

# Monthly Update

February 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I want to thank you for your response to our appeal for financial support to close the shortfall that we experienced as a result of expenses incurred by our part in the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon. We are close to being out of debt.

This edition of the Monthly Update contains a description of Thomas Oden, a well respected intellectual who espoused our orthodox Wesleyan doctrine; he recently went to be with the Lord. In addition, we have some of the prayers that have been offered up by both Billy and Franklin Graham on behalf of our presidents; we might pray in a similar way. These are two men who have been faithful in their service to the Lord. I've also included a post on Facebook by Lynn Dahnke, who is very politically engaged in American politics – even though she is a native of England. A very determined lady, I have told her that if she had been Prime Minister of England during 1776, we would probably still be speaking the Queen's English. I have offered her thoughts. The rest of the Update includes information on the continuing disobedience to our Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church in "sexuality" issues, crime and statistics in the Black community written by a Black professor, abortion issues, upcoming Judicial Council cases, and a new section that will deal with issues and discussions on "A Way Forward" – the group that is tasked on how we are to address that thorny issue of "same-sex" matters (as if that had not already been addressed over 2,000 years ago).

I am the Sunday School teacher for the "Men's Bible Class" at my own church, Camp Ground United Methodist Church. I am the youngest guy in the class; Joe Dyer, who recently passed away, was the oldest at 105 years old. He was a fountain of knowledge, wisdom, and insight; he asked piercing questions that challenged me and caused me to think – and dig deeper into our lesson material. He inspired us. Active and mentally alert until almost the very end, he would cause us to think – and laugh. People would ask him his secret to living to such a good old age. He would reply, "Just keep on breathing." Another saying was, "You have two ears and one mouth. That should tell you something." One thing that I really appreciated was his support when I had been slandered; many of the people even in my own local church had turned against me for my work in Concerned Methodists, exposing some of the deep-seated problems in our denomination. He said to me, "Boy, you don't back down one inch, do you?" Coming from him, that was a very high compliment. "Good by, Joe. We will see you again."

Again, thank you for your continuing faithfulness.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,  
Executive Director

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# February 2017 Update

## **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up. – As quoted by Jack Ramsey from  
Mississippi

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### **The Good Stuff**

+ *Billy Graham's prayer for the nation: Five Timeless Inauguration Prayers from Billy Graham & Franklin Graham.*

Franklin Graham had the privilege of offering the prayer of invocation at the inauguration of George W. Bush in January 2001. This year, he [has] been invited to speak during the Jan. 20 ceremony for President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President-elect Mike Pence. Franklin Graham had the privilege of offering the prayer of invocation at the inauguration of George W. Bush in January 2001. This year, he has been invited to speak during the Jan. 20 ceremony for President-elect Donald Trump and Vice President-elect Mike Pence.

Throughout the years, Billy Graham and Franklin Graham have prayed for incoming presidents, offering petitions for the head of state and our nation that still ring true today. Billy Graham, considered pastor to the presidents, continually pointed America back to God through his inaugural prayers. Here are five excerpts from previous prayers you can use while lifting up the outgoing and incoming presidents.

1. For the nation: Our Father and our God, Thou hast said, “Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord.” We recognize on this historic occasion that we are “a nation under God.” We thank Thee for this torch of faith handed to us by our forefathers. May we never let it be extinguished. Thou alone hast given us our prosperity, our freedom and our power. This faith in God is our heritage and our foundation!

Thou hast warned us in the Scriptures, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” As George Washington reminded us in his farewell address, morality and faith are the pillars of our society. We confess these pillars are being eroded in an increasingly materialistic and permissive society. The whole world is watching to see if the faith of our fathers will stand the trials and tests of the hour. Too long we have neglected Thy word and ignored Thy laws. Too long we have tried to solve our problems without reference to Thee. Too long we have tried to live by bread alone. We have sown to the wind and are now reaping a whirlwind of crime, division, and rebellion.

And now with the wages of our sins staring us in the face, we remember Thy words, “If my people who are called by my Name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” – Billy Graham, 1969 inaugural prayer

While Billy Graham attended and prayed during many presidential inaugurations, he also participated in private events at the request of the elected presidents. In 1965, he preached a sermon to President Lyndon B. Johnson and invited guests during a private event on Inauguration Day.

2. For unity: We pray, O Lord, for President-elect George W. Bush and Vice President-elect Richard B. Cheney, to whom You have entrusted leadership of this nation at this moment in history. We pray that You'll help them bring our country together so that we may rise above partisan politics and seek the larger vision of Your will for our nation.

