

Monthly Update

March 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This “Monthly Update” contains information on issues that are very much in the news, those affecting not only our United Methodist Church but also our American society: Immigration “Sanctuary church” issues, Islam, radical feminist ideas, the North Carolina House Bill #2 (the “Bathroom Bill”), Israel, the Boy Scouts, and the ever-present issues surrounding homosexuality and how it is affecting our denomination.

I often wonder how some of our church leadership presume to advise the President of the United States on how to run the country – yet they preside over a church that has sustained an uninterrupted 48-year decline. It would seem that the adage would apply “Get your own house in order first before telling someone else how to clean theirs.”

In last month’s letter, I told you about Joe Dyer, who passed away – at 105 years of age. February 14th The Reverend Charles Walker went to be with the Lord; he was 97 years old and just short of celebrating his 75th Wedding Anniversary with the love of his life Mozelle. When interviewed for the February 9th edition of the *Archdale-Trinity News*, he was asked, “How long have you been married?” Charles’ reply was, “Not long enough.” One of the “old-time” Methodist pastors who really loved the Lord, he was key to Mt. Gilead UM Church and a cherished supporter of Concerned Methodists. I often say of Charles, “If every Methodist pastor loved the Lord as he did, our United Methodist Church would solve its problems – and there would be no need for our ministry since we as a denomination would get back on track.” A memory I have is:

One time when I preached at a church he was pastoring – Community Evangelical Methodist Church in High Point, I walked down from the pulpit knowing I had done a terrible job – preached a flat sermon, and told Charles so. I had also committed the “unpardonable sin” of not stopping until 12:14 P.M. As we walked toward the door at the back, he patted me on the arm as a father would to a son and said, “Now Allen, just give the Holy Spirit room to work.” Charles then talked to the people in the congregation. Person after person walked up to me and told me, “When you said ----- that really meant so much to me.” I just stood there in awe because I did not remember saying any of those things. And I knew it was a lousy sermon. There was a peaceful spirit in that place and no one was in a rush to get out of the door and go to a favorite restaurant. People just talked to each other, laughed and enjoyed the fellowship.

Charles was right – but it showed me the strong spiritual connection between him and our Lord – that he and Jesus had unbroken communication with each other.

Charles had that “sweet, sweet spirit” that the hymn writer penned so many years ago.

As in last month’s Update, I would ask that you please continue to read Psalm 91 as a prayer and “hedge of protection” around our country. And I ask that you continue to support us with your prayers and your gifts. Thank you.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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March 2017 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

[Note: This has been used before; it bears repeating now, since many in the United Methodist hierarchy are increasingly vocal in their support of continued illegal immigration in defiance of our country's stability and security. – AOM]

Theodore Roosevelt's ideas on Immigrants and being an AMERICAN in 1907:

In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin.

But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American... There can be no divided allegiance here.

Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all.

We have room for but one flag, the American flag...

We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language...

and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people.

– Theodore Roosevelt, 1907

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The Good Stuff

+ [Note: This also has been used before but it bears repeating now given our call to remain faithful. – AOM]

Would He Be Ashamed of Me?

I am building, ever building, as I live from day to day,
Something good or something evil, in the things I do and say.
Soon I'll have a finished structure, standing for eternity.
But if Christ should look upon it, would He be ashamed of me?

There are little seeds of kindness that are ready to be sown;
There's a noble deed that's waiting to be done by me alone.
There are acts that break or injure – mean and selfish as can be.
If my deeds were known to Jesus, would He be ashamed of me?

There are words at random spoken, that may soothe or wound a heart.
I can never repossess them once they from my lips depart.
Every word can bring some blessing, or a cursing it may be.
If He heard the words I've spoken, would He be ashamed of me?

Up ahead the road's dividing; here and now I must decide.
One there is that's straight and narrow, while the other's smooth and wide.
After one of these is chosen, and I've reached my destiny,
When He found me there, I wonder, would He be ashamed of me?

– By PFC Seth Baker. As reprinted from A Paratrooper's Faith, page 28

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+ ***Mornings at the Pentagon***. Over the last 12 months, 1,042 soldiers, Marines, sailors and Air Force personnel have given their lives in the terrible duty that is war. Thousands more have come home on stretchers, horribly wounded and facing months or years in military hospitals. This week, I'm turning my space over to a good friend

and former roommate, Army Lt. Col. Robert Bateman, who recently completed a yearlong tour of duty and is now back at the Pentagon. Here's Lt. Col. Bateman's account of a little-known ceremony that fills the halls of the Army corridor of the Pentagon with cheers, applause and many tears every Friday morning. It first appeared on May 17 on the Weblog of media critic and pundit Eric Alterman, the Media Matters for America Website:

"It is 110 yards from the 'E' ring to the 'A' ring of the Pentagon. This section of the Pentagon is newly renovated; the floors shine, the hallway is broad, and the lighting is bright. At this instant the entire length of the corridor is packed with officers, a few sergeants and some civilians, all crammed tightly three and four deep against the walls. There are thousands here. This hallway, more than any other, is the 'Army' hallway. The G3 ["Operational"] offices line one side, G2 ["Intelligence"] the other, G8 is around the corner. Moderate conversations flow in a low buzz. Friends who may not have seen each other for a few weeks, or a few years, spot each other, cross the way and renew [memories]. Everyone shifts to ensure an open path remains down the center. The air conditioning system was not designed for this press of bodies in this area. The temperature is rising already. Nobody cares.

