

Monthly Update

January 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

After the Christmas holidays I wanted to give some of the news that we had wanted to print this past month. With the presidential elections in November and the often vitriolic campaign rhetoric, it was especially distressing. In addition to the great interest in the political sphere, we are focused on what is going on in our United Methodist Church, the commission, the bishops, the conflict over homosexuality, and other areas of interest.

It is with a great deal of sadness that we note the passing of Professor Thomas C. Oden, a giant of the faith, orthodox in his beliefs and as reflected in his writings.

In The Good Stuff we have a human interest story that exemplifies the caring & generous nature of many Americans. In actuality, with all of our faults and despite our critics, we tend to be generous to the less fortunate within and outside of our country. I had included Benjamin Netanyahu's greeting to the president-elect, not out of partisanship to the winner of the race, but out of admiration for the Israeli Prime Minister. If Hillary had won, as a consummate diplomat, his greeting to her would have been just as generous. Speaking of the presidential elections, included in this update are observations and prayers on the election and for our country. During the run-up to the final voting, we had received commentaries from both sides. A man in Missouri had stated, "I support Hillary because she is principled and because she is a Methodist"; another person stated his opposition to her based on national security and integrity issues. We in Concerned Methodists are not involved in political advocacy but want our supporters to engage as citizens in the electoral process. That has helped to make our country great. Included also are issues on our national anthem, Colin Kaepernick, Haiti and the Council of Bishops' convening the commission on "A Way Forward" to address "conflicts" on the homosexuality issue.

To summarize just some of our actions, in 2016, we attended two national and two regional conferences, and General Conference 2016 (sending information to include the book *The Issues @ Hand* to the 864 delegates around the world), and published two other books: *Jude* and *The Cross and the Crescent*. All of this was in addition to our normal work. We are "contending for the faith" and committed to staying in our denomination, fighting for what is right and true, and focused on revival in the United Methodist Church.

From those of us here at Concerned Methodists, we thank you for your partnering with us, both in finances and in your prayers. We strive to serve our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully while making the most effective use of resources He provides in these challenging times.

Again, please continue to pray. We still need intercession for our church and our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris, Executive Director

January 2017 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

When an American had been captured by Muslims from Morocco, then-President Teddy Roosevelt sent a message by telegram to the head of that country that read, “Either you return our American citizen alive or you will be dead – I will send all of our military forces necessary to make that happen.” The American was returned unharmed. – Dr. Bill Bennett

The Good Stuff

+ Benjamin Netanyahu’s greeting: President-elect Trump, my friend, Congratulations on being elected President of the United States of America. You are a great friend of Israel. Over the years, you’ve expressed your support consistently, and I deeply appreciate it. I look forward to working with you to advance security, prosperity and peace. Israel is grateful for the broad support it enjoys among the American people, and I’m confident that the two of us, working closely together, will bring the great alliance between our two countries to even greater heights. May God bless America. May God bless Israel. May God bless our enduring alliance. – Date: Nov 10, 2016

+ Breakfast at McDonald’s. I am a mother of three (ages 14, 12, 3) and have recently completed my college degree. The last class I had to take was Sociology. The teacher was absolutely inspiring with the qualities that I wish every human being had been graced with. Her last project of the term was called, “Smile.” The class was asked to go out and smile at three people and document their reactions. I am a very friendly person and always smile at everyone and say hello anyway. So, I thought this would be a piece of cake, literally.

Soon after we were assigned the project, my husband, youngest son, and I went out to McDonald’s one crisp March morning. It was just our way of sharing special playtime with our son. We were standing in line, waiting to be served, when all of a sudden everyone around us began to back away, and then even my husband did. I did not move an inch... An overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside of me as I turned to see why they had moved. As I turned around I smelled a horrible “dirty body” smell, and there standing behind me were two poor homeless men.

As I looked down at the short gentleman, close to me, he was “smiling.” His beautiful sky blue eyes were full of God’s Light as he searched for acceptance....He said, “Good day” as he counted the few coins he had been clutching... The second man fumbled with his hands as he stood behind his friend. I realized the second man was mentally challenged and the blue-eyed gentleman was his salvation.

