

Monthly Update

November 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This November Update is going to be very different from past issues at this time of the year. For the past several weeks we in Concerned Methodists have been working hard to formulate our input to the commission on “A Way Forward” that is examining how we might move into the future as a denomination. Admittedly, their work is not easy. In the body of this Update we have included an article giving additional insight into how the process works. In “The Good Stuff” we have included an experience from Fayetteville Christian School. Our football team Coach Greg Bryant is a very admirable person. The school’s headmaster received an e-mail from one of the referees of a game we had played that was very complimentary.

We had used this opportunity to offer to you our input to the commission while also including to the commission how we have been examining these problems – not just since General Conference 2016 – but for the past twenty-five years. We have included in this Update a copy of the document we had submitted to them; we did not include here the copies of the past book covers authored by members of Concerned Methodists that we had submitted to the commission. We offer this to you for your information.

At this time of Thanksgiving, we had wanted to give you an example of thankfulness from one of our servicemen. Years ago, the Veterans of Foreign Wars sponsored a dinner to honor the war veterans in that area. At the dinner, a veteran soldier was introduced as one of the speakers. In making the introduction, the presiding officer referred to the fact that the man who was about to speak had lost a leg in World War II. The veteran was greeted by loud cheering as he arose to make his speech.

He began by disavowing the introduction. “No,” he said, “that was a mistake. I lost nothing in the war, you see, for when we went to the war we resolved to give our country our all – even if it meant our lives. We reckoned that we would not even come back. So you see, in returning at all, everything that we brought back was clear gain.”

He gave a fresh insight into what it means to “serve our country” – and the meaning of gratitude. When I had resolved to spend my life in defense of the country, I had mentally resolved that I was offering my all for the United States – even if it meant my life. As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, let us “count our blessings” and among them let us include our God who has preserved this nation that has given us so much.

In addition I would ask that you keep our United States of America in the forefront of your thoughts and prayers – against our enemies – at this difficult time.

I do thank you for your support and prayers. They are essential parts of our ministry as we continue to “fight the good fight” as we are called.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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November 2017 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Great faith is a product of great fights. Great testimonies are the outcome of great tests.
Great triumphs can only come out of great trials. – Smith Wigglesworth

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The Good Stuff

+ *Fayetteville Christian School.*

“Hello Mrs. Peters.

My name is Joe Lapp. I am a retired teacher (28 yrs), high school coach, parent, and football official for over 20 years. I would like to take the time to inform you about how impressed I was with Coach Bryant. I was fortunate to work the game last night at Wake Christian High School and was assigned to work on the Fayetteville Christian sideline. He is a true Christian!!!

He [is] an excellent role model for the lucky players that he has touched during his career. Even though his team was badly defeated on the scoreboard, they are true winners to have a coach that has a positive attitude, always coaching with compassion for his players, and a passion for teaching the game.

I could list many positive characteristics that he and his staff possess, but I am sure that you have heard them before.

It was a true pleasure to see such a fine man in action. I only wish that my children had a chance to play for a person like Coach Bryant. He is teaching much more than football to his players and they will remember him for those lessons for their lifetime.

I hope that you have a great school year.

Joe Lapp

PS: I have probably officiated over one thousand of games in my career and this is the first email that I have felt compelled to write. – E-mail from Referee Joe Lapp; Sep 3, 2017

+ *Questions Wesley asked band meetings.* In his instructions for how to hold a band meeting, John Wesley said every member should be asked these questions at each weekly meeting:

What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?

What temptations have you met with?

How was [sic] you delivered?

What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?

Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

– John Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies” The Works of John Wesley Vol 9 p 78. Posted by Dwight Deal.

+ *Proclamation - Thanksgiving Day – 1789 by George Washington - 10/03/1789.* The text of George Washington's October 3, 1789 national Thanksgiving Proclamation; as printed in The Providence Gazette and Country Journal:

By the President of the United States of America.

A Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of

Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand, at the city of New York, the third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine.

G. Washington.

A Way Forward. *Up to bishops to shape Way Forward ideas.* United Methodists expecting to see proposals from the Commission on a Way Forward will need to wait until the bishops weigh in. “We as a commission serve the Council of Bishops, and the bishops serve the church,” said the Florida Conference’s Bishop Ken Carter, one of three episcopal leaders who serve as commission moderators. Carter is also president-elect of the Council of Bishops.