"10:36 hours: The clapping starts at the E-Ring. That is the outermost of the five rings of the Pentagon and it is closest to the entrance to the building. This clapping is low, sustained, hearty. It is applause with a deep emotion behind it as it moves forward in a wave down the length of the hallway. A steady rolling wave of sound it is, moving at the pace of the soldier in the wheelchair who marks the forward edge with his presence. He is the first. He is missing the greater part of one leg, and some of his wounds are still suppurating. By his age I expect that he is a private, or perhaps a private first class. Captains, majors, lieutenant colonels and colonels meet his gaze and nod as they applaud, soldier to soldier. Three years ago when I described one of these events, those lining the hallways were somewhat different. The applause a little wilder, perhaps in private guilt for not having shared in the burden ... Yet...Now almost everyone lining the hallway is, like the man in the wheelchair, also a combat veteran. This steadies the applause, but I think deepens the sentiment. We have all been there now. The soldier's chair is pushed by, I believe, a full colonel. Behind him, and stretching the length from Rings E to A, come more of his peers, each private, corporal, or sergeant assisted as need be by a field grade officer.

"11:00 hours: 24 minutes of steady applause. My hands hurt, and I laugh to myself at how stupid that sounds in my own head. My hands hurt. Please! Shut up and clap. For 24 soldier after soldier has come down this hallway - 20, 25, 30.... Fifty-three legs come with them, and perhaps only 52 hands or arms, but down this hall came 30 solid hearts. "They pass down this corridor of officers and applause, and then meet for a private lunch, at which they are the guests of honor, hosted by the generals. Some are wheeled along. Some insist upon getting out of their chairs, to march as best they can with their chin held up, down this hallway, through this most unique audience. Some are catching handshakes and smiling like a politician at a Fourth of July parade. More than a couple of them seem amazed and are smiling shyly.

"There are families with them as well: the 18-year-old war-bride pushing her 19-year-old husband's wheelchair and not quite understanding why her husband is so affected by this, the boy she grew up with, now a man, who had never shed a tear is crying; the older immigrant Latino parents who have, perhaps more than their wounded mid-20s son, an appreciation for the emotion given on their son's behalf. No man in that hallway, walking or clapping, is ashamed by the silent tears on more than a few cheeks. An Airborne Ranger wipes his eyes only to better see. A couple of the officers in this crowd have themselves been a part of this parade in the past. "These are our men, broken in body they may be, but they are our brothers, and we welcome them home. This parade has gone on, every single Friday, all year long, for more than four years. Did you know that? I didn't. – By Joseph L. Galloway, McClatchy Newspapers; Jan 25, 2017.

It really breaks your heart to know that we didn't know this goes on every Friday, well at least I didn't know. Instead, I guess the media feels it's more important to report on Hollywood stars as heroes. I hope this article gives you a sense of pride for what our men and women are doing for us, every day, as they serve in the armed forces here and abroad.

– Received from my good friend Tom Starnes.

+ *Boy Scouts Christian alternative sees ‘tremendous response’ after transgender decision launches with 500 troops.*

(RNS) Since the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) decided to accept transgender youngsters, there appears to be a growing market for a different kind of scouting group. The BSA does not require troops chartered by houses of worship to accept children who do not identify with their birth gender. Nevertheless, the website of Trail Life USA, which [is] a Christian alternative, has had trouble keeping up with the people checking an online locator map for troops across the country since the Jan. 30 announcement. “We’ve seen tremendous response,” said Trail Life CEO Mark Hancock in reference to the surge of membership inquiries. “Where many people would say that they’re leaving Boys Scouts, we have many others that are saying that the Boy Scouts left them.”

Trail Life currently has about 26,000 members. New troops have to go through a chartering process that can take weeks, but the surge of traffic to its website and thousands of new likes on its Facebook page suggest its numbers are about to swell. “We’ve pushed a few employees from part time to full time and pushed some from full time to overtime to handle the inquiries from troops around the country that are looking for an organization that’s more aligned with the original timeless values of Boy Scouts,” Hancock said. His organization generally does not focus on the Boy Scouts but he thought it needed to be vocal about the latest decision, which he called “harmful to boys”.

“We don’t want boys psychologically, spiritually, and possibly physically scarred by the confusing message being presented by the BSA,” he said in a statement posted on Trail Life’s website. “We don’t want boys or girls subjected to compromising situations on outings in an environment where reasonable precautions are no longer enforceable.” Trail Life’s website includes a “purity” section in its values statement: “We are to reserve sexual activity for the sanctity of marriage, a lifelong commitment before God between a man and a woman.” It describes membership as “designed for biologically male children under the age of 18.”

Since Trail Life began in January 2014, its staff has doubled to 12, its mostly evangelical church-based troops have increased from 500 to 700 and it has moved from a virtual office to the 127-acre campus of a former boys home in Belton, S.C. Participating boys, called “Navigators” and “Adventurers,” have outdoor adventures, earn badges and can seek the Horizon Award that Trail Life considers a parallel to the Eagle Scout rank. Many of their troop numbers correspond to Bible verses. Troop 110 is particularly popular, after Colossians 1:10 – “So that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way” – on which the organization’s “Walk Worthy” motto is based.

The BSA, which has nearly 2.3 million youth members, said it has received letters of support since its decision from a range of religious organizations – which charter the majority of Scouting units – including Reform Jews, United Methodists, Catholics and Mormons.

Other conservative Christians opposed the BSA’s latest move, with Fox News’ Todd Starnes calling it “a complete capitulation to the gender and sex revolutionaries” and Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore tweeting “This is crazy, IMO.” More liberal denominations, including the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ, welcomed the move, pledging to work with the BSA as it implements the new policy. UUA President Peter Morales, whose church renewed a formal relationship with the BSA after it welcomed gay Scouts and leaders, called the latest juncture “a significant step in the direction of greater inclusion.”

