

Monthly Update

July 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Monthly Update again addresses issues that are a result of GC2016 and residual effects of the 2016 meeting of the Western Jurisdiction at which an individual involved in lesbian practice was consecrated as a bishop. The resulting financial difficulties are not surprising; this is not rocket science but obvious to anyone who is an orthodox Christian.

In the March Update I had summarized the situation in which two big churches in Mississippi seek exit from our denomination. The most-attended church and another large congregation in the Mississippi Conference have each taken the first steps toward leaving the United Methodist connection. Parishioners at The Orchard, which denominational data lists as the 16th highest in U.S. worship, voted almost unanimously to begin the process of peaceful withdrawal. The tally at the Tupelo church was 1,025 in favor of withdrawal, 2 against and 4 abstentions. The vote at Getwell Road United Methodist Church in Southaven, a Memphis suburb, was 782 for separation, 19 against and 7 unsure. The Orchard has an average weekly worship attendance of about 2,700, and Getwell Road has a worship attendance of about 800. Both churches completed voting on Feb. 5. However, Mississippi Area Bishop James Swanson Sr. doesn't consider the votes binding and holds out hope the congregations will remain part of the connection. Lead pastors of both churches expressed frustration with the denomination's intensifying homosexuality debate, calling it a "distraction" from ministry. (UMNS)

I had spoken to a pastor at The Orchard to see if there was any hope for the church to stay in the UMC? He assured me that there was none; he and the other pastors had already surrendered their UM pastoral credentials and the Mississippi Conference was set to vote the following week. I was sick at heart to learn that – but not surprised.

In remembrance of our pending celebration of July 4th I offer the words which we know:

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness....

Remember – thank any veterans you know for their service to our country & for keeping our country free. Please pray for our church & our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

July 2017 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., replied to a reporter on his 90th birthday, March 8, 1931:
“Young man, the secret of my success is that at an early age I discovered I was not God.”

* * * * *

The Good Stuff

+ **From our American History, we have a shining example of courage and determination.**

Samuel Whittemore – American Tiger

Born in England on July 27, 1695, Samuel Whittemore came to North America as a Captain in His Majesty’s Dragoons, fighting the French in 1745. He was involved in the capture of the French stronghold, Fort Louisburg, and there captured a decorative French officer’s sword. About its capture, all Sam would say is that its previous owner had “died suddenly”. For some reason, Britain returned Louisburg to the French, who immediately started rebuilding the fort.

After the war Sam stayed in the colonies, buying a farm in Menotomy (now “Arlington” in Massachusetts), built a house with his own hands, and settled there. He married Elizabeth Spring, and then Mrs. Esther Prentice after Elizabeth died. He and his two wives had 3 sons and 5 daughters among them. His house, on Massachusetts Avenue, in Arlington, still exists to this day.

In 1758 when war broke out again with the French Sam volunteered, and at age 63 he was sent to help recapture Louisburg. They did – and this time reduced the fort to rubble. The following year he was part of General Wolfe’s expedition that took Quebec from the French. Later, nearing 70, he fought in the frontier Indian Wars (1763). Leaving his wife, children and grandchildren to take care of the farm, he joined the colonial force against the Ottawa chief, Pontiac. He came home this time astride a much finer horse than he’d left with, and now he owned a brace of pistols whose previous owner had, also in Sam’s words, “died suddenly.”

For Sam, back in Menotomy, life was good. Having traveled far and wide, survived multiple combat deployments, and fought against enemies of varying stripes and tactics, in his senior years he was now loving life and basking in the admiration of his wife, his children, and his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Freedom was what Sam had always fought for, and he found living in freedom to be a glorious way of life. Freedom’s song hummed in his soul. He believed in American independence, stating that he wanted his descendants to be governed by their own laws and not have their lives dictated by a king on the other side of the earth.

But in the spring of 1775 Sam could see storm clouds gathering and he was deeply concerned about threats to his freedom, both foreign and domestic. Sam knew that freedom is never free. That’s why, like so many of his countrymen, he was agitated by the current political climate – the posturing, the scare tactics, and what he regarded as pure bullying. His free way of life was threatened, freedom’s enemies had become blatantly aggressive. And he wasn’t going to take it anymore.