Use them to bring reconciliation between the races, healing to political wounds, that we may truly become one nation under God. Give our new president, and all who advise him, calmness in the face of storms, encouragement in the face of frustration, and humility in the face of success. Give them the wisdom to know and to do what is right, and the courage to say no to all that is contrary to Your statutes of holy law. – Franklin Graham, 2001 inaugural prayer

3. For the transition: And now, on this twentieth day of January, 1993, we commit to you President-elect (Bill) Clinton and Vice-President-elect (Al) Gore, who you have permitted to take leadership at this critical time in our nation's history. Help them always to see the office to which they've been elected as a sacred trust from you. We

pray that you will bless their wives who will share so much of the responsibility and burdens. Make President-elect Clinton know that he is never really alone but that the eternal God can be his refuge and he can turn to you in every circumstance. Give him the wisdom you've promised to those who ask and the strength that you alone can give. We thank you for his predecessor President Bush and the dedication he gave to this office. Bless him as he and Mrs. Bush continue their dedicated service to our country in other spheres. We commit this inaugural ceremony to you and ask that the memory of this event may always remind us to pray for our leaders. I pray this in the name of the one that's called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. Amen. – Billy Graham, 1993 inaugural invocation

[Billy Graham offered the invocation during President Bill Clinton's first inauguration in 1993.]

4. For the president-elect: And now we come to a new era in our history. In Thy sovereignty Thou hast permitted George Bush to lead us at this momentous hour of our history for the next four years. As he today places his hand upon the Bible and solemnly swears before Thee to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution, give him the wisdom, integrity and courage to help this become a nation that is gentle and kind. Protect him from physical danger, and in the lonely moments of decision grant him Thy wisdom to know what is morally right and an uncompromising courage to do it. Give him a cool head and a warm heart. Give him a compassion for those in physical, moral and spiritual need. O God, we consecrate today George Herbert Walker Bush to the presidency of these United States with the assurance that from this hour on, as he and his family move into the White House, they will have the presence and power of the One who said, "I will never leave thee or forsake thee. [Hebrews 13:5]"—Billy Graham, 1989 inaugural invocation

[Billy Graham prayed during the first inauguration of Richard Nixon in 1969.]

5. For courage & commitment: Our Father and our God, we thank You today for the privilege of coming into Your presence on this historic and solemn occasion.

We thank You for Your gracious hand which has preserved us as a nation. We praise You for the peaceful continuity of government that this Inauguration represents.

We recall that the Bible says, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm 127: 1, KJV).

You also said that to whom much has been given, much shall be required.

We look gratefully to the past, and thank You that from the very foundations of America You granted our forefathers courage and wisdom, as they trusted in You. So we ask today that You would inspire us by their example; where there has been failure, forgive us; where there has been progress, confirm; where there has been success, give us humility; and teach us to follow Your instructions more closely as we enter the next century.

Give to all those to whom You have entrusted leadership today a desire to seek Your will and to do it. – Billy Graham, 1997 inaugural prayer

– Billy Graham Evangelistic Association January 19, 2017.

### **Of Interest.**

+ *Thomas Oden (1931–2016), Theologian and Friend.*

[Note: Dr. Thomas Oden was a force for UM stability. This is written by Mark Tooley, someone whom I admire. – AOM]

Of the many personal memories I have of theologian Thomas Oden, one is most prominent. It was the late 1990s, and he was sitting at our conference table after hours of a drifting committee meeting. Without prompting, he spontaneously delivered a 15-minute talk about his parallel spiritual life with then-First Lady Hillary Clinton. They had both been raised in Methodist homes, read the same church publications, attended the same kind of church activist meetings, known the same church personages, and enthusiastically adopted the same commitment to political progressivism. We all listened with rapt amazement. In those days there were no smartphones for quick recording. Afterward I asked him to publish his extemporaneous tour de force. He politely said he'd try but weeks later regretted he couldn't since he lacked the time to reassemble his thoughts. No doubt Tom was back to work writing another of his dozens of published books. Over the next couple of decades there would be other spontaneous, masterful perorations from Tom, but I never learned to stand by with a recording device.