I held my tears as I stood there with them.

The young lady at the counter asked him what they wanted. He said, “Coffee is all, Miss” because that was all they could afford. (If they wanted to sit in the restaurant and warm up, they had to buy something. He just wanted to be warm).

Then I really felt it – the compulsion was so great I almost reached out and embraced the little man with the blue eyes. That is when I noticed all eyes in the restaurant were set on me, judging my every action. I smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give me two more breakfast meals on a separate tray. I then walked around the corner to the table that the men had chosen as a resting spot. I put the tray on the table and laid my hand on the blue-eyed gentleman's cold hand.

He looked up at me, with tears in his eyes, and said, “Thank you.”

I leaned over, began to pat his hand and said, “I did not do this for you. God is here working through me to give you hope.” I started to cry as I walked away to join my husband and son...

When I sat down my husband smiled at me and said, “That is why God gave you to me, Honey, to give me hope.” We held hands for a moment and at that time, we knew that only because of the Grace that we had been given were we able to give. We are not church goers, but we are believers. That day showed me the pure Light of God’s sweet love.

I returned to college, on the last evening of class, with this story in hand. I turned in “my project” and the instructor read it.

Then she looked up at me and said, “Can I share this?” I slowly nodded as she got the attention of the class. She began to read and that is when I knew that we as human beings and being part of God share this need to heal people and to be healed. In my own way I had touched the people at McDonald’s, my son, the instructor, and every soul that shared the classroom on the last night I spent as a college student.

I graduated with one of the biggest lessons I would ever learn: unconditional acceptance. – “Susie” + 7 Key Things to Pray Now that the Elections are Over. One of the most painful...presidential elections in history is over. Regardless of your view on the results, life continues. The question before us as believers is, “Now What?” Will we stop praying for our nation or intensify our prayers? Was this really just about who would be the next President of the United States or did God use this election to stir us up in prayer to depend more upon Him than ever before?

Clearly it is not time to stop or slow down in our prayer lives. More than ever, the future of our nation depends upon the prayers of God’s people. Though there are many more things we can be praying about, of course, here are some very important ways to begin to seriously intercede for the United States in the days ahead.

1. Healing in the Church. One of the worst things to happen in this election has been the division among followers of Jesus. Pray for healing of relationships and for the desire of Jesus for unity among his disciples to be fulfilled. “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23).

2. Healing in the nation. This election has revealed the depths of division in our nation. Opposing world views that fought over the ballot box will continue to battle unless the Lord steps in and brings his peace. Pray especially for the true tolerance that allows for opposing views to be expressed freely. “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near” (Eph. 2:17).

3. Wisdom for our new president. Leading this nation through these perilous time requires wisdom that only God can give. Pray especially for the choices for the cabinet and key advisors. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise” (Ps. 111:10).

4. Supreme Court choice. For many, the selection of Supreme Court justices became a key part of this election. Pray for wisdom for the president and the senate as they make choices that will impact our nation for many years. “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another’” (Zech. 7:9).

5. Truth to guide the media. Media bias and accuracy was a key concern and issue during this election. Pray for a spirit of truth to cover the media and that reporters and news networks would see their role as givers of information and not as shapers of thought. “Have I not written thirty sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, teaching you to be honest and to speak the truth, so that you bring back truthful reports to those you serve?” (Prov. 22:20-21).

6. A stable economy. An election season such as this past one brings great uncertainty to an economy that was already unsteady. Ask the Lord to steady our economy so that his people can continue to give generously toward helping the poor and advancing the Kingdom of Christ. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

7. Revival and a Great Awakening. One of the greatest benefits of this confusing election season has been the increasing awareness within the Church that we desperately need revival. Pray for God to send another revival and Great Awakening to our nation that would awaken the Church, bring salvation to millions, and transform the culture of our nation. “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!” (Isa. 64:1-2). – David Butts; received from one of our associates; Nov 16, 2016. David Butts is the president of Harvest Prayer Ministries and the chairman of America’s National Prayer Committee. His newest book, *With One Cry: A Renewed Challenge to Pray for America*, encourages people to keep on praying for our nation. Harvest Prayer Ministries is a ministry with prayer resources for local churches.