“If a religious organization declines to accept a youth or adult application based on their religious beliefs, we ask that they please notify their local council so that a unit open to accepting the individual can be offered as an option,” said BSA spokeswoman Effie Delimarkos. Some religious groups have used cautious language about their next steps concerning the scouting organization after the decisions it has made in recent years to accept gay Scouts, gay leaders and now transgender youngsters. The Mormon church has said it is “studying” the BSA’s announcement but noted the organization’s assurance that religious groups can organize their troops in ways consistent with their religious beliefs.

The Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis said it was “evaluating” the effect the policy would have on its troops. “We will continue to be in dialogue with Boy Scouts of America in hopes that they will recognize their error and rededicate themselves to serving the needs of the boys in the organization,” the archdiocese said. Ted

Spangenberg, president of the Association of Baptists for Scouting, said he hopes groups such as Trail Life, as well as mission-oriented programs like the Southern Baptist Royal Ambassadors, will continue to thrive. “These can be effective in helping churches and their families disciple the youth in their congregations,” he told RNS. “But, the truth is, these organizations just don’t have the brand awareness and breadth of program and appeal that the Boy Scouts still has with the ‘un-churched’ of America.”

The former chairman of BSA’s Religious Relationships Committee said congregations that run units still are responsible for membership guidelines. “Faith groups chartering Boy Scout units need to realize that the latest change only impacts them as they choose for it to do so,” said (UM) R. Chip Turner.

– By Adelle M. Banks, Religious News Service (RNS); <https://twitter.com/AMBankstw>; February 17, 2017.

Of Interest. [Note: Following are articles giving some of the fallout from the ordination of Karen Oliveto. – AOM]

+ *Two large Mississippi churches to leave denomination.* Getwell Road UMC, Southaven, MS – Two large local United Methodist churches in the Mississippi Annual Conference have taken congregation wide votes to leave the denomination. Ninety six percent of the parishioners at Getwell Road UM Church in Southaven and 99 percent at The Orchard UM Church in Tupelo supported separation on Sunday, February 5. The senior pastors at both churches explained that their congregations are now in a process of discernment with the annual conference regarding their departures. Getwell Road UM Church, a vibrant and growing suburban congregation in the greater Memphis, Tennessee, area, averages over 800 people in worship. And The Orchard is the 15th largest United Methodist church in the U. S. in terms of worship attendance. On average, over 2,700 people attend its weekend services. “We want our departure to be as peaceful and God honoring as possible,” said the Rev. Bryan Collier of The Orchard. “We will be in conversation with Bishop James Swanson about the details and timing of this process. We want to act honorably and peacefully.”

Bishop Swanson, the resident bishop of the Mississippi Episcopal Area released a statement on Monday afternoon informing the conference of the news. He reported that he and two district superintendents are engaging in a discernment process with the pastors and their congregations. “Our staff and lay leadership have had conversations about this move for some time; it’s not something we rushed into,” said the Rev. Bill Beavers of Getwell Road UM Church. “This past October we invited the whole congregation to engage in conversation and prayer over the possibility. Several serious months of discernment preceded our congregational vote.”

Both pastors cited their congregations' frustration with the denomination's long and acrimonious debate over the church’s sexual ethics and teachings on marriage. Going forward, they said their congregations want to focus on kingdom matters so they are removing themselves from unproductive battles that distract them from their larger missions.

Collier cited the Judicial Council’s (essentially the denomination’s “Supreme Court”) impending decision regarding the validity of the Western Jurisdiction’s July election of the Rev. Karen Oliveto as the denomination’s first openly gay bishop. This April the Council is expected to answer several questions of law pertaining to her election.

The Orchard, Tupelo, MS: “Either way, the Council's decision is just going to prolong a bitter and divisive debate,” Collier said. “We don’t want to be part of the argument anymore. We have more important things we need to do in the Tupelo community and well beyond it.”

Neither pastor nor Bishop Swanson offered a hard timeline regarding the discernment process they have agreed to enter into. Swanson asked for prayers for all concerned. “I want to do my best to take care of and do right by Getwell Road,” said Beavers. “Our entire leadership team wants to be proactive, rather than reactive. We will continue to be in prayer and in a time of discernment as we work with Bishop Swanson.”

Other sources have reported that additional local UM churches in the Mississippi Annual Conference are contemplating similar actions in March or late April after the Judicial Council answers the questions of law pertaining to Bishop Oliveto.

– By Walter Fenton, Good News; Feb 8, 2017. Walter Fenton is a United Methodist clergy person and an analyst for Good News.

+ ***Statement from the WCA Council on the Mississippi Congregations.*** Yesterday Bishop James Swanson issued a statement indicating that two congregations in the Mississippi Annual Conference are actively re-evaluating their relationship with The United Methodist Church.

We understand that the members of both congregations voted overwhelmingly to move toward exiting our church. The Orchard UMC in Tupelo and Getwell Road UMC in Southaven are two highly vital congregations. According to the General Council on Finance and Administration, Getwell Road has grown steadily over the past twenty-five years from an attendance of 221 to 804. Nearly 500 people have professed faith in Jesus Christ at Getwell Road since 2005 under the ministry of the Rev. Bill Beavers. Led by Dr. Bryan Collier, The Orchard UMC has grown in attendance from 315 to 2711 over the past fifteen years. This vibrant congregation can often be found on the annual list of the fastest growing UM congregations and is currently the fifteenth largest congregation in United Methodism by attendance.