Other, lesser men would have considered it time to sit back, relax, and enjoy the “flight.” After all, Sam had “done his part.” He’d earned his stripes, paid his dues.

Time to fade away? Certainly not on Sam’s watch. Sam’s “aged” soldiering is a model for all of us. Let’s stay in the fight.

April 19, 1775 – arguably the most important day in American history – was a fine spring day. The air was clear, and the smell of freshly-turned soil filled the nostrils of 80-year-old Samuel Whittemore as he breathed deeply of freedom. The previous night he had watched as Colonel Smith led his column of 700 soldiers through Menotomy. He was probably concerned, but the British had come out of Boston before and there had not been any serious trouble.

What he had not known was that the British Regular troops – the world’s finest professional soldiers at the time – had been given secret orders to march out from Boston and seize colonial militia weapons, ammunition,

and supplies at Concord, 18 miles up the road and to capture both John Hancock and Samuel Adams, two advocates of “rebellion.” (This was an early attempt at “gun control.”)

The Colonials got word of the British operation and made their own plans. At Lexington Green, the British had been confronted by Captain John Parker’s Minutemen who were armed and ready. The veteran Parker had prepared his grim-faced company with these famous words, “If they mean to have war, let it begin here.” Some 50 “undisciplined” militiamen carried a variety of weapons. When ordered to disperse, the Minutemen refused – and the British fired; by early morning eight freedom-loving Americans lay dead on the green. Six of the eight were three fathers and their three sons. The rest fled as ordered by their officers. So it is in every generation: the ones who “get it” pass it on.

Leaving Lexington somewhat bruised by the Colonials’ resistance, the British companies moved on toward Concord. The countryside was abuzz. Minutemen, contrary to common myth among the British of their being a bunch of disorganized, spontaneous rabble, responded to their own sophisticated system of organized riders to alert the people.

On their arrival in Concord, the British troops searched for the weapons and munitions, but could not find them since they were concealed in several places. Hancock and Adams were miles away, thanks to the warning by Paul Revere and the other riders.

Learning that the Minutemen were swarming in from as far away as Worcester, and that the weapons were too well hidden – and meeting a large American force that just kept growing – the British fell back. The Redcoats, overwhelmed in this deadly clash, began a retreat toward Boston. Soon, guerrilla bands fired from the woods and stone walls at the beleaguered marching troops. As British casualties increased, the troops became disorganized. The Americans then struck even harder at their hated red-coated foes. The British route back to Boston would take them through Sam’s hometown of Menotomy.

While all of this was going on, Sam was placidly working in his fields; he knew nothing of the British invasion and the deaths at Lexington. Later on the morning of the 19th he heard rumors that there had been fighting at Lexington and Concord. But, when General Percy had marched through the town with an additional 1,400 soldiers, Sam’s military experience told him there was serious trouble – “why else would the British be sending reinforcements?,” he probably asked himself. So, again he got into the fight. Sam had decided that they were going to get a bellyful. Over his eighty years the warrior soul in Sam’s chest had matured to the finest quality and the sharpest of edges. This original “Uncle Sam” had the sharply-honed soul of a warrior.

The people in Menotomy learned that the combined, heavily engaged, columns of Smith and Percy were retreating toward the town, burning homes along the way, and with some American reportedly being shot by the British after being taken prisoner.

Having taken root in a man’s chest, the warrior soul never leaves, never quits, never surrenders – and certainly never runs from a just fight. No matter the odds.

Octogenarian or not (80+ years old), Sam Whittmore would do his part again. So the aged warrior strapped on his captured French sword, stuck his two dueling pistols in his belt, put on his powder horn and shot bag, took his musket from its place on his fireplace mantle and ordered his family to stay inside until he returned.