+ I Stand for the National Anthem.

Dear [Brothers and Sisters], As the football season rolls on, more and more athletes are disgracing themselves and embarrassing their coaches and teams by thumbing their noses at the national anthem. As a result of San Francisco 49ers football player Colin Kaepernick shameful

antics of kneeling during the national anthem, even junior high students are now following the pied piper and engaging in the same unpatriotic antics.

One college football player is not ashamed to show his pride in America...even to the point of standing alone. Last week, Millikin University linebacker Conner Brewer was the only player from his private Illinois university team to stand on the sideline and proudly respect the playing of the national anthem. His teammates cowered in the locker room, choosing to hide away during the playing of our nation's most beloved refrain. Conner's stand is a testament to the bravery and patriotic pride of those who defended Fort McHenry the night before Frances Scott Key wrote our nation's rallying cry. Let's not let Conner stand alone. Make a statement that our national anthem is worth standing for!

Take Action. Let everyone know, "I Stand for the National Anthem." Let Conner know that you and thousands of other patriotic Americans are proud of "The Star-Spangled Banner!" – Received by e-mail from the American Family Association, October 19, 2016.

+ God Is King, No Matter What.

[Note: The following was sent out before the recent election on November 8th but it is instructive for us today. – AOM] With election day looming, the Bible's political metaphors for God remind us who ultimately reigns. Throughout this raucous political season, evangelicals have been known more for whom we might elect than for being citizens of the kingdom of heaven. High-profile evangelical and charismatic leaders have expressed unheard of levels of enthusiasm for a man known for being a casino owner, a serial adulterer, liar, & business fraud. Others...hopeful for economic transformation in an unequal society, stand bewildered at the choice between an unscrupulous billionaire and a politician who takes six figures from Wall Street for 30-minute speeches. Polls regularly show the two...candidates are among the most disliked nominees in recent memory. Meanwhile, we are repeatedly told (for how many elections in a row?) that this is the most important election of our lifetime, and that it will determine the course of our nation. Even those of us who are confident about whom to vote for may find ourselves staring into a bottomless chasm of despair when the election is over. If the vote doesn't go our way, are we left with anything more than defeat and tears? Looking for a King and a Kingdom. One evening some years back, one of my sons curled up in my lap while I reclined in my reading chair. As he scanned my book piles, his eyes fell upon the spine of N. T. Wright's *How God Became King*. Wright argues that in the Gospels Jesus comes as the God of Israel in the flesh, showing back up among his people to establish his reign as he promised in the prophets. God's gospel heralds could finally shout "your God reigns" (Isa. 52:7), for Yahweh was now revealed as "king over the whole earth" (Zech. 14:9). "But I thought God has always been King?" my son said. It was a terrific observation. Didn't the psalmist say that God was enthroned over everything? Of course he is. And the New Testament tells us that the most important political fact anyone can ever know is that God has established his Son as the ruler of all things and is actively putting all things under his feet. That Son will one day, fully and finally, establish God's eternal kingdom. Only then will we be able to say that government of the people, by the people (who will reign with him, Rev. 2:25–27; 5:9–10), and for the people shall not perish from the earth. – Jason Hood; Nov. 7, 2016; posted on Facebook. Jason Hood serves as

director of advanced urban ministerial education and teaches New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Boston campus. This is part of an essay.

+ Billy Graham's perspective.

"America has gone a long way down the wrong road. We must turn around and go back and change roads. If ever we needed God's help, it is now..." stated Billy Graham, as he received the Congressional Gold Medal, May 2, 1996. Billy continued: "If ever we needed spiritual renewal, it is now. And it can begin today in each one of our lives, as we repent before God and yield ourselves to Him and His Word." He has had an unprecedented friendship with every past U.S. President since Truman.