From Heresy to Orthodoxy. Tom's memoir, *A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir*, recounts his 80-year journey from small town, Depression-era, Oklahoma Methodist piety, to swimming in the confident but cresting high tide of social gospel mainline Protestantism, to his spiritual and intellectual encounter with Christian orthodoxy through the church fathers. Oden devoted himself almost exclusively to atoning for his years of theological malpractice by committing his next 40 years to rigorous scholarship, teaching, and organizing for creedal Christianity. Having previously—like much of Methodism and mainline Protestantism—sought relevance through an endless stream of urgent political causes, theological fads, and parapsychologies, Tom later committed himself to stewardship of ancient church teachings. In the preface to one volume of a systematic theology, he declared: *The only claim I make is that there is nothing original in these pages. I present no revolutionary new ideas, no easy new way of salvation. The road is still narrow (Matt. 7:14). I do not have the gift of softening the sting of the Christian message, of making it seem light or easily borne or quickly assimilated into prevailing modern ideas.*

Early in his midlife spiritual metamorphosis, Tom dreamt one night of discovering his own tombstone, which recalled of him: "He made no new contribution to theology." He sought to faithfully transmit what the church had ecumenically assembled in its early centuries, ending his quest for self-empowerment through theological revision.

Ecumenical Methodist. Tom was the pre-eminent Methodist theologian in America since Albert Outler's death nearly 30 years ago. But he was uniquely distinguished and admired not just within Methodism but also within wider Protestantism, evangelicalism, and even among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. He was arguably one of America's most important Christian theologians over the last 50 years. Spending most of his career at United Methodism's Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey, his best-known works are a three-volume systematic theology, four volumes on John Wesley's teachings, and 29 volumes of *The Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. In 1995 he published *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements*, his searing critique of mainline Protestant seminary liberalism, which earned him no bonus points among most of his colleagues. In his final years Tom published several books on the theological riches of early African Christianity.

His previous zeal for liberal Protestant activism through groups like the World Council of Churches and the Methodist Federation for Social Action transferred to new collaborations with the Evangelical Theological Society, publications like *First Things* and *Christianity Today*, and United Methodist renewal groups. Tom witnessed the decline of mainline Protestantism and sought to contribute to orthodoxy among evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and a remnant of traditional mainliners. Though he never minimized his own Wesleyan commitment, he worked seamlessly with Christians of many traditions because of his unifying devotion to the early church's understanding of core doctrine.

Tom never seriously considered leaving Methodism; he cleaved to its distinctives and believed he had an obligation to the church that baptized and brought him to faith. He fiercely led the fight for upholding doctrinal standards at the 1988 United Methodist General Conference, was a friend to or participant in every major United Methodist evangelical renewal group, and to the end opposed quitting or dividing the denomination, always pointing to reformation through orthodoxy. Tom was never naïve about the labor, patience, or suffering required; he simply had faith the Lord would prevail.

Personal Remembrance. I first met Tom when I was a young man. I had just joined the staff of the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), whose board he would later join and chair across much of eight years. His shift from theological heterodoxy to Christian orthodoxy had included a political shift from Saul Alinsky devotee to Burkean conservative. Until the final months of his life he was emailing encouragement to our staff, both for church renewal and also reformation of Christian social witness.

Tom's physical health had begun declining at least 10 years ago. His beloved wife, Edrita, died in 1998 of cancer after more than 40 years of marriage. As a widower he seemed to accelerate his scholarly and church labors, including global travel. At a 2009 IRD board meeting, where I would be elected president, he suffered a heart incident requiring hospitalization and early departure. (He warmly supported my appointment, which I don't think affected his health!) He had to end his travels while continuing his intense writing schedule. In 2012 I visited his Oklahoma City home, seeing his legendary library, and interrupting his board meeting of the Center for Early African Christianity, which he founded and directed with his usual entrepreneurial vigor. In typical fashion,

Tom introduced me to one Christian college official present by referencing an earlier controversy between myself and faculty at that school. Oden loved debate and intellectual, civil confrontation. I never saw him again in person, but in 2013 he addressed by Skype a small group at the Evangelical Theological Society. With white hair and measured wisdom, he seemed like an Obi Wan Kenobi figure who spoke with the authority of the apostolic age.

I deeply admired Tom from the start. He was brilliant, insightful, courageous, unwavering, and passionate in good causes. He was good natured and unfailingly gracious. He encouraged me in my vocation as a young man, and was still doing so in my middle age. Tom was smarter than almost everybody, but he never condescended. He seemed always to make time to counsel and mentor others. He could get angry over important principles but not—at least ever in my observation—over ego. He had endless good sense and was, to me, the consummate well-grounded Methodist who never forgot who he was or from where he came.

How I wish there could be from Tom at least one more soaring, extemporaneous recollection of great theological and ecclesiastical events. This time I'd make sure to record it. But the Lord whom Tom rediscovered and served for so long has preserved for us his own grace-filled record of Tom's countless accomplishments in his service.