Sam selected a position near a tavern behind a rock wall that provided cover and gave him a good view of the road from Lexington that the British would have to pass – and sat down to wait. His fellow Minutemen tried to talk him out of the vulnerable position, but he would have none of it. He wasn’t out to avoid a fight; he intended to pick one. As it happened, his location placed him right in the path of the British Grenadiers of the 47th Regiment of Foot soldiers.

The greatest moment in Sam’s life was about to happen.

As the British pushed ahead, the fighting became fierce. Minutemen on both sides of him were firing their muskets, then they’d sprint away to reload. But not Sam. Waiting for the right moment, when the enemy was almost on top of him, he stood up and fired his musket, dropping one British regular in midstep. Sam then jumped out from behind the wall, drew his two pistols, and fired both of them, killing one Redcoat immediately and mortally wounding another. Since the British soldiers were on top of him, Sam did not have time to reload his weapons, so he drew his sword and started flailing away at the enraged, cursing, bayonet-wielding, soldiers

who now surrounded him. One of the soldiers leveled his Brown Bess musket at point blank range and fired, tearing away part of his face. The .69 caliber ball knocked him to the ground. Dazed, Sam rose, still trying to fight, but was again knocked down by a musket butt and bayoneted thirteen times by the vengeful Redcoats. Think of it – most of the British soldiers would have been less than half his age.

The British continued their fight through the streets of Menotomy, which turned out to be the costliest action of the day. They left forty of their soldiers dead in the town and another eighty wounded, half the casualties of the day. After the British column had fought its way clear, the town's people and minutemen started to search for their wounded compatriots. Several had seen Sam's "last stand" and approached to remove his body. To everyone's astonishment Sam was not only still alive, but still conscious and full of fight. Lying there – he was trying to load his musket!

Using a door as a makeshift stretcher, the townspeople carried Sam to a tavern, where a doctor stripped away his torn, bloody clothes, and was aghast at his many gaping bayonet wounds, his horribly injured face, bruises and lacerations. The doctor remarked that "it wouldn't do any good to even dress the wounds since there were so many." Whittemore's family and friends persuaded him to "do his best." After his wounds had been bandaged, Sam was carried to his home, to die surrounded by his grieving family.

To die? Not quite!

That old warrior thought differently. Sam survived – and lived another 18 years. He was terribly scarred, but always was proud of what he had done for his adopted country. He is quoted as having stated that he would take the same chances again.

Sam died on February 3, 1793, at age 98 and is buried in the town's cemetery. He was survived by 185 direct descendants – each living as a free American.

You can question the old soldier's tactical judgment, making the stand in the manner he did, but you can never question his bravery.

He also proved you are never too old!

– Sources: + *The Warrior's Soul* by General Jerry Boykin & Stu Weber (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2015), pp. 8-12. Used by permission. Excerpts from "Never Too Old," Revolutionary War Historical Article; Sons of the American Revolution, Sons of Liberty Chapter; "The Story of Cpt. Samuel Whittemore" by Donald N. Moran. <http://www.revolutionarywararchives.org/whittemore.html>; Excerpts from "Samuel Whittemore, American Patriot and Freedom Fighter"; Boston Discovery Guide; "A veteran long before the War for Independence, Sam Whittemore was America's oldest, bravest soldier." by Patrick J. Leonard. <http://www.boston-discovery-guide.com/menotomy>.

Of Interest.

+ *How to reclaim the church-planting tradition.*

ALAMEDA, Calif. (UMNS) – Methodists once planted at least a church a day across the American frontier. Today's United Methodists are trying to recover that legacy – with a modern twist. [Efforts are under way to try to reclaim that tradition. However, I would suggest that it will not happen until we recover the Wesleyan faith that is our tradition. Until then, we will try different organizational techniques – that do not go to the heart of our problem. – AOM]

– Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); Jun 21, 2017.