Billy concluded: "We must fortify ourselves by meditating upon the person of Christ... Christ must be vitally real to us if we are to prove loyal to Him in the hours of crisis. Today our nation ranks as the greatest power on the face of the earth. But if we put our trust in armed might instead of Almighty God, the coming conflict could conceivably go against us. History and the Bible indicate that mechanical and material might are insufficient in times of great crisis. ...We need the inner strength that comes from a personal, vital relationship with God's Son, Jesus Christ. The wheels of God's judgment can be heard by discerning souls across the length and breadth of nations....The need for a return to God has never been more urgent. The words of Isaiah are appropriate for us today: 'Seek the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.'"

Of Interest

+ When ESPN Anchor Finds Out Kaepernick Didn't Even Vote, He Teaches QB a Lesson He'll Never Forget.

[Note: Another observation on Colin Kaepernick (posted on Facebook by Colonel Allen West) it includes a commentary by ESPN commentator Stephen A. Smith. It should be noted that Colonel West & Stephen Smith are both black. – AOM] ESPN commentator Stephen A. Smith gave Colin Kaepernick a brutal verbal beatdown Wednesday after he learned the San Francisco 49ers quarterback decided not to vote at all in the 2016 presidential election.

In a fiery and lengthy rant, Smith argued Kaepernick has delegitimized everything he tried to accomplish by first sitting then taking a knee during the national anthem in protest of "oppression" in America. "As far as I am concerned, Colin Kaepernick is absolutely irrelevant," Smith said. "I don't want to see him again; I don't want to hear from him again; I don't wanna hear a damn word about anything he has to say about our nation – the issues that we have, racial injustices, needing change, etcetera, etcetera. He comes across as a flaming hypocrite." If you can believe it, those were the nicest things the ESPN commentator had to say. Smith seemed to grow more angry with Kaepernick as he continued: "After all this noise that you made, even though you didn't intend to do so by offending our military servicemen and women...to turn around and not to even take your behind to the polls to vote for a particular candidate – it is

shameful! Absolutely shameful! Him of all people, because of the position he took, because of the attention he brought to the issues, the fact that you don't even have the decency to go to the polls and activate yourself in this election, as our president said, is a ---- shame. I don't want to hear another word from Colin Kaepernick! It's a waste of time."

Nope. He still wasn't done. Smith went on to hit Kaepernick over his poor play on the field and called for a total media blackout. "I would personally make a request to the media in this nation," he said. "Wherever he is, if he ain't on that football field trying to throw another ---- incomplete pass, do me a favor and make sure of one thing: Take the camera away from him. It means nothing!"

+ My commentary on Colin Kaepernick.

I had posted this on Facebook: Untold numbers of people say they have stopped watching (NFL football) because they are offended by Colin Kaepernick taking a knee during the national anthem, as well as any accompanying protests." I am disappointed that this happened and others have followed Colin's example. This reflects ignorance and ingratitude: Ignorance because he does not understand the tremendous freedoms that we enjoy in our country; Ingratitude because he has benefited from all this country has to offer, and responds in this way. I would offer [three] examples of people who do appreciate our country:

The first comes from the late Richard Wurmbrand, the Romanian pastor who was imprisoned by the Nazis in the 1930s because he refused to compromise his Christian ministry. Later when the communists took over, he was imprisoned by them for the same reason. I heard Wurmbrand say that whenever some people were being tortured, the one thing that gave them hope was thinking of the United States and the freedom that existed here. Our country was a beacon and inspiration of freedom to the world.

The second example comes from the Korean War. When one of the American POWs who had been held by the communists was released at the end of that conflict, he could barely walk. Yet he refused all offers of assistance, but slowly and painfully staggered over to an American flag, fell to his knees, wrapped his face in the flag, and started crying. He realized the priceless gifts that our country has to offer. (A big husky MP went over, picked him up, and carried him over to where he could get medical help.)

The third example was what happened to a member of the Black Panther Party in the 1960s who had committed a felony in a violent encounter with the police; rather than go to prison, he fled the country and lived abroad for a little over two years, some of the time in Morocco. After that length of time, he voluntarily returned to the United States knowing that he would be facing the consequences of his crime – and probably prison time. He realized, although belatedly, what a privilege it is to be a citizen of the United States of America.