May Tom as faithful theologian and friend to so many never be forgotten in this world. And may he forever rejoice with the early saints whose lives and teachings he so closely studied—that we might know them and our triune God better.

– Mark Tooley. Mark Tooley is president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy and editor of the foreign policy and national security journal *Providence*; December 9, 2016.

+ **Post from Lynn Dahnke.** [Note: This is the observation of one who is extremely involved in politics. – AOM] This is the long-awaited day y'all! Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Out with the old, in with the new. America is moving on! Let's all be part of the solution in fixing America's problems, not part of the obstruction that creates them. Your race, age, religion, gender (assumed or real), and sexual orientation do not define who you are. You do! Let's address the REAL issues, and stop the ideological power grab of big government. Drain the swamp, and rid the country of the influences of special interest groups and hate mongers who foster discord and do NOT have YOUR best interests at heart. We have become pawns in their calculated games of divide and conquer, for self grandeur. They have come to own the minds and hearts of too many Americans by instilling a sense of distrust and victimization. Remove the shackles of political correctness and over-regulation which stifle the ability of Americans to think big and live free. Be what you can be, and don't be limited to only what big government wants you to believe you can be. You are only a victim of society if you choose to believe it. We are all Americans! When America succeeds, we ALL succeed. The show IS on the road, and we ARE about to 'Make America Great Again'.

– Post from Lynn Dahnke, January 20, 2017 4:42 PM. Mrs. Dahnke is an extremely capable and activist lady. Despite the fact that she was born and raised in England of English parents, she has taken an avid interest in American politics.

+ **Bishop Bard Endorses Disputed Just Resolution.** Bishop David Bard, the newly appointed leader of the Michigan Episcopal Area, has signed-off on a frivolous and insulting “just resolution” of a complaint filed against the Rev. Michael Tupper, a retired clergyman in the West Michigan Annual Conference. Bard's endorsement falls under the category of “it would be funny” were it not so damaging to the integrity and unity of The United Methodist Church. And coming just a few months into his tenure, it calls into question his willingness to defend the church's polity and uphold its teachings. At a minimum, his decision to endorse the Tupper resolution suggests he will only do so selectively.

Tupper, a now retired elder in the West Michigan Annual Conference, presided at his daughter's same-sex wedding in 2014. A complaint was filed against him that eventuated in a “just resolution” endorsed by the now retired Bishop Deborah Kieseey. The resolution included no adverse consequences for Tupper's actions, nor did it even elicit from him a promise not to preside at future same-sex services. Not surprisingly, he defied the church again by presiding at another same-sex union in July 2015. A complaint was dutifully filed and Bishop Kieseey

sought to dispense of it in the same manner as the first one. However, Tupper, who wanted publicity drawn to the church's teachings against such weddings, demanded a church trial, believing his guilty plea and the loss of his ministerial credentials would move the denomination to radically liberalize its teachings on marriage. Late this summer Tupper finally relented in his demand for a trial. Given the details of the just resolution Bard endorsed, there's little wonder why he did. The resolution rewards the guilty and afflicts the innocent.

According to two provisions in the resolution, Tupper and the Counsel for the Church, the Rev. Elbert Paul Dulworth, "will set up Training Sessions for all Michigan [Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)] chairpersons to attend in the spring of 2017 in helping them to set up a process of discernment in every local church during the fall of 2017 regarding their readiness to accept the appointment of a gay clergyman." And lest clergy think they can escape the mocking resolution, Tupper and Dulworth were also given the task of setting up a "Training Session for all Michigan clergy in the spring of 2017 to offer pastoral care for LGBTQI individuals who are considering marriage or ordained ministry." Never mind that both provisions either skate close to or across the lines established by the church. Bard evidently believes laity who volunteer to serve in the time consuming role of SPRC chair and pastors who have plenty on their plates should travel many miles and waste valuable time in order to attend training sessions designed by a clergyman who has willingly and knowingly violated the Book of Discipline. The not so hidden goals of both sessions is to teach laity and clergy how to become party to violating the church's teachings. Presumably, even clergy and laity who are committed to upholding the denomination's understanding of Christian marriage are expected to turn out for these teach-ins.

"This just resolution is a rejection of the authority of General Conference," said the Rev. John Grenfell, Jr., a former Detroit Annual Conference district superintendent and a long time advocate for clergy and laity in church disputes. "It grants permission to two elders to redefine the life and mission of the church, when only General Conference can do that. Laity and pastors have the responsibility to support the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church, not attend programs that undermine and reject the guidelines of holy conferencing."