The bishop-appointed commission, which includes 32 members from nine countries, has the task of trying to find a way through the denomination’s impasse around ministry with LGBTQ individuals. The moderators are not members but facilitate the commission’s discussions. The 32 members include nine bishops – one just elected this year. “Finally, the work that the commission does will flow through the Council of Bishops,” Carter said. “They will take the work that the commission has done. They will respond to it. They will shape it. They will adapt it. And then they will offer it to the church particularly through the delegations of the called General Conference in February 2019.”

Carter answered questions about the commission’s process in a conference call Oct. 26 with around 40 conference and other denominational communicators, including a United Methodist News Service reporter. The two other commission moderators – the West Virginia Conference’s Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball and retired Bishop David Yemba – could not join because of scheduling conflicts. The aim of the call, Carter said, was to “improve channels of the communications.”

The commission will hold its sixth meeting next week in Nashville, and the following week will present some preliminary ideas to the Council of Bishops for review and possible revision. In late 2017 or early 2018, Carter said, the commission hopes to communicate more to the public about the content of its work.

As with its previous meetings, the sixth gathering will be closed to all but invited guests. Carter told the communicators that all of the group’s scheduled nine meetings will be closed. United Methodist News Service has urged the meetings be open. “We felt at the beginning that we were working with a group of people that really needed to build trust with each other,” Carter said. “There is a saying that insanity is doing our work in

the same way and expecting a different result. And the results we are getting is what happens in the open in public at General Conferences, and really how that gets communicated.” He likened the commission’s work to diplomacy, which often takes place behind the scenes. Ultimately, he said the work will become public when it’s presented and debated at the 2019 called General Conference, the denomination’s top policymaking body. The bishops’ deadline to submit their proposals to the 2019 General Conference is July 8, 2018.

The 2016 General Conference, by a 428-405 vote, authorized the bishops to form the commission “to develop a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in our Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality.” The commission’s mission, vision and scope — developed by the Council of Bishops executive committee — make clear the group also is looking at possible changes to how the denomination is organized. “In reflection on the two matters of unity and human sexuality, we will fulfill our directive by considering ‘new forms and structures’ of relationship,” says the group’s statement on its scope. In the call, Carter said part of what the commission is trying to address is how to define or redefine unity. “That gets to the question of can we live with one Book of Discipline? Or are we currently living with one Book of Discipline?” he said. The Book of Discipline, the denomination’s book of policies, since 1972 has asserted that all people are of sacred worth but that the practice of homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.” In later years, General Conference made officiating at a same-gender union or being a “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy member chargeable offenses under church law.

But increasingly United Methodist clergy have publicly defied these prohibitions as LGBTQ individuals have gained wider public acceptance in various parts of the world. In July last year, the U.S. Western Jurisdiction elected Bishop Karen Oliveto, who is openly gay and married to a deaconess. The Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, has since ruled that the consecration of a “self-avowed practicing” gay bishop violates church law.

Carter told the communicators that the way forward for The United Methodist Church would not come only from the top but be built from the ground up. He pointed to many local churches that are able to navigate differing views of homosexuality within their pews. – By Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), Oct. 26, 2017.

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October 9, 2017

To the Members of the Commission on A Way Forward
Members of the Council of Bishops
Renewal Group Leaders

Subject: Recommendations for the future of the United Methodist Church

First of all, I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

References (addressing concerns in the United Methodist Church):

1. Books authored by the late Reverend Larry Eisenberg: *God has no Grandchildren*, and *Go, General Conference* (© 1996).
2. Book authored by the late Dr. Calvin Johnson: *Beyond the Point of No Return* (© 1997).
3. Books I have authored: *The Church in Bondage* (© 2000), *Homosexuality in the United Methodist Church* (© 2001), *Stewardship Report* (© 2003), *At the Crossroads* (© 2004), *Stewardship Perspectives – 2007*(© 2005), *We’ve a Story to Tell...*(© 2008), *On the Brink* (© 2009), *Jude* (© 2015), and *The Issues @ Hand* (© 2016)

We in Concerned Methodists appreciate the opportunity to offer our perspectives to the Commission on A Way Forward. We had wanted to send you our recommendations so that, after you have had the opportunity to review those offered by other groups, we could present a specific plan that would enable us to move forward as a denomination in a way that would provide cohesion that would increase over time and provide us a renewed viability in, not only the Christian community, but also in our nation and in our world.

The books listed in the references above are ones that have been authored by members of Concerned Methodists and deal with various concerns and problems we perceived in our United Methodist Church (copies of the book covers are enclosed). I must note that two of my books *Homosexuality in the United Methodist Church* and *At the Crossroads* are dedicated to my adoptive sister (“Sis”) who has, since she was a college Freshman, lived in multiple lesbian relationships.