+ *Sudden Financial Crisis Hits Yellowstone Methodists.* A swarm of earthquakes hitting the region surrounding Yellowstone National Park in the past week has captured the attention of geologists studying the geologically volatile region. But United Methodists in the area are just now learning about a seismic shift of their own that threatens the continued operation of their conference. "Unprecedented financial challenges have emerged in the last five months radically challenging our short term sustainability," warned a presentation by the United Methodist Church's Yellowstone Annual Conference on June 10. "Unfolding in 2017 is a[n] unprecedented level of deficit that could end normal operations of the conference." Bishop Karen Oliveto has

overseen the Yellowstone Annual Conference since her appointment to lead the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area in September 2016.

In February, the Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) reported that some congregations in the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area – which includes the Yellowstone Annual Conference – were facing decreasing membership and financial contributions following the election, consecration and appointment of the Rev. Karen Oliveto as bishop for the region. Oliveto, who is “married” to another woman, faces opposition from some United Methodists both within and outside of her Episcopal area. Methodists in the region launched a “sustenance fund” – later re-styled a “generosity fund” to compensate for financial “stress” in local congregations, but now problems with local congregation finances have manifested themselves at the conference level. “We must decide and execute a course of action quickly, to be completed in the next 3-4 months,” the presentation urges.

A Sudden Crisis. While a scarcity of financial resources has afflicted the tiny, declining Yellowstone Annual Conference for some time, the June 10 conference report is phrased in urgent language, describing a grim financial shortfall that has developed only in the past 4-5 months. Reasons cited include “weakened local churches due to death and loss of significant givers” and “reaction to [Oliveto’s] episcopal election” – which conference officials admit was a significant factor, if “only one of many”.

The Yellowstone Annual Conference has faced a loss of income of \$30,000 a year from 2014 through 2016, but the presentation reports that in 2017 this loss has grown to \$25,000 a month under 2016 income levels in 2017. Forecast income for 2017 is projected to be \$935,000, while the forecast deficit is \$303,356. At the start of 2017, conference reserves were only \$294,000. “By year’s end most reserves will be depleted with no new income projected to continue conference operations,” the report states. Citing only three levers of control, the report concludes that the conference must decrease spending, increase income (through squeezing more money out of the congregations within the conference,), and delve into the conference’s financial reserve.

Subtracting for denomination-wide “general church” apportionments (the conference is planning to pay \$302,095, which would be slightly below average national and its own giving percentage levels for 2016), program and administrative staff (\$398,625), office expenses (\$62,000), and Cabinet Level Staff (\$297,488) only \$240,148 remains in the conference budget. Of this amount, all but \$51,250 is needed to paying retiree healthcare, but \$188,898 is needed for remaining discretionary items – an amount dwarfed by the projected deficit.

Tough Decisions Ahead. Plans for borrowing funds, raising money from outside the conference and squeezing more dollars out of struggling congregations – who have lost some of their own large contributors – are not sustainable. All sources of significant spending reductions involve staff reductions, deep cuts to general church apportionments, and eliminating costs such as United Methodist campus ministry within the conference (\$32,000), supporting the moving expenses for pastors within the conferences (\$23,000), the conference Vital Worship Developer (\$30,000) and support for the Blackfeet United Methodist Parish which serves the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana (\$15,000). The presentation suggests increasing conference income through setting of fundraising goals for congregations as part of a conference-wide campaign. But the amount of new funds needed would be significant: to take no more than \$100,000 from reserve finds, approximately \$150,000 would need to be raised (or cut in spending) by the end of 2017. “Extraordinary efforts will need to be taken,” the presentation warns. If fundraising is not successful, the annual conference must have a plan ready to execute in November/December to severely curtail operations of the conference.

In the presentation, turmoil or financial distress experienced by local congregations is not addressed. The concern is focused entirely upon a conference budget largely controlled by the bishop (Oliveto). If Oliveto’s appointment as bishop is indeed one of the contributing causes to a financial shortfall, she could step down to relieve some of the distress.

The Yellowstone Annual Conference is already proposing a merger with the neighboring Rocky Mountain Conference. It remains to be seen if the financial difficulties will accelerate or force the hand of the proposal for Yellowstone to merge into a new Mountain Sky Annual Conference.