What should be done with Colin and any other person who disrespects our country's flag and all that it stands for? He should be made to live in a foreign country for at least 2 years. Then before he would be permitted to come back in, he would have to give the reasons and justify why he wants to return, with no guarantee that he would be permitted to come back. I would venture to

say that these folks would get on, not just 1 knee, but both knees at that point and beg to be let back into our country. – Allen Morris, Opinion Piece + Commentary on the political election.

Dear Supporter, Last night's presidential results have given us a reprieve for America. We were about to go over the cliff. The knock-out punch was about to be delivered to the America that our Founding Fathers handed to us. We were about to lose the Supreme Court of the United States to the far left for a generation. Persecution against Christians was about to be amped up the likes of which we have never seen before. After all, Hillary Clinton called us an "unredeemable basket of deplorables." These secular progressives or God-haters were ready to pounce with nothing to stop them. I told my staff to get ready for the federal government to come after Christian radio with new regulations that would prohibit anything ...spoken against homosexuality. Clinton made it clear she believed in abortion, even partial birth abortion,...that the tax-payers should pay for it. Much more evil was about to descend our beloved America. But God had mercy on us. Don't get me wrong – Donald Trump is not our savior. Jesus Christ is our King now and forever more. But God has allowed this man to be elected president – against all odds – and Donald Trump has chosen to surround himself with many Godly men whom I admire and trust. But for God, why would a billionaire business tycoon from New York City want to look to Christian men for counsel and advice? He didn't need Gov. Mike Pence to win Indiana. No, God has placed Gov. Pence, a Bible-believing brother in Christ, in Donald Trump's path.

Now I ask all AFA supporters to pray daily for President-elect Trump and Vice President-elect Pence. May they hold to their promises, return our government to a constitutional republic and may the Lord bring a great spiritual revival to this land.

Thank you, Tim Wildmon, President, American Family Association – American Family Association, P.O. Drawer 2440, Tupelo, Mississippi; November 9, 2016

+ Reactions vary to 2019 special General Conference.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops' announcement that a special General Conference likely won't happen before 2019 brought a range of reactions, from support to frustration. Faulting the bishops about timing, or anything else, is not the way to go, according to Mathew Pinson, chair of the North Georgia Conference delegation to General Conference 2016. The Book of Discipline says delegates to a special General Conference will be the delegates from the preceding General Conference or their "lawful successors" – unless an annual or missionary conference decides to have an election. The projected special General Conference would consider the work of the Commission on a Way Forward. General Conference 2016 approved letting the Council of Bishops create such a commission, in an effort to work through divisions over church law related to the practice of homosexuality. "I think there is some wisdom in keeping the delegations as close to the last General Conference as possible," Pinson said. "It was that body that asked for this work to be commissioned. It should be that body that receives that work back & acts upon it. It's the job of those of us who were at General Conference as delegates, and the larger church, to undergird these bishops with prayer and support as they carry out to the best of their ability what the church asked them to do," Pinson said.

But the Rev. Rob Renfroe...said [that] waiting until 2019 for the special church law-making session “telegraphs a lack of urgency. We’re in a crisis, and we need some reason to believe that we’re moving forward.”

The 2016 General Conference approved the Council of Bishops creating a commission to examine and possibly revise church law dealing with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer United Methodists, with the prospect of the bishops calling a special General Conference in 2018 or 2019 to act on the commission’s recommendations. The effort came as church leaders acknowledged deep divisions, even the threat of schism, over restrictive church law related to the practice of homosexuality. The Council of Bishops recently named a 32-member Commission on a Way Forward, and on Nov. 2 the bishops announced that they’re planning for a special General Conference in early 2019 to deal with the commission’s recommendations. That means the gathering would come just a little over a year before the regularly scheduled 2020 General Conference, to be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Some UMs grumbled about a long wait for the special General Conference, and about the prospect of two expensive meetings in close succession. The case was for extra time. But the bishops noted in a press release the obstacles to moving quicker, including the logistical details and the Book of Discipline requirement for delegates to have 230 days to study any petitions they’ll be considering. Such arguments satisfied the Rev. Tom Berlin, who led the Virginia Conference delegation to General Conference 2016. “I would say that while many of us hoped for a 2018 time frame, all of us understand that scheduling a meeting of that size takes time, and a few more months will give all of us the opportunity to be more deliberate and prayerful as we prepare for the called General Conference,” said Berlin, a member of the Commission on a Way Forward.