Since the beginning of our ministry, we have had an abiding concern about problems in our church. Three of the referenced books have been sent to each of the delegates to General Conference in the hopes that they would help move our church toward revival and resultant growth: *The Church in Bondage* (GC-2000), *At the Crossroads*, (GC-2004), and *The Issues @ Hand* (GC-2016). We offer to you our recommendations along with the information contained in the book *The Issues @ Hand* (both are enclosed).

If necessary, I can personally appear to answer questions or to elucidate our plan.
Should you need to reach me, please don’t hesitate to call me at (910) 488-4379/5090.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

Enclosures: as stated.

Preamble

First, we must establish that we in Concerned Methodists do not support schism nor separation in any way, but believe that we can move forward into the future if we implement the fourteen points we have presented. The 280-page book *The Issues @ Hand “Crucial Concerns for the United Methodist Church”* contains more detailed information in the area of sexuality (to include that of “heterosexual” issues) and is offered as a resource to the members of the Commission to be used – or not – as each person sees fit. The papers submitted by The Reverend Paul Stallworth, President of Lifewatch, and Mr. John Lomperis, Director of UMAction reflect our doctrinal perspectives. To exemplify our concerns, we offer the idea that problems in our denomination have resulted in decline in our church since 1969 – at times closing an average-sized church every day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

We must also observe that various actions in the area of sexuality from as early as 1986 until the present have been taken that violate the Book of Discipline and are creating division in the church. Taken together these indicate a breach in the trust and confidence that United Methodists, both laity and clergy, have a right to expect from our leadership, church employees, and the connectional system in our denomination. The failure to take corrective action against the individuals and sectors of our denomination who have set themselves against our church’s doctrine constitute a breach of trust that is foundational to our connection. By their actions, they have, in effect, nullified our governance by the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, compromised our connectional system, and broken faith with the people called United Methodists.

If our leaders do not feel bound by the provisions of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, then they should not expect the other parts of the body to feel bound by it. Both “example” and “actions” are fundamental principles of leadership. Our desire is to have a healthy future for our United Methodist Church – which has a rich heritage and can have a richer future – while at the same time preserving the integrity and viability in our connection. In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* Thom S. Rainer, president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, has observed, “...the dying churches, at some point in their history, forgot their purpose.” He later concluded, “A church without a gospel-centered purpose is no longer a church at all.” (p. 75) While he is talking about a local church, this observation can be applied to a denomination as well.

Therefore, it is reasonable to propose basic principles on which we can achieve our goals. We have set forth a 14-point plan of how we might engage in ministry together without experiencing separation or schism. We believe that implementation of these measures would establish a framework by which we could move forward

into the future together as a denomination. To lay a structural basis to effect this, we recommend that the 2019 General Conference of the United Methodist Church implement the following changes:

A Call for Denominational Changes

- 1.** The prioritization of the ministry needs to be the local church. We need to recognize that this is the basic field of outreach in our denomination and is the UMC's main interface to the secular world. Focus of ministry needs to be from the local church to the general church, a "bottom-up" as opposed to a "top-down" approach.
- 2.** Local churches need greater flexibility in determining the ministries they support and how they "do" mission.
- 3. Stewardship.** The mandatory apportionment needs to be eliminated in favor of the voluntary, freewill offering. When pressure is exerted on members of local churches to make compulsory payment to support unbiblical activities or for expenses by a bloated denominational hierarchy, the laity have a right to not be compelled to support it.

Accountability. If church employees and leaders will not abide by the Bible nor the *Book of Discipline*, and fail to provide leadership for maintenance of the connection, they should not expect churches and individuals to support their activities through coerced giving.

Local churches need to provide direct support to missionaries and overseas conferences. The bureaucratic machinery drains too much out of the giving dollar to provide for effective world-wide missions.