We are deeply saddened that the collective dysfunction of our connection is causing fruitful congregations to question their place in United Methodism. We share their frustration over wavering leadership, weak resolve, and open rebellion to our doctrine and discipline. The structures designed to enable the ministry of the local church have too often become a hindrance to the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As these congregations testify, the continuing conflict in our church harms our witness for Christ. But change is coming.

Just to be clear, the actions of the two congregations were taken independently, without consultation with the Wesleyan Covenant Association Council, and are the actions of those congregations alone. We continue to believe that those of us committed to the historic doctrine and discipline of The United Methodist Church are better off acting together and in connection with each other. The Commission on a Way Forward is meeting to bring recommendations to a proposed called General Conference in 2019. While the commission's ability to find a solution with integrity is difficult, we believe that this process offers the best option for preserving the ministry and integrity of conscience for traditional and orthodox United Methodists. The protracted timetable, while not ideal, provides an opportunity for like-minded United Methodists to organize for a new future.

The Wesleyan Covenant Association stands as an alliance to advance vibrant, scriptural Christianity. We are building relationships in local chapters and around the world to refocus on John Wesley's vision of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land. Whatever the future holds, we know that we want to face it together. The Wesleyan Covenant Association is committed to being a landing place for persons and congregations who desire to be part of a global expression of vibrant, orthodox, Wesleyan Christianity as we live into what's next.

The WCA Council commits to pray for Bishop Swanson, the Mississippi Conference Cabinet, and the pastors and people of each of these congregations, and we ask the rest of the church to join us. The days ahead will try us all. We call upon the entire church to walk faithfully and in love. God bless! – Jeff Greenway, Chair, Wesleyan Covenant Association

+ ***Apportionments and the Viability of a Connectional Church.*** Some United Methodists are pleased to pay them, others have come to loathe them, and still others have little or no idea they are contributing to them when they tithe and make gifts to their local church on Sunday morning. The “them” is apportionments; financial payments local churches make to fund the mission of a large, connectional denomination like the UM Church. In a recent press release, the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration reported that 27 of the denomination's 56 annual conferences paid 100 percent of their apportioned shares. And the United Methodist News Service followed-up with an article headlined “Record number of conferences give 100 percent.” The report of a record struck some United Methodists as counterintuitive given all the turmoil in the church. The long and acrimonious debate over the church's sexual ethics and teachings on marriage has reached a crisis point. Several regional bodies have voted to defy its teachings, and one jurisdiction elected an openly gay bishop. These troubling developments come on top of news that average worship attendance at local UM churches continues to plummet, that some congregations are withholding their apportionments, and that some individuals are requesting that their personal tithes and gifts not be used to pay their church's share. So how, when it comes to apportionments, could the UM Church be setting any records? – By Walter Fenton

+ *Top Evangelicals Denounce Refugee Ban in Full-Page WaPo Ad.*

[Note: It is disappointing that those who criticize the president's temporary ban would tie biblical authority to their opinion piece. It is necessary for our country to realistically safeguard its borders and security; this they ignore. – AOM]

In a new full-page advertisement in Wednesday's edition of The Washington Post, over 100 prominent Evangelical leaders—many theologically conservative—are denouncing President Donald Trump's moratorium on refugees from seven predominantly Muslim countries entering the United States. Although a federal judge has temporarily blocked the president's executive order, the proposed changes to America's refugee policies expose divisions within evangelicalism, with some leaders anxious over national security and others a lack of compassion. The main force behind the advertisement appears to be World Relief, the Christian aid agency associated with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The compassionate aims of the advertisement are commendable, but not all Evangelicals agree with its organizers' approach to aiding refugees. Daniel Burke, CNN's religion editor, notes evangelical pastors and authors among the ad's signatories include Pastor Timothy Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in NY, Christian author Ann Voskamp, Bill and Lynne Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church, preacher and author Max Lucado, Pastor Eugene Cho of Quest Church and Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals. The format of the advertisement is an open letter addressed to President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence. In response to the refugee ban, the Evangelical signatories are "deeply concerned by the recently announced moratorium on refugee resettlement" whose protest to the refugee ban "is rooted in the call of Jesus to 'love our neighbor as we love ourselves.'" "As Christians, we have a historic call expressed over two thousand years, to serve the suffering. We cannot abandon this call now. We live in a dangerous world and affirm the crucial role of government in...setting the terms on refugee admissions...compassion and security can coexist as they have for decades," states the advertisement.

Missing from the advertisement, however, are aspirations to address the core reasons why so many refugees are seeking safe haven in the U.S. "For years, numerous organizations including the one I work for have been advocating for safe havens where ethnic and religious minorities would be safe from the ongoing sectarian wars," wrote Luke Moon, Deputy Director of the Philos Project, a Christian non-profit promoting positive Christian engagement in the Middle East.

"True love and compassion... drives my belief that the U.S. should help to end the conflicts that caused the refugee crisis in the first place," Moon says. "Truly loving refugees means defending them where they are. Not using them as political pawns." Thankfully, the Persecuted Church and other religious minorities coming from the seven predominately Muslim nations are acknowledged by the advertisement. "As leaders, we welcome the concern expressed for religious minorities, including persecuted Christians. Followers of Christ face horrific persecution and even genocide in certain parts of the world," says the advertisement. However, a similar full-page advertisement in The Washington Post and organized by World Relief denouncing the State Department's exclusion of Christian refugees during the height of ISIS' religious genocide would have been equally commendable.

In 2015 Faith McDonnell, Religious Liberty Director for the Institute on Religion & Democracy, was among the few who reported [that] the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) admitted outright to officials at the Barnabas Fund, a Christian relief agency, "There is no way that Christians will be supported because of their religious affiliation."

