

However, the courts and hospital refused to allow them to transfer their son to another hospital. About a month ago, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the hospital can remove Charlie's life support and allow him to die. However, the hospital later agreed to consider new evidence involving Charlie's condition before taking him off the ventilator. But on Monday, lawyer Grant Armstrong said experts confirmed that it is too late to treat their son. The BBC reported Armstrong "told the presiding judge Mr. Justice Francis that US neurologist Dr Michio Hirano had said he was no longer willing to offer the baby experimental therapy after he saw the results of a new MRI scan last week."

Hirano previously said Charlie had an 11 percent to 56 percent chance of benefiting from the experimental treatment. He and a group of doctors examined Charlie last week and gave their expert opinions to the judge. Questions remain about whether Charlie could have benefited from the experimental treatment, had it not been delayed for months during the legal battle between Charlie's parents and the hospital. The court battle began in March.

Their last request to take Charlie home to die also was denied. "We promised Charlie every day we would take him home. It seems really upsetting, after everything we've been through, to deny us this," his mother said. The hospital opposes the parents' request. Its lawyers argued that Charlie needs to stay at the hospital or go to a hospice facility until he dies. Doctors claimed his ventilator will not fit through the door of his parents' home; he could suffer a painful death.

Despite all of his problems, Charlie's parents – and millions like them – believe that Charlie is a valuable, living human being who should be given a chance to live. Leading pro-life advocates helped Charlie's parents fight for his life. Charlie's parents brought Terri Schiavo's brother Bobby Schindler to London to help them fight for care for their son. Schindler spoke with LifeNews exclusively about their invitation. Schindler told LifeNews: "We are here by invitation from the family to come alongside them as they struggle to save their son, Charlie. The critical issue here is not a political one, but the simple notion that families know what is best for their loved ones."

"Charlie's situation is very reminiscent of my family's battle to save my sister, Terri. Hopefully being here can help his parents, Connie and Charlie, deal with the day-to-day emotional roller coaster, as they fight for their son's right to live," Schindler added.

[Note: This is alarming in that we see the consequences of state-run health care – of courts making decisions over and above those of the parents for their child. We believe that the relationship between parents and their children is God-ordained within the family. If not stopped, this could be the future for those of us in America. – AOM]

– Steven Ertfelt; LifeNews.com; Wsdhinhyon, DC; July 28, 2017.

(UM) Judicial Council. Judicial Council Denies Motion for Reconsideration. The United Methodist Church's Judicial Council has declined a request to reconsider a portion of its April 2017 decision regarding the

consecration of an openly lesbian bishop. In a brief email to Mr. Richard Marsh, an attorney representing the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops in its bid for reconsideration, the Rev. Lui Tran, Council secretary, wrote, “After careful review and prayerful consideration, the Motion to Reconsider [Judicial Council Decision] 1341 of the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops has been denied.” Tran also noted the Council’s decision to deny was unanimous.
– By Walter Fenton

[Note: This is a good decision on two counts: 1] The request was denied, 2] The decision was unanimous. – AOM]

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If you sacrifice principle trying to please everyone, you end up pleasing no one. ~ John Wooden

Global Outlook

It cannot be that the people should grow in grace unless they give themselves to reading.

A reading people will always be a knowing people. ~ John Wesley

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Albania. *Albanian church holds national convention.*

GJINAR, Albania – The United Methodist Church in Albania’s first national convention provided a time of fellowship for about 140 participants from Elbasan, Durrës, Pogradec and Tirana. On July 2, the day after the convention, the first UM worship was held in the first-ever United Methodist church in Durrës. – UMNS Daily Digest; Jul 14, 2017.

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I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.

~ Mother Teresa