Bard's endorsement of the resolution signals his willingness to at least selectively tolerate and even reward open defiance of the church's polity and its teachings. This will not bode well for an episcopal area that is already facing significant drops in worship attendance and church membership. And it will further demoralize laity and clergy who stand-up for the church's good order and integrity, and expect its leaders to do the same.

[Note: This shows questionable reasoning and problematic leadership by Bishop Bard. – AOM]

– By Walter Fenton. Walter Fenton is a United Methodist clergy person and an analyst for *Good News*.

+ ***The Black Community and Crime***. The FBI reported that the total number of homicides in 2015 was 15,696. Blacks were about 52 percent of homicide victims. That means about 8,100 black lives were ended violently, and over 90 percent of the time, the perpetrator was another black. Listening to the news media and the Black Lives Matter movement, one would think that black deaths at the hands of police are the major problem. It turns out that in 2015, police across the nation shot and killed 986 people. Of that number, 495 were white (50 percent), 258 were black (26 percent) and 172 Hispanic (17 percent). A study of 2,699 fatal police killings between 2013 and 2015, conducted by John R. Lott Jr. and Carlisle E. Moody of the Crime Prevention Research Center, [shows] that the odds of a black suspect's being killed by a black police officer were consistently greater than a black suspect's getting killed by a white officer. Politicians, race hustlers, the news media keep such studies under wraps because these studies don't help their narrative about racist cops.

The homicide victim is not the only victim, whether he is a criminal or not, for there are mourning loved ones. No one ever fully recovers from having a son, daughter, husband, mother or father murdered. Murder is not the only crime that takes a heavy toll on the black community. Blacks are disproportionately represented as victims in every category of violent crime -- e.g., forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

Today's level of lawlessness and insecurity in many black communities is a relatively new phenomenon. In the 1930s, '40s and '50s, people didn't bar their windows. Doors were often left unlocked. People didn't go to bed with the sounds of gunshots. What changed everything was the liberal vision that blamed crime on poverty and racial discrimination. Academic liberals and hustling politicians told us that to deal with crime, we had to deal with those "root causes." Plus, courts began granting criminals new rights that caused murder and other violent

crime rates to skyrocket. The liberals' argument ignores the fact that there was far greater civility in black neighborhoods at a time when there was far greater poverty and discrimination.

The presence of criminals, having driven many businesses out, forces residents to bear the costs of shopping outside their neighborhoods. Fearing robberies, taxi drivers -- including black drivers -- often refuse to do home pickups in black neighborhoods and frequently pass up black customers hailing them. Plus, there's the insult associated with not being able to receive pizza or other deliveries on the same terms as people in other neighborhoods.

In low-crime neighborhoods, FedEx, UPS and other delivery companies routinely leave packages that contain valuable merchandise on a doorstep if no one is at home. That saves the expense of redelivery or recipients from having to go pick up the packages. In low-crime communities, supermarket managers may leave plants, fertilizer and other home and garden items outdoors, often unattended and overnight. They display merchandise at entryways and exits. Where there is less honesty, supermarkets cannot use all the space that they lease, and hence they are less profitable. In high-crime neighborhoods, delivery companies leaving packages at the door and supermarkets leaving goods outside unattended would be equivalent to economic suicide.

Politicians who call for law and order are often viewed negatively, but poor people are the most dependent on law and order. In the face of high crime or social disorder, wealthier people can afford to purchase alarm systems, buy guard dogs, hire guards and, if things get too bad, move to a gated community. These options are not available to poor people. The only protection they have is an orderly society.

Ultimately, the solution to high crime rests with black people. Given the current political environment, it doesn't pay a black or white politician to take those steps necessary to crack down on lawlessness in black communities.

– Dr. Walter E. Williams. Dr. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University.  
walterewilliams.com [By way of information, Dr. Williams is black. – AOM]

**A Way Forward.** *A Way Forward commissioners share prayers, hopes.* They are praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance and trusting in their common Wesleyan heritage to help find "A Way Forward" for The United Methodist Church. The Commission on a Way Forward has the daunting task of trying to bridge the denomination's deep divisions on homosexuality and foster church unity. When this international group of United Methodists holds its first face-to-face meeting in Atlanta, they will bring some very different perspectives and experiences. They also bring a shared commitment to prayer and a faith in God who is bigger than human struggle. [Note: By the time this Update is mailed, they will have met. – AOM]

In December, the commission held a conference call to pray together. But next week will be the first time many of the members will meet each other. Their first order of business will be to get to know each other and begin to build trust. Meanwhile, United Methodists around the world have begun 75 weeks of focused prayer for the denomination – "Praying our Way Forward." United Methodist News Service asked each of the 32 commission members and the three bishops serving as moderators about their prayers are as the group begins its work, as well as where they see potential agreement. More than 15 responded.