As Christians, we talk often of our transparency and authenticity. I don't doubt the sincerity of these Evangelical leaders and signatories, but am cautious of the temptation to protest the plight of refugees when politically popular.

– IRD, February 16th, 2017. <https://juicyecumenism.com/author/chelsen-vicari/>

A Way Forward.

+ 'A Way Forward' Commission Faces Impossible Options.

[Note: The author of this opinion piece was very much an adversary in our involvement in trying to help St. Paul (UM) Church in Fairbanks, Alaska. In the interest of offering a different perspective – this is included. – AOM]

Protests at the 2016 General Conference against The United Methodist Church's stances regarding LGBTQ people led to delegates voting for the creation of the Commission on a Way Forward. The United Methodist Church has created a committee called the Commission on a Way Forward, and charged it to work with the Council of Bishops to prepare a proposal for the United Methodist (UM) General Conference on a way out of its impasse on human sexuality. Specifically, the denomination is not of one mind on how it ought to minister to and receive into its ministry people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer (LGBTQ) or any of the other names of the orientations folks now apply to themselves. In my judgment, the Way Forward Commission has an extremely limited number of options before it as it does its work. In fact, there are only four. The options are as follows:

1) Remain in the status quo. This would mean that the Church would continue to prohibit the ordination and appointment to ministry stations of LGBTQ people, and it would continue to prohibit its clergy from performing same sex union ceremonies and prohibit such ceremonies from being performed in its churches. These prohibitions are church-wide—they apply anywhere in the world where there are United Methodist churches.

2) Abolish the prohibitions that discriminate against LGBTQ people on a churchwide basis, which is the exact reverse of option 1.

3) Reintroduce A Third Way, which was the proposal I wrote for the Connectional Table, the planning and program coordination agency for the UMC, which introduced the proposal to General Conference last year. The proposal had its origin, unapologetically, in the proposal put forward in advance of General Conference by Adam Hamilton and others, which he called A Way Forward. There were some differences some might see as subtle, but in essence what I did was put in legislative form Hamilton's basic idea. Rev. Hamilton proposed to make decisions about ordination, appointment, and same sex unions subject to local decision and control, where there is room for debate and decision about just what the word "local" will mean. A Third Way was rejected by General Conference last year.

4) Propose some sort of division of The United Methodist Church along ideological lines.

I did not identify these options as "possible," because I know that neither of the first two is possible. Option 1 is already de facto inoperable. Several of the regional branches of United Methodism have formally and officially abrogated the UMC's official stand on inclusion. It is not working even in many regions that have not taken official stands against the UM position, because they simply are not following the bans. They openly ordain and appoint LGBTQ people, and many of the denomination's clergy openly perform same-sex union ceremonies as a matter of being in ministry to this community of God's people. Many UM bishops tolerate or encourage this work in their areas of responsibility.

– By Lonnie Brooks, January 24, 2017.

Comments (2):

Looks like Mr. Brooks has a clear understanding of the problem. Since GC has to approve of the proposal he could have added a probability for each of his options to pass GC. I would give his option 1 the highest probability and his option 4 the next highest. Options 2 and 3 look like no sale to me. If we go with option 4 which leads to a break down of our connection and pushes doctrine and policy to a lower level the obvious question will be "Why do we need bishops?"

– Kevin

There are very profound differences among Methodists at this point and perhaps the time has come to adopt a system similar to the Baptists where the local church is the final arbiter of matters. It is not simply gay matters that are a source of debate, but also the authority of scripture, etc. The centralized church has been unsuccessful in imposing its views on these matters with local conferences openly being defiant. The question is why continue this war?

– David

(UM) General Board of Church and Society. General Secretary's Statement on Current Immigration Raids.

On February 17, Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), issued a statement on recent and ongoing immigration raids. "These raids are occurring in homes, places of work, and even near churches. We are especially troubled by the raid outside of a United Methodist Church in Virginia on February 8th where men exiting a hypothermia shelter were confronted the minute they crossed the street off of church grounds. Targeting those seeking sanctuary or services provided by houses of worship will not be tolerated." etc. [Note: In other words, she implies that the UM church is above the law. AOM] – Threads, NC Conference of the UMC, Feb. 21, 2017.

Homosexuality.

+ ***Lesbian Bishop Election Bringing Financial Stress to Western UMC Congregations.*** The election of a partnered lesbian as a bishop in the United Methodist Church's liberal Western Jurisdiction has resulted in significant fallout in the Denver-based Mountain Sky Episcopal Area. Reports from multiple congregations indicate that membership and financial contributions have decreased since the election, placing some in a precarious position. In a confirmation of troubles, the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences have launched a "sustenance fund" to compensate for financial "stress." The fundraising appeal is being promoted on multiple liberal United Methodist websites.

Bishop Karen Oliveto of San Francisco, California was elected to the episcopacy by delegates to the Western Jurisdictional Conference July 15, 2016 in Scottsdale, Arizona. The former pastor of Glide Memorial Methodist Church was consecrated as a bishop the following day and later appointed to oversee the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences. Oliveto's election is being challenged as a defiance of church law against partnered gay clergy. The election is on the docket for review by the denomination's high court, the Judicial Council, at its April meeting.

United Methodist congregations in the region have been struggling for many years, and the Western Jurisdiction is by far the church's smallest. This recent spate of losses is worse than the rate of decline that was already occurring prior to the election of Oliveto. The dual announcements of the sustenance fund have been characterized by the urgency of their language. "This fund is especially needed where a pastor's compensation is at risk," the announcement reads. "Allocated funds for equitable compensation support will be exhausted before the need is met. And, importantly, by Discipline, equitable compensation funds cannot be used for part-time pastors in the same situation." While the announcement does not significantly cite Oliveto's election as the cause of membership and giving declines, it prominently leads with her election, consecration, and appointment, indicating that the two are connected. The statement subsequently reports: "As we crossed the threshold, there has been stress in some of our most theologically diverse congregations."