- 4.** Title to local church property needs to be jointly held by that church and the Conference. When a church building is constructed, financed, and cared for by the people in a congregation, they should have a part in legal ownership.
- 5.** All expenses for each bishop in the United States need to be borne by his/her own conference; all expenses for each district superintendent are to be borne by the district. This increases accountability at both levels.
- 6.** Each jurisdiction should be financially self-supporting and bear its own expenses.
- 7.** The UMC's denominational bureaucracies need to be downsized to the minimum functional level and commensurate with the support they receive from freewill offerings.
- 8.** Money from the UMC's "Ministerial Education Fund" to the seminaries should "follow the student" and be used to pay expenses as he/she attends school. For example, since Asbury Theological Seminary graduates more students who become United Methodist pastors than does any of the thirteen "official" seminaries that receive apportionment money, it is not cost-effective to continue supporting seminary education in the way it has been in the past.
- 9. The episcopacy.** Bishops should serve for a maximum of two 4-year terms, then returned to the pastorate or retire.
- 10.** Provide for the effective recall of bishops. If bishops will not abide by the teachings of the United Methodist Church or if they publicly oppose its teachings, they need to be removed. It is unconscionable that they should continue to be in positions of authority, represent the UMC, and receive church money to undermine its teachings and that of the orthodox Christian faith.
- 11.** Money from the UMC's "Episcopal Fund" should be used to either supplement or to pay for the salaries and other expenses for the bishops in those overseas conferences that do not have the financial resources to support this function. Churches in America should undergird this financial support and can view it as supporting worldwide missions.
- 12.** Engage in an intense denomination-wide focus on Jesus Christ, fully as Lord and Savior, and the Bible as God's Word revealed to humanity – and how they are lived out through our Wesleyan doctrine. Along with this endeavor, we need to have an in-depth study of "The Character of a Methodist" by John Wesley and how we can use it to inform our lives as Wesleyan Christians. We need to lay a firm foundation of who we are as United Methodists based on our heritage if we are to move forward together on a firm spiritual foundation and to have any hope of truly "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" – rather than it being an empty platitude.

13. Cease all political activism and lobbying. When we have a greater understanding of the twin pillars of our faith, and follow the Holy Spirit's leading, we can better live out that faith – and impact our nation and our world for Christ.

14. Lay members in the United Methodist Church should exercise Responsible Christian Stewardship in recognizing that they have the right to not support with their money given to the Lord's work what they perceive as aberrant or un-Christian actions – at all levels within the denomination. This is their right – and duty. They can let their financial giving speak for their consciences.

Concluding Observations

If these fourteen points are adopted, they would provide a viable basis on which we could move forward into the future without schism. Those parts of the United Methodist Church that are ministering in accordance with God's plan will grow and gain influence; those parts of the United Methodist Church that are not ministering in accordance with God's plan will decline, lose influence, and possibly die. Is this risky? Yes, but – to take a lesson from the business world – one of the reasons for the success of the free-market economic system (which has proven to be the most effective in the world) is the risk taken by a business owner in manufacturing a product or providing a service. If he offers a product or provides a service that people want, they will buy it – and the owner may become successful. If, however, he offers a product/service that people don't want or is no longer needed, people will not buy it, and the owner will have to either change or he will fail – and possibly go out of business.

Implementation of these measures will lead to a less authoritarian church with a down-sized bureaucracy. This, in turn, will enable us to move into the future in a healthier, more streamlined way and better able to adapt to our changing culture. Indeed, George Barna in his book *Revolution* has observed that the trend for the future is away from denominationalism (especially those with a top-heavy bureaucracy) and toward more localized, informal church groups. He has written, "Although we cannot accurately predict what the Church will look like twenty years hence, we can be confident that it will be more different from than similar to the Church at the start of the twenty-first century. The Revolution [as he calls it] is an extensive grassroots response to the undeniable and insatiable human longing for a genuine relationship with God our Father. The Transformations it introduces are sometimes difficult to accept...but the outgrowth is a stronger and more irresistible Church" (p.124).

The reality is that we have a "product" – if you will – that people everywhere need: the priceless salvation that is offered through Jesus Christ. We also have a "human instruction book" known as the Bible. We in the United Methodist Church have the additional advantage of these two essential "products" being explained through our Wesleyan doctrine and with the proven "track record" of our Wesleyan heritage.

The heart of our problem is spiritual. Until we have a firm understanding of the Bible and Jesus Christ, we will continue to experience division, acrimony, and confusion in our witness – with consequent decline in membership. When we return to our Wesleyan doctrine and heritage that have served us so well in the past, face our problems and correct them, as shown by our brothers and sisters in Africa, we as a denomination can start to grow again.

What is needed is revival. Our most earnest prayer is that the Holy Spirit be poured out on the people called Methodists and that every person would be changed into a John Wesley or Susannah Wesley. Then we would become passionate about evangelizing and caring for the authentic needs of people – and truly "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." We could then impact our nation, and indeed the world, for Christ.

This is our heritage – the purpose for which God has called us.