The Yellowstone Annual Conference is among the most liberal within the denomination. At its gathering last year, the group of churches in Wyoming, Montana and a sliver of Idaho voted to affirm abortion provider Planned Parenthood and a host of other progressive causes tied up in sexuality and gender identity.

3 Responses to Sudden Financial Crisis Hits Yellowstone Methodists:

1. Diaphone64 says: “It’s beautiful!”; June 21, 2017.

2. Gwendolyn Fulkerson says: “If the United Methodists don’t take a stand to hold with traditional, Scriptural teaching, this is just the beginning of a complete decline in the UMC. I hope they decide to take a true stand and not try to straddle the fence anymore. We are getting tired of waiting and will leave if they don’t stay true.”; June 21, 2017.

3. Dave says: “No surprise here. Yellowstone was in trouble before KO’s arrival. Her presence has destabilized many churches that were struggling. But financial concerns aren’t going to change KO’s reign. The RMC will not acknowledge the growing cause and effect of decline caused by her leadership.”; June 21, 2017.

[Note: Should anyone be surprised? Un-Christian decisions and actions should suffer financial consequences. – AOM]

– Jeffrey Walton, Institute on Religion & Democracy; June 21, 2017. <https://juicyecumenism.com/wp-content/uploads/Karen-Oliveto>.

+ *Plan approved for agency evaluation.*

Oslo, Norway – A church leadership body approved a plan to connect the evaluation of United Methodist general agencies with the development of the denomination’s budget. The United Methodist Church has 10 general agencies that rely at least in part on local church giving to operate. Their duties vary, but all are charged with working with local churches, conferences and each other. The Connectional Table, which acts as a sort of church council for the denomination, has the responsibility of evaluating the missional effectiveness of these agencies. It also has the responsibility of working with the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination’s finance agency, to draft a four-year budget that covers not only the 10 church-funded agencies but also other denomination-wide work. General Conference, the denomination’s top lawmaking body that typically meets every four years, has the final say on the denominational budget.

In years past, the evaluation and budgetary work have been largely separate. The Connectional Table, meeting May 17-21 in Oslo, Norway, outlined a process for the evaluations to have some bearing on 2021-2024 agency budgets and possibly their spending plans before then. “It won’t be the only factor, or even the major factor, but it will provide some input,” said the Rev. Brad Brady, co-convenor of the Connectional Table’s agency evaluation advisory group. He is also senior pastor of Perry United Methodist Church in the South Georgia Conference. “We don’t have any preconceived notions of where things are going to go,” Brady added. “We want to see this as our roadmap as we start our journey.”

In evaluating the agencies, the Connectional Table will be looking at how the agencies collectively seek to aid conferences and local churches, fulfill their mandates in the Book of Discipline and execute other essential ministries. Brady noted that his team already knows some of the Book of Discipline’s mandates go far beyond what any agency can accomplish. For example, the Commission on the Status and Role of Women has responsibility for “the elimination of sexism in all its manifestations from the total life of The United Methodist Church. They’ll be working on that until kingdom come,” Brady said to laughter from fellow Connectional Table members. He foresees the evaluations leading agencies to submit legislation to the 2020 General Conference that would streamline their responsibilities to reflect the best use of resources. One thing the Connectional Table will look at is how the agencies, alongside churches and conferences, help carry out the denomination’s Four Areas of Focus. Those areas are: Creating new and renewed congregations, developing principled Christian leaders, improving global health and engaging in ministry with the poor.

Each agency has a board of directors that oversees its work. Starting this year, the Connectional Table will collect the evaluation materials those boards are already gathering as well as other materials requested by the evaluation team.

Next year, the Connectional Table will seek input from the denomination's 132 conferences about the partnerships they have with agencies. Specifically, the Connectional Table's evaluations will look for evidence that agencies are fruitful in mission, making continuous improvement, building partnerships and communicating their story. The Connectional Table next will meet with leaders from each agency to discuss what it's learning about that agency's work.