IRD has heard directly from sources within the local conferences about how the recent accelerated rate of decline is a direct result of the moves to impose Oliveto as their bishop.

Negative reports from churches in the region are numerous:

One congregation has lost 20 percent of its membership in the brief time since Oliveto's election.

- A member from one church reported that so many of their members had left, and the last key donor had gone, that they could no longer afford a pastor after the first of the year.
- Members from another church said they were planning on going 'non-denominational' and planned to discuss costs involved for purchasing their facilities from their annual conference.
- Members from two churches indicated that they were "hand-to-mouthing" bills and were not sure how much longer they could stay open.
- Members from several other churches have indicated that their yearly tithing commitments ended up falling short; some by a large amount.
- One church in a large town reported that it had exhausted its reserves in December.

- The extent of discontent with Oliveto's election and assignment there has come as a surprise to the Mountain Sky Area's liberal leadership. One person related a conversation with a delegate that voted for the new bishop in which the delegate said, "I was caught totally off guard by the amount of resistance to Bishop Karen's election."
- Another delegate, explaining their vote for the new bishop, experienced so much push back that the delegate looked "shell shocked" in a church meeting.

Officials in the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conferences appear to be operating within a bubble or echo-chamber in which they assumed United Methodism in their area was monolithically liberal, not expecting resistance at the local level. Attempts by Oliveto to demonstrate enthusiasm from every congregation – and taking names of those who are not – aren't faring well in the region. The bishop has described United Methodists displeased with her election as "the bad churches" and denounced them as a "destabilizing factor" in the region. Calls for greater "inclusion" do not appear to have resulted in the including of more people in the life of local United Methodist congregations: there is no corresponding evidence that financial losses brought about by departing traditionalists are being offset by liberal gains. Notably, the "sustenance fund" has been re-styled a "generosity fund."

[Note: This is to be expected and should come as no surprise. When church law is openly violated, people often vote with their money and refuse to support with their money what they view as incompetent church leadership.

– AOM]

- The Institute on Religion & Democracy • Jeff Walton; <https://juicyecumenism.com/author/jeffreywalton/>; February 3, 2017.

+ ***Manna Church ending Boy Scout sponsorship.*** One of Fayetteville's most prominent churches is cutting ties with the Boy Scouts of America after the organization decided to allow transgender children who identify as boys to enroll in its programs. Josh Miller, scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 957, said he had been told [this]. Spokesman for Manna by Christopher Hale said church leaders who work with the Boy Scout troop that is chartered through the church "are researching other options for scouting that more closely reflect our values. There are organizations that mirror the Boy Scouts while also providing the option of being faith based," the statement said. Hale said the church has been using a faith-based program called "American Heritage Girls" for years. The American Heritage organization's website says it is a "Christ-centered leadership and character development ministry." Miller said he believes that a Cub Scout group that meets at the church will be moving to another church. The Boy Scout troop might have to disband, he said.

[Note: Manna is one of the largest and most influential churches in Fayetteville, North Carolina. – AOM]

- Steve DeVane, The Fayetteville Observer; Feb. 21, 2017

Immigration Issues.

[Note: What is missing in all of these references is that these are illegal aliens. Someone has said that, "To call an illegal immigrant 'undocumented' is like calling a heroin drug pusher and 'undocumented pharmacist'." In addition, what is ignored or denied is the measures taken on immigration and building the wall are for our protection. – AOM]

+ ***United Methodist churches offer sanctuary.*** In the heart of an immigrant community in Dallas, the Rev. Owen Ross says his United Methodist congregation of mostly immigrants embodies the scriptural mandate to "love the foreigner as your native-born." Ross cites Leviticus 19:34 in talking about why Christ Foundry United Methodist Mission is one of some 60 United Methodist congregations standing ready to shelter anyone under threat of deportation. While there is no law against it, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement has an unofficial practice of not going into churches or hospitals to take immigrants into custody. Since the election of President Donald Trump, who is expected to make big changes in immigration policies, more than 800 places of worship nationwide vowed to shelter and protect immigrants in danger of separation from their families or being returned to countries they fled.

Sanctuary is biblical. Bishop Minerva Carcaño took part in a national press conference call on Jan. 17 with other faith leaders concerned about what could happen to immigrants under the new administration. “We held the press conference in hopes that the administration can hear there is another opinion in this country,” said the California-Nevada Area bishop, who also heads the denomination’s Immigration Task Force. “People of faith are saying going after immigrants, building a wall, breaking apart families, rolling back DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival) which has helped so many young people, is just not helpful. It is not the right or just thing to do.” Sanctuary is biblical, she added. “We forget that sanctuary is an expression of our faith that comes from scripture, from the lips of Jesus who calls us to welcome the stranger. It is a call to discipleship.” [Note: Simply put, what she says here is not true. – AOM]

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society, the denomination’s social justice agency, offers guidelines for churches that want to become a sanctuary church. – By Kathy L. Gilbert, United Methodist News Service (UMNS).