The Rev. Beth Jones, a General Conference 2016 delegate from the Susquehanna Conference, sees the 2019 date as an advantage. “This extended time will give the commission that needed extra time to build relationships with each other, and mutual understanding,” Jones said. “That needs to be the foundation.” The Rev. Judy Zabel, a Minnesota Conference delegate to General Conference 2016, agreed that a deliberate pace is better.

Tim Crouch, leader of the North Texas Delegation to General Conference 2016, said he’s disappointed the special General Conference won’t happen earlier, but strongly believes it would be a mistake just to wait until General Conference 2020. “We have to have a special session devoted to these issues,” Crouch said. “I just don’t know how we could do the regular work of the General Conference and dedicate the kind of time and attention that’s necessary.” Matt Berryman, executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, said 2019 “is longer away than we would have liked.” But Berryman, whose group favors changing church law related to LGBTQ people, supports the special General Conference. “That means the church is willing to spend a huge amount of money and believes it’s incredibly important to go ahead and solve the problem,” said Berryman, who has been named to the Commission on a Way Forward. The global factor. Florida Conference Bishop Kenneth Carter, who serves as one of three moderators for the Commission on a Way Forward, said the worldwide nature of the denomination dictates a more deliberate pace than some will like. He noted that the council itself represents four continents and a variety of languages. Carter, who said the commission will have its first meeting in January, counseled patience and a commitment to democratic decision-making within the

global context. “This will not have a good outcome if one part of the church walks much faster than another,” he said. [Note: To read a statement from the Moderators of the “Commission on a Way Forward” (Bishop David Yemba, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, and Bishop Ken Carter) on the scheduling, you may go to the following website on the internet: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/from-the-moderators-of-the-commission-on-a-way-forward>] – By Sam Hodges and Kathy L. Gilbert, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), Jacksonville, Florida; Nov. 4, 2016. Hodges, a United Methodist News Service writer, lives in Dallas. Gilbert is a multimedia news reporter for UMNS. <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/reactions-vary-to-2019-special-general-conference>.

+ Commentary:

A Lack of Urgency. In 2010, leaders in The United Methodist Church hired two well-respected consulting firms to study the church's institutional structure in an effort to assess its effectiveness and to arrest the denomination's steady decline in membership and worship attendance. One of the firms, Apex HG Consulting, reported a “general lack of trust” in the church’s leadership. It traced this finding to a “lack of accountability” across a denomination that lacked clear metrics for discerning the effectiveness of its institutional infrastructure (i.e., its general boards and agencies, and its executive and administrative bodies). By September of 2012, after a deflating General Conference, a blue-ribbon panel tasked with evaluating the church's efforts to make critical changes wrote: “Business as usual is unsustainable. Dramatically different and new behaviors, not incremental changes, are required. We have not yet seen the degree of shared sense of urgency or commitment to systemic adaptations with the redirection of leadership expectations and sufficient resources that our situation requires.”

In May of 2014, at a combined meeting of the church’s Connectional Table and the General Council on Finance and Administration, economist Don House informed church leaders that lacking the expeditious implementation of a strategic, credible, and metrics oriented plan, the UM Church’s infrastructure would become unsustainable by 2030 and face collapse by 2050. Despite these warnings from well-respected people in and outside of the church, the Council of Bishops’ (COB) lack of urgency this year in addressing existential threats is shocking. This lack of urgency is most clearly demonstrated in the COB’s ponderous response to threats against its governance and the covenant that binds together local congregations, annual conferences, and the general church.