Finally, the leadership body plans to use the information it gathers in planning how the denomination allocates its resources. "Our endgame is to lift up the collaborations among the general commissions and agencies so we can highlight what is being done across the connection," Dana Lyles, the other co-convenor of the agency evaluation advisory group, told United Methodist News Service. "You have little pockets doing great things, but it's not being captured." An assistant principal in Greensboro, North Carolina, Lyles has long experience with evaluations.

The Rev. Kim Cape, the top executive of the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, thanked the evaluation team for working with her and other agency leaders. She is the convenor of the General Secretaries Table, which brings together the top executives of the denomination's general agencies. Each agency's top executive serves on the Connectional Table with voice but not vote. "I think that this is a work in progress," she said. "We're learning as we go along."

– By Heather Hahn, UMNS; May 24, 2017.

+ ***Climatologist against Global Warming Groupthink.*** Dr. Judith Curry is Professor and former Chair of the School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Her remarks delivered to the US Senate Commerce Committee Hearing on "Data or Dogma? Promoting Open Inquiry in the Debate over the Magnitude of the Human Impact on Earth's Climate" [reflected a change in her position of human causation].

– June 14, 2017

Homosexuality. ***Christian day in St Louis.*** Gay rights activists are demanding that the Major League Baseball team drop their 30-year-old "Christian Day" event and remove featured speaker Lance Berkman from the event. The team soundly rejected those demands and "Christian Day" will go on. Team officials say the day is a reflection of its commitment "to bringing like-minded groups together to share in the unifying experience of Cardinals baseball."

Berkman – a committed Christian – came under fire two years ago when he spoke out against a city ordinance in Houston that would have allowed transgender people to choose whichever restroom they wanted to use. The issue is, what to do about a 15 or 16-year-old boy who thinks he's a girl and wants to shower with the girls," he said at the time. "Maybe he is [transgender], maybe he's confused. But I wouldn't want him in the shower with my daughters. We shouldn't have the rights of 2 percent of the population trump the rights of the other 98 percent."

The LGBT community freaked out and are demanding that the "Christian Day" be cancelled, or at the very least that Berkman be pulled from the event. An organization called St. Louis Pride said it was "disappointed by the decision of the St. Louis Cardinals to provide a public platform for Berkman, an individual whose words and actions towards the LGBTQ+ are divisive and demeaning."

In a statement, the team said it sees nothing wrong with its sponsorship of Christian Day. "The Cardinals have hosted a Christian Day at the ballpark for nearly three decades," the team said "The post-game event usually features a well-known keynote speaker (often a former Cardinal or professional athlete) who talks about his or her experience of being a practicing Christian in the public arena. "Lance Berkman participated in Christian Day when he was a Cardinals player, and we welcome him back this year to discuss his faith."

Team officials point out that it has a large number of special promotional days to bring members of the community together. "As an organization, the Cardinals have always been committed to bringing like-minded groups together to share in the unifying experience of Cardinals baseball," the statement continued. "We are an inclusive organization with a social responsibility to be welcoming to all types of people and organizations. We continue to try and reach out to every part of our community, and have hosted a variety of themed events like

Christian Day, Jewish Community Night, Catholic Family Night, Bosnian Heritage Night, Fiesta Cardenales, and many others. We are excited to announce that we will be hosting our first Pride Night later this season which will bring members of the LGBT Community together to enjoy Cardinals baseball.” [Note: The truly intolerant ones are the LGBT Community as evidenced here. – AOM]

– Robert Gehl; The Federalist Papers; June 20, 2017

* * * * *

Man is still the most extraordinary computer of all. – John F. Kennedy

Global Outlook

Anyone with less than an active prayer life has a withered hand. – Navigators commentary on Mark 3:5

* * * * *

Congo. *Church acts as bridge between warring tribes in Congo.* Tribal conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo have sent hundreds fleeing and left many dead. The clashes are occurring between the Bashimbi (indigenous tribes also known as pygmies) and the Bantu, said the Rev. Joseph Mulongo Ndala, Mulongo District superintendent for the United Methodist North Katanga Conference. He has taken 11 members of a displaced family into his home and said church members throughout the region are opening their homes to displaced people. Mulongo said he has been holding meetings to train people to be peacemakers rather than joining in the fighting. “It is great joy to see that people have understood the church’s call and are mobilizing to assist with food, etc.,” he said. “Pygmies are not violent people, they live a nomadic life,” Mulongo explained, but added that the Bantu people, who are the majority, consider Bashimbi to be second-class citizens. According to Congolese history, the Bashimbi were the first occupants of the Congo.