+ ***Faith leaders urge all to welcome strangers, refugees.*** President Donald Trump’s order banning refugees from seven Muslim countries was countered by the voices of faith leaders who reminded followers that “a Middle Eastern refugee savior taught us to love the foreigner like we love ourselves.” The Rev. Omar Hamid Al-Rikabi, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Heath, Texas, and the son of an Iraqi Muslim immigrant, said Trump’s order is “unnecessary, unethical and immoral....Any order that singles someone out based on nationality, ethnicity and religion is racist and abhorrent to the Constitution, but more so to the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” Rikabi said. “Going forward, I do have hope in the American immigrant story... the one we all have, and the one that welcomed my father and our family. But my full hope rests in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” The Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, pastor of Foundry United Methodist Church, located just blocks from the White House, said Trump’s actions call out for a response from people of faith. “If we believe Christian lives are worth more than non-Christian lives, we need to examine our claim to be Christian,” she said in a statement on “Building Walls” that was read during both Sunday morning worship services. The statement uses Scripture from Luke 22:27, “Jesus came among us not as someone who pushed his way to the front of the line, but as one who serves.” At the Indianapolis International Airport, nearly 1,000 people rallied at an event organized by an interfaith social justice coalition of 38 Indianapolis congregations including three United Methodist churches – Broad Ripple, Meridian Street and North. Speakers came from several faith traditions and included Jewish rabbis, Muslims imams as well as Christian pastors. On their way back to Washington, U.S. Senator Joe Donnelly, an Indiana Democrat and a grandson of immigrants, and U.S. Rep. Andre Carson, a Democrat from Indianapolis and a Muslim, spoke out against the immigration ban. They called it unconstitutional and un-American. [Note: It is neither. – AOM]

UM Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Area and president of the Council of Bishops, said failing to assist refugees fleeing danger does harm to them and to us. “When we abandon strangers who are at risk of bigotry, xenophobia and violence, we not only destroy their hope, we destroy our own souls,” he said. “I call on the Trump administration and the U.S. Congress to rescind the harmful executive orders and save the soul of our country.” UM Bishop Peggy Johnson, who leads the Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware conferences, said the order does not make the country safer. “Violence against Americans is not a teaching of the Muslim faith,” she said. “I urge you to have conversations in your churches about this situation, mobilize to write letters, speak to your senators and legislators....”

Several UM leaders... joined others in saying a series of executive orders concerning immigrants are in direct opposition to sacred texts to love our neighbor and welcome the sojourner. “As followers of Jesus, we reject in the strongest terms efforts to expand the U.S.-Mexico border wall, penalize communities providing sanctuary, halt refugee resettlement or impose a religious test for those facing forced migration,” said the Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society. More than 2,000 faith leaders have signed a letter to President Trump and members of Congress from the Interfaith Immigration Coalition calling on them to welcome refugees of all nationalities and religions. “United Methodist Women takes to heart Jesus’ commandment to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. Throughout our 150-year history,

we have carried this out by extending God’s love to women, men, youth and children around the world, including immigrants and refugees,” said Harriett J. Olson, top executive of United Methodist Women. Thomas Kemper, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, said, “I pray that the Trump administration will be guided in its immigration policy by international standards of human rights and respect for migrant workers as stipulated by United Nation’s Conventions.” Leaders of National Justice for Our Neighbors, a United Methodist immigration ministry, said they “vehemently oppose” two executive orders announced on Jan. 25 that focus on border security and interior enforcement. “As people of faith, we are called upon to seek mercy, do justice, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Times change; governments change; yet these commands remain unchanged. JFON will continue to stand with our immigrant brothers and sisters and fight for them.

[Note: The degree of ignorance and misapplication of scripture is astounding. What would be their reaction if someone proposed not paying the apportionment? These same people would be outraged – yet what they are advocating is disobeying the law with actions that puts our country in serious jeopardy. UM Bishop Johnson’s quoted “Violence against Americans is not a teaching of the Muslim faith” is regrettable; it is. We face very real dangers here. – AOM]

– By Kathy L. Gilbert and Daniel Gangler, UMNS; Jan. 30, 2017.

Islam. *Islam – Just a few poison jelly beans.* A friend of mine sent me this. Share it with anyone who is protesting President Trumps immigration policy: “Got into a argument with 2 Muslim [doctors] this A.M. regarding the Trump ban on Muslims for 4 months. I presented the ‘jelly bean’ theory of terrorism to them: You have a bowl of 10,000 jelly beans of all colors. 2 of the jelly beans will kill you instantly if eaten. How many jelly beans will you let your children eat?

Neither one responded, and they both shut up and walked away.”– AOM. Received from a friend. Feb 15, 2017 9:01 AM

(UM) Judicial Council. We wait for the Judicial Council decision on the Karen Oliveto case to be made in April.

(UM) Women/Women’s Issues.

+ *Women’s edition of Bible offers new light.* Beth Bingham began to see Hagar of the Old Testament in a new way after studying The CEB Women’s Bible. Suddenly she wasn’t just the servant who bore Abraham a child when his wife Sarah couldn’t. She was, essentially, the Bible’s first single mom – one who had to leave the house because tensions were so high. Bingham, a student at Virginia Theological Seminary, couldn’t wait to bring The CEB (Common English Bible) Women’s Bible and share her Hagar insight with the female inmates she studies Scripture with twice a month. “Many of them are single moms,” said Bingham, on track to become an Episcopal priest.

The women who edited and wrote commentaries for The CEB Women’s Bible hope it will illuminate scripture for lots of readers – women, of course, but also men. The CEB Women’s Bible ... has a definite female emphasis. Brief articles draw on Scripture in addressing such issues as fertility, birth control, miscarriage, menopause, abortion, same-gender love, head-covering, “God as Mother,” body image, glass ceiling and harassment. All five editors are women, as are all 80 of the commentary contributors. The team includes mainly seminary professors and pastors, but also Christian novelists and a rabbi. “I think the vast, inclusive number of women’s voices that we have represented in the writings is beautiful and wonderful,” said the Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, senior pastor of Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington and one of the five editors.