+ "So many sisters and brothers around the connection are praying about this work and trusting God to lead us," said Scott Johnson, a member from the Upper New York Conference. He helped deliver the laity address at last year's General Conference.

+ "I'm confident that my sisters and brothers on the commission have been doing the same. Trusting that, my hope is that we come to this work knowing that we are not in this alone. I also hope that we make space for God to do something unexpected."

+ Jacques Umembudi Akasa of the Democratic Republic of Congo sees similar promise for the work. "I think there is reason to hope because it is the wishes of many Methodists," the United Methodist missionary said in French. "Obviously the task is complex, but we have faith."

+ The Rev. Casey Langley Orr, associate pastor of discipleship at First United Methodist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, said that in preparation, she has centered herself by repeating three beloved prayers: the Prayer of St. Francis, the Breastplate of St. Patrick and the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer. "While it is difficult to know what

exactly to expect as our conversations begin, my hope is that each of us can aim to be instruments of peace, to recognize Christ in one another, and to remember that we serve and represent God first,” said Orr, a deacon.

The commission includes eight bishops, 13 other clergy and 11 lay members who will all have a vote in the group’s deliberations. The three moderators don’t vote. Members come from nine countries, including the United States, and 14 U.S. states. The group includes 14 women and two openly gay men. It also has leaders of advocacy groups that have long taken opposing stands on ministry with LGBTQ individuals and biblical interpretation. 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 church split over homosexuality reached a fever pitch. In following months, many clergy and candidates came out as gay, multiple conferences urged noncompliance with church prohibitions related to homosexuality, and the Western Jurisdiction elected and consecrated Bishop Karen Oliveto, a married lesbian. The Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, plans in April to take up a petition related to her election. 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 commission will examine and possibly recommend changes to the denomination’s Book of Discipline, which since 1972 has stated, “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” The bishops’ executive committee also has decided that the group will explore new ways of being a global church in different cultural and theological contexts.

+ “The United Methodist Church is in an unprecedented place, and there is a great deal at stake. At the same time, we are in God’s hands, and God is faithful,” said Florida Area Bishop Ken Carter, one of the three moderators. “I am praying for the members of the commission. By design, we are men and women of diverse talents, gifts and perspectives, and yet this is the Body of Christ.”

+ MyungRae Kim Lee, executive director of the National Network of Korean United Methodist Women, has looked to Matthew 7:7 for inspiration. “I personally believe that as we keep on asking, seeking, and knocking, with the guide of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to find a new way to forward,” said Lee, a member of the New York Conference.

Points of agreement. Leah Taylor, a Texas Methodist Foundation representative and member of the Texas Conference, said she and other commission members share a sense of honor and heavy responsibility in their role. She also hopes members will find a shared vocabulary “that is kind, thoughtful and generous to all. Personally, I am joyful and fearful at the same time,” she added.

+ The Rev. Donna Pritchard, senior minister of First United Methodist Church in Portland, Oregon, said she trusts the whole commission will come ready to listen to God and each other.

+ Alice Williams of the Florida Conference said she expects agreement that United Methodists can do more collectively than divided.

+ The Rev. Tom Berlin, lead pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia, said his experience is that all United Methodists share a common desire to see the reign of God in the church and in the world.

+ On matters of sexuality specifically, David N. Field also sees reason for hope. The coordinator of the Methodist e-Academy in Switzerland said he thinks commission members can reach an agreement “on many significant issues as to what the church should affirm as the appropriate context for sexual relationships.”

Points of contention ahead. Even as commission members talk about their common faith, some already express divergent views of where they expect the body to end up. 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 believes the commission’s role “has less to do with re-litigating the anachronistic question of whether or not same-sex love and LGBTQ persons are compatible with Christian teaching and much more to do with the urgent necessity we now face to create an inclusive church in the face of ongoing harm and discord.”

+ 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. She believes “the strongest argument within the commission will be recognition of the great decision within The United Methodist



Church and the church can no longer continue with the turmoil that exists currently, and that the commission understands it must bring a proposal or proposals to address A Way Forward.”

#### Seeking end to conflict.

+ Dave Nuckols, Minnesota co-lay leader and Reconciling Ministries Network board member, says he prays that the commission will help the denomination “live into Jesus’ example of radical inclusion of all persons – including LGBTQ persons – and shift our energy from arguing amongst ourselves and instead evangelize the unchurched.”