The conflict, dating from June 2016, began when the Bashimbi revolted against their treatment by the Bantu. “The pygmies are saying the Bantu are taking their land, making farms and imposing taxes. They want to be independent,” Mulongo said. Bashimbi attacked the city of Manono on Dec. 20, using bows and arrows and killing a number of people. The Bantu responded by killing 18 Bashimbi, including burning three alive, Mulongo reported. It is now a humanitarian situation because the survivors of the violence are not receiving any aid from anyone outside the country, he said. In response to a request for aid from North Katanga Episcopal Area Bishop Nikulu Ntanda Ntambo, the UM Board of Global Ministries has approved a grant of \$10,000 towards holding a...reconciliation seminar with two groups, said the Rev. Mande Muyombo, a director with the mission agency. Pygmy tribes live in Central Congo, East Congo and North Katanga Episcopal areas of The UMC. The conflict happening now is in the North Katanga area, said Bishop David K. Yemba, leader for the Central Congo Area. Gaston Nkulu Ntambo, a UM missionary serving in Central Congo, said the Batembo, another pygmy ethnic group, reside in the triangle between the towns of Kabalo, Kongolo and Nyunzu. They are farmers who work for daily wages, but do not own the land. They, too, are involved in conflict with Bantu.

One major source of conflict is inter-marriage between the Batembo and Bantu. Bantus marry women from the Batembo tribe but forbid Bantu men from marrying anyone from that ethnic group. “This was the source of all the conflicts and now the conflict has spread all around,” Ntambo said, adding that the Bantu who come in contact with the Batembo are being killed by the Batembo. “The whole situation started more like a tribal conflict,” Ntambo said. He said the conflict was between the Baluba tribe, a Bantu tribe which is also his tribe, and the pygmies. “They are also moving from village to village, burning it down and stealing whatever they find. The Bantu groups have all abandoned their villages for the nearby major towns as they run from the pygmies,” he said.

Reaching out to tribes. Judith Yanga, communications director of the United Methodist East Congo Episcopal Area, said clashes have been reported in the Abanga community 350 kilometers from the city of Kindu.

United Methodist Bishop Gabriel Yemba Unda, East Congo, has been working to evangelize the indigenous people as well as get them better access to education and health care. “There are several pygmy sites in our episcopal region: Abanga, Balanga towards Kailo, Kambare towards the territory of Kasongo, Kongolo on the border with Katanga and more than 360 kilometers from the city of Kisangani to the province of Ituri,” Yanga said.

Because of the work of The United Methodist Church already underway, church leaders have been contacted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to collaborate in aiding the tribes, Yanga reported.

Peace talks. A peace and reconciliation meeting was held Nov. 24-28 in Nyunzu, a district of the Tanganyika Conference in Central Congo. Nyunzu is located at the junction of five territories: Manono, Ankoro, Kongolo, Kabalo and Kiyambi.

The Rev. Betty Kazadi Musau, secretary of the Central Congo Conference and health board chair of the North Katanga Conference, said there are more than 12,000 displaced people in the area. She has been working to bring together United Methodist women from the Tanganyika conference with the indigenous people to dialogue about peace. They have met together for meals for the first time, she said. “Now, every week, United Methodist Women call and update me about tribe members who attended the workshop and have become members of the United Methodist church in Nyunzu,” she said. They are learning sewing and knitting skills. “The United Methodist women shared that if people are busy with their jobs for family subsistence, they will prevent and reduce conflict and manipulation by politicians,” she said.

– By Kathy L. Gilbert, UMNS; Jan. 13,

2017.

* * * * *

Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. – General George Patton