This is not the first women’s Bible, but others have been from a conservative evangelical point of view.

[Note: This is telling, in and of itself. The authors of this bible set themselves over and against the orthodox, evangelical faith. In addition, as I had originally discerned, it leans toward the heretical “Re-Imagining” theologies. – AOM]

+ **United Methodist Women Rallies Against House Bill 2.** United Methodist Women members stand in solidarity with those working to repeal North Carolina’s House Bill 2 at a rally at Marshall Park in Charlotte. United Methodist Women put feet to their prayers Monday afternoon as they gathered at Marshall Park in Charlotte, North Carolina, to stand for justice and demand repeal of the state’s House Bill 2, officially titled the Public Facilities Privacy and Security Act but popularly referred to as the “bathroom bill,” as it mandates that people use the restroom that corresponds with the gender listed on their birth certificates. “We stand with the people of North Carolina because fear of those different from us is not a reason to enact restricting laws,” said United Methodist Women National President Shannon Priddy.

United Methodist Women was in North Carolina for Leadership Development Days, an event contracted before HB2 passed. United Methodist Women chose to use its presence in the state as an opportunity to speak out against the injustices of HB2, especially to add voices to those in Charlotte already doing the work to repeal the bill. During the rally participants took action by calling State Senate President Pro-Temp Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore and asked them to repeal HB2. “People of North Carolina: House Bill 2 is an act of injustice enacted under the guise of protecting women and children,” said the Rev. Rodvegas Ingram, social coordinator and vice chair of Western North Carolina Black Methodists for Church Renewal. “This bill is hurting women, children and men instead of protecting them. The hurtful things of House Bill 2 have nothing to do with a bathroom.” [Note: It does. – AOM] At the rally members displayed art they’d help create during Leadership Development Days with the help of God Is in the Graffiti, an initiative by The United Methodist Church’s General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) to help place a new lens on religious symbols in street art. Ingram said. “This act of injustice must be repealed to bring about healing.”[Silly.]

[Note: They speak of standing against “injustice” and the bill’s “hurting women, children and men.... The hurtful things of House Bill 2 have nothing to do with a bathroom.” This shows aberrant activism and untruthfulness. This is about men in bathrooms being used by our wives and daughters. This shows harmful misuse of apportionment money. – AOM]

– By Tara Barnes, January 31, 2017. Tara Barnes is editor of Response Magazine. Response Magazine is a publication of the UMW.

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Seeing clearly can be painful at times. – Dr. Robert Jeffress

Global Outlook

If everyone gives a thread, the poor man will have a shirt. – Russian proverb

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+ **China.** When Chinese entrepreneur He Rongfeng was a teenager, he was very poor. When he couldn’t find a job, he along with a couple of his friends had to beg on the streets of Taizhou in China’s Zhejiang Province to help support their families. Then they met Dai Xingfen who owned a restaurant. She extended to the group of boys her kindness and generosity by feeding them and helping them to find jobs. Now wealthy, Rongfeng was able to locate this kind lady and offered her a reward for her past actions. She wouldn’t take any money, but was happy to know that she had help Rongfeng get started in his life.

– February 15, 2017

Israel. The Maccabee task force, Israel. “We at the Maccabee Task Force are laser focused on one core mission -- to ensure that those who seek to delegitimize Israel and demonize the Jewish people are confronted, combatted and defeated. Now that we’re in touch, we’ll keep you updated on the most important developments relating to the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement. We’ll also update you on our efforts to combat BDS on college campuses across the country. And we’ll share with you the best pro-Israel materials produced by our extensive network of allies.”

[Note: This is an important area. There are powerful forces at work, both within our United Methodist Church and within our country, trying to do exactly that – to use Boycotts, Divestments, and Sanctions in order to weaken Israel economically and isolate her. We must stand with the Israelis at all costs and protect their right to exist. – AOM]

Sincerely, The Maccabee Task Force, POB 19698, Las Vegas, Nevada 89132 [contact@mactaskforce.org]

– The Maccabee task force, Israel; E-mail received; Jan 17, 2017.

North Korea. North Korea is on a “slippery slope” toward a “popular uprising,” says a former diplomat who defected from the country last year. Thae Yong Ho went on to say that Kim Jong Un’s “days are numbered,” the *Wall Street Journal* reports. According to the *New York Times*, Thae spoke to reporters Wednesday, part of a series of interviews he’s been giving since December. He’s the highest-ranking North Korean defector in decades. Thae says he “wasted the first 50 years of my life” but that now he’ll “be a man of action,” dedicated to bringing down Kim’s regime in North Korea. He says it’s the outside world’s job to “spray gasoline” on North Korea so that its people can “set fire to it,” the Guardian reports. Thae says Kim’s grip on North Korea is loosening as technology makes it easier for outside culture to spread there. TV shows from South Korea and movies from China are smuggled across the border in cellphones and flash drives. Thae says with greater views of the outside world, North Koreans will soon realize “they have the right to live freely.” In fact, he says dissent is already spreading among both ordinary citizens and the elite. But he says the world must not compromise with Kim; international sanctions are working. Sitting down with Kim would give him a victory he desperately needs, and defeating Kim is the only way of solving the growing North Korean nuclear problem, Thae says.

– Newser media outlet

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It is an easy thing to argue from precedent because it makes everything simple, but it is a risky thing to do. Give God “elbow room”; let Him come into His universe as He pleases. If we confine God in His working to religious people or to certain ways, we place ourselves on an equality with God. – Oswald Chambers