+ The Rev. Jessica LaGrone, dean of the chapel of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, and a leader of the new Wesleyan Covenant Association, wants “to see the church find a way out of the loop of ongoing conflict that honors Scripture and cares for individuals and the local churches that minister to them.”

+ Zimbabwe Area Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa said that he expects there is no way to develop “A Way Forward” that will be acceptable to all United Methodists. Some will leave the denomination no matter what happens, he said with sadness. However, he said, he sees a way to avoid a real schism. “What is encouraging as far as I am observing is that most people are looking forward to ‘a way forward,’ which will not split the denomination,” he said.

Any recommendations from the new commission would need the approval of General Conference. The Council of Bishops is considering calling a special General Conference in 2019.

– By Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), Jan. 19, 2017. Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for UMNS. Côte d’Ivoire native Isaac Broune, member of UM Communication’s French content team, contributed content.

#### **Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues. Good News on the Pro-Life Front!**

- HR7, the bill banning federal funding of abortion, passed.
- Mexico City Policy, January 23, 2017. On this day, President Trump reinstated the pro-life Mexico City Policy. “President Trump on Monday morning signed an executive order blocking foreign aid or federal funding for international nongovernmental organizations that provide or “promote” abortions,” reports The Hill. “The order comes one day after the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Roe V. Wade Supreme Court ruling that made abortion legal.” The so-called Mexico City policy, established by Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1984, blocks federal funding for international family planning charities that provide abortions or “promote” the procedure by providing patients with information about it, including by offering referrals to abortion providers. This policy prohibits overseas, non-governmental organizations, such as International Planned Parenthood, from receiving U.S. funds to provide or promote abortion. The policy also directs the Secretary of State to work with the Secretary of Health and Human Services to apply this prohibition to all global health assistance funding. This would apply to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) that has supported coerced abortions under China’s one-child-per-family program. Referred to by critics as the “global gag rule,” the policy has been subjected to a game of political football over the years, with Democratic presidents rescinding the policy once in office and Republican presidents then reinstating it. President Obama rescinded the policy when he took office in 2009. Republicans quickly praised the order as an advancement of “pro-life” policies that protect taxpayer funds. “Life is a precious and sacred gift, and we must do all we can to protect it,” said Rep. Michael Burgess (R-Texas), chairman of the House’s health subcommittee. “I applaud President Trump for taking this important action and look forward to continuing to work together in advancing pro-life policies and protecting taxpayer dollars.”
- No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act (H.R. 7), January 24, 2017. Congress passed H.R. 7, a bill that made the Hyde Amendment (the federal ban on funding of abortion) and other current abortion funding prohibitions permanent and government-wide. The Hyde Amendment has historically been attached annually to appropriation bills, but H.R. 7 will make the Hyde Amendment permanent. The bill will also ensure that Obamacare will faithfully conform to the Hyde Amendment while Congress works to repeal and replace Obamacare. H.R. 7 also requires full disclosure, transparency, and the prominent display of the extent to which any health insurance plan on the healthcare exchange funds abortion.

• March for Life, January 27, 2017. Kellyanne Conway, counselor to President Trump, will speak at the 44<sup>th</sup> annual March for Life on Friday with the theme, “The Power of One.” March for Life states, “One person can make a difference in the world, whether in the life of one person or many. Sadly, in the U.S. alone, more than 1 million babies are not even given the opportunity to live and change the world each year. Building a culture of life and ending abortion takes each and every person. Starting with your family or neighborhood, our collective efforts will change hearts and minds, save lives, and build a culture of life.” Ms. Conway is expected to reinforce this theme in her speech.

• Defund Planned Parenthood, February-March, 2017. The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives are expected to pass a bill later this year, likely in late February or March, that will include language to terminate mandated funding of Planned Parenthood. President Trump campaigned on the promise to end the federal funding of Planned Parenthood....

– Tim Wildmon, President, American Family Association; AFA ActionAlert [actionalert@afasv.net](mailto:actionalert@afasv.net); Jan 25, 2017. Chaplain Gordon James Klingenschmitt, PhD, Pray In Jesus Name, PO Box 77077, Colorado Springs, CO 80970

### **(UM) Judicial Council. Judicial Council April 2017 Docket.**

[Note: We are including this because of its importance to the connection of The United Methodist Church. – AOM]

Docket No. 0417-1. IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the South Central Jurisdictional Conference concerning the application, meaning, and effect of ¶¶ 304.3, 310.2d, 341.6, 2702.1a), b), and d) of The Book of Discipline 2012 in regard to the nomination, election, consecration, and/or assignment as bishop of a person who claims to be a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” or is a spouse in a same-sex marriage or civil union.