Shortly after GC 2012 progressives plunged the denomination into crisis by adopting a strategy of ecclesial defiance of the church’s polity. If that were not enough, some active bishops tolerated or excused the defiance, and seemed unwilling or unable to hold clergy and even an episcopal colleague accountable. By the 2016 General Conference it was apparent to everyone the denomination was in crisis and the potential for division was real. At that General Conference Bishop Bruce Ough, the incoming president of the COB, acknowledged the depth of the division, confessed the COB itself was divided, and therefore recommended the creation of a special commission to address the crisis. [It] would be directed to present a plan to resolve the crisis for consideration at a possible called General Conference in 2018 or 2019. To the assembled delegates this seemed like the best way forward given the circumstances.

But to many United Methodists, the creation of another body to address its problems lacked urgency. The COB appeared to be fulfilling the very critiques of the church's leadership cited by the costly analysts it hired to diagnose its ailments. Despite increasingly high profile attacks against the church's polity in the immediate aftermath of General Conference, culminating in the Western Jurisdiction's intentionally provocative election of a lesbian clergy member as a bishop, the COB bogged down even further. It took the bishops five months just to name the members who would serve on its special commission. And to date, only the 3 commission moderators – three bishops, of course – have actually met.

It is reported that the 32-member commission will have an introductory conference call in December, and finally get down to business in January. Given all the disruption and divisiveness many would have thought the COB would have moved more quickly. Instead, it has reverted to form. Like other leading church bodies it has lacked the urgency people within and without the church have said it needs to exhibit. Instead of accelerating the timetable, the bishops recently explained that any potential called General Conference would now have to wait until 2019. Many are justifiably dubious of this ever happening. "A requirement that materials be in the hands of delegates at least 230 days before such a session," said Ough, "makes it unlikely that the Commission could complete its work in time to meet that deadline for a 2018 meeting, so 2019 seemed to us to be the best option." This is only true because the COB lacked the urgency to deal with a crisis that is harming local churches and annual conferences, exacerbating a looming demographic and fiscal crisis, and deepening the trust deficit in its leadership pointed out to it six years ago.

People across the theological and social spectrum have expressed surprise and even dismay by the number of bishops (eight, not including the three episcopal moderators) appointed to the commission. Given the COB's failure to lead and its lack of urgency, the commission's first order of business should be to kindly, but firmly minimize the role of bishops in its work and its ultimate recommendation. Business as usual is unsustainable.

– By Walter Fenton *

When in doubt tell the truth. That will astound your enemies and will confound your friends. – Mark Twain

Global Outlook

An ambitious man with a rusty wrench will do more than a lazy man who has a box filled with new tools.

Haiti. Poverty. "I hate poverty. I hate the ravage I see from day to day that it causes. I hurt for the mother who writes and says her baby cries all the time because there's no money left to buy food or the friends whose house was filled with water from heavy, continual rains ruining everything. Then there's others who do have a paycheck coming, but it's already spent long before it's

placed into their hands because they are so in debt. I hate a system that makes it impossible to buy the bare necessities in the market because the prices are so outrageous. I hate to see the people we've been called to serve suffer so. A dry place to lay one's head, having electricity and a place to charge your phone and food in the belly are considered luxuries here. Thoughts of decorating a tree and buying gifts to give at Christmas are the furthest things from their minds. What we really think we need depends on who we are and which part of the world we live in.

Watching people live in survival mode is hard. This isn't meant to put a damper on your holidays.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying life, giving and receiving and enjoying friends and family.

That's not the purpose of this post [on Facebook]. I know my friends will let me decompress. :)

Just don't forget those around you who are not quite as fortunate as you." [Note: While Hurricane Matthew hit us on the East Coast pretty hard, it really devastated Haiti, which is already mired in extreme poverty. The effects of the hurricane exacerbated the problems that are already there. – AOM] – Received from Ms. Dana Adams; Dec 13, 2016. She and her husband Pritchard are missionaries to Haiti with Rehoboth Ministries. Donations to their ministry may be made through: The Lord's Table Church, Attention: Rehoboth Ministries, Inc., PO Box 11049, Goldsboro, North Carolina 27532. *

Life is too short for drama or petty things, so laugh hard, love truly and forgive quickly. Live While You Are Alive. Forgive now those who made you cry. You might not get a second chance.