July 21, 2016

Rev. Luan-Vu “Lui” Tran, Secretary of the Judicial Council

Dear Rev. Tran,

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

Meeting in Wichita, Kansas, on Friday, July 15, 2016, and with a quorum present, the South Central Jurisdictional Conference passed (by majority vote) a motion made by Mrs. Dixie Brewster, lay delegate of the Great Plains Annual Conference, to request a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council. The motion was as follows:

“Bishop, I move that the South Central Jurisdictional Conference request a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council on the following matter: Is the nomination, election, consecration, and/or assignment as a bishop of The United Methodist Church of a person who claims to be a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” or is a spouse in a same-sex marriage lawful under The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. Specifically, What is the application, meaning and effect of 1304.3, 1310.2d, 1341.6, and 12702.1 (a), (b), and (d) in regard to the nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as bishop of a person who claims to be a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” or is a spouse in a same-sex marriage or civil union? Further ---

• Does a public record that a nominee for the episcopacy is a spouse in a same-sex marriage disqualify that person from nomination, election, consecration and/or assignment as a bishop in The United Methodist Church?

• If a jurisdictional conference nominates, elects, consecrates, and/or assigns a person who, by virtue of being legally married or in a civil union under civil law to a same-sex partner, would be subject to a chargeable offense, is the action of the jurisdictional conference null and void?

• Is it lawful for one or more of the bishops of a jurisdiction to consecrate a person as bishop when the bishop-elect is known by public record to be a spouse in a same-sex marriage or civil union?

• When a bishop, district superintendent, district committee on ordained ministry, Board of Ordained Ministry, or clergy session becomes aware or is made aware that a clergy person is a spouse in a same sex marriage or civil union of public record, does such information in effect and in fact amount to a self-avowal of the practice of homosexuality as set forth in Par. 304. 3...

This petition is submitted on behalf of the South Central Jurisdictional Conference under the authority of United Methodist Book of Discipline Par. 2610 (2)(t), in that it pertains to “matters relating to or affecting jurisdictions or jurisdictional conferences or the work therein,” that is, the qualification and election of bishops by

jurisdictional conferences pursuant to Book of Discipline Par. 27 (2) and Article V of the United Methodist Constitution. Specifically, the petition addresses action by the Western Jurisdiction in electing Rev. Karen Oliveto, reported to be an openly gay clergy member, as a bishop. Accordingly, the petition will directly affect Bishop Oliveto, her qualifications and the efficacy of her election as bishop. More generally, the petition will affect all jurisdictions and jurisdictional conferences of the United Methodist Church, who have an interest in the election and appointment of bishops in the United Methodist Church. The maker of the motion, Mrs. Dixie Brewster, will be notified of her need (as maker of the motion) to identify all persons/entities affected by or having an interest in matters addressed in the petition, and of her right to file a brief as authorized by Appendix B of the Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Judicial Council. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and please let me know if anything further is needed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Resident Bishop, Louisiana Area  
The United Methodist Church  
Copy: Bishop Michael McKee

Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church  
April 2017 Docket

+ ***Other items on the Judicial Council's agenda.***

[Note: Some of these cases are of concern because they show organized disobedience to our Book of Discipline. – AOM]

- Docket No. 0417-2: IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law regarding the Untitled Resolution passed by the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference.
- Docket No. 0417-3: IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law regarding the authority of the Western Jurisdictional Conference to adopt rules and the effect of those rules on nominations to the jurisdictional pool.
- Docket No. 0417-4: IN RE: Petition for Declaratory Decision from the General Conference concerning if Judicial Council Decision 1318 applies to Petition No. 60805 in regard to complaints against bishops.
- Docket No. 0417-5: IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law in the New York Annual Conference, as remanded by Judicial Council Decision 1330, concerning if 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."
- Docket No. 0417-6: IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference, as remanded by Judicial Council Decision 1329, concerning (a) if 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," and (b) if the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry 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.
- Docket No. 0417-7: IN RE: Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law in the West Michigan Annual Conference, as remanded by Memorandum 1335, concerning (a) if a Wesley Foundation is considered a conference board or agency by the West Michigan Plan of Organization and the Book of Discipline (¶ 610, ¶ 701), and (b) if a local pastor appointed as campus minister of a Wesley foundation under ¶ 344.1a is ineligible for nomination to the Conference Leadership Team because of the membership requirement established by the West Michigan Plan of Organization.

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Anybody who thinks he can be happy and prosperous by letting the Government take care of him better take a closer look at the American Indian. – Henry Ford