

Monthly Update

October 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This Update has some information on the United Methodist Church but most deals with two seemingly secular issues: Hurricane Harvey and the National Football League (NFL) issue of people not standing for the American flag. Again, from last month's edition of the Update, if you would like a more detailed summary of your own conference, let me know and I shall send it to you. In the November Update we include our submission to the "Commission on a Way Forward" and how we believe that it can put our United Methodist Church onto the path of resolving some of its problems – and possible growth.

There is little doubt that the racial strife and turbulence in our country as exemplified by what happened in Charlottesville, Virginia a few weeks back are being orchestrated by those who want to harm our country. "Divide and conquer" is a maxim used to incite internal conflict, anarchy, and possible collapse. Saul Alinsky's precepts in his "Rules for Radicals" teaches that. I believe that Hurricane Harvey, as devastating as it was (and still is), showed our nation and the world that skin color does not matter in the United States when it comes to most issues, if not all. A crisis has a way of bringing to the surface what is truly deep down in a person's (and a nation's) character. I believe that God has used it to show who we really are as Americans.

The second issue is closely allied to and, I believe, also being orchestrated by the same people – that of the NFL and some of their players not standing for the American flag at the playing of the Star Spangled Banner at the beginning of football games. It started off with Colin Kaepernick, a black player who had been adopted and raised by a white couple. It has also been revealed that he dated a Muslim lady and had developed a hatred for the police. Things have escalated to where other players, owners, and people associated with football in different ways have also taken a knee or sat through the playing of our anthem. What is especially troubling is that these actions are being noted by other nations, especially those we regard as enemies: North Korea, Iran, Russia, China and the Islamic countries. If they believe that we are "weak" and do not have the will to fight for our country, they may initiate some type of hostile action against us. In the 1930s some students at Oxford University in England had signed a paper saying they would not fight for "crown and country" if they were called; the Nazis in Germany took note. Then in the late 1940s, a statement that outlined our "sphere of interest" that did not include the Korean Peninsula was a factor in leading the communists to invade South Korea. We need to be aware that the same factors could operate today.

May I ask you to continue to pray for our ministry as we "contend for the faith" in the United Methodist Church and for our country? Our God is sovereign over all and can do mighty things, but we need to do our part.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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October 2017 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Gratitude is the mother of all virtues. – G. K. Chesterton

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The Good Stuff.

+ **Pray for Brandon Smalls.** “Prayer warriors--God has set a battle before us that will require all of to use every tool He has given us. Our sweet Brandon found out today he must have 5 more weeks of chemo/radiation combo followed by up to a year of weekly chemo. The news is sad to all of us who love him and want him here stirring things up and being the awesome kid we love. God has called us to pray, to fast, to call upon his name. Please send this prayer request to every prayer partner you know. We must join in this battle and ask the Lord to heal Brandon [15 years old]. Pray for his encouragement, his spirit, his will to fight. Pray for his family to endure and to feel His love. Pray. Fast. And then pray some more.” – As posted by Mrs. Tammi Peters, head of Fayetteville Christian School, Fayetteville, NC.

+ **Arrogant Texans.** “To all the non-America friends I made in Singapore, who often asked me what made Texans so “arrogantly proud” to be Texans... this is a big part of it! From a friend’s friend...sharing!!”:

TEXAS! Clay Morrison said this, and said it well!!:

“TO MY FELLOW TEXANS – I have worked as a public adjuster on every major disaster to hit this country over the past 20 years and I am convinced that [Hurricane] Harvey will go down as the most significant natural disaster in modern US history. I have to tell you that when I look back at Katrina, Sandy and all the rest, none compare to what we are seeing with Harvey. I’m not referring to the scope of damage here, (which exceeds both) but to the people who ARE TEXANS.

After spending a couple days helping with high water rescues, I have been amazed by the non-victim, can do attitudes of my fellow Texans. Not a single person that I ferried to the shelters complained, or asked for anything for that matter, and I can tell you that it was totally different in ALL the other storms. Tonight I watched the news as FEMA and other federal agencies scratched their heads because every Texan with a Jon boat had already showed up and rescued their neighbors. You have stood up, helped your neighbors, shown compassion for the least of these, done the job no one else wanted to do and are showing the world who Texas is.

‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few’, (Mathew 9:37).

I firmly believe that Texas is about to show the world what a few faithful workers look like. Thank you for being who you are and God Bless this place called Texas.”

– Barb Henry, who lives in Victoria, Texas and experience the brunt of Hurricane Harvey. She has lived much of her life adult overseas, much of it in Singapore. She is originally from Palacios, Texas and had experienced Hurricane Carla.

+ **Two good examples that came from Hurricane Harvey.** Another example of how God can use crises in our lives to do His work. Sandy Rios-in-the-Morning on American Family Radio had asked for calls from the Hurricane Harvey-affected areas about things that had happened. One man called in and said that he and a friend had Jon Boats going around helping people. With one couple, the wife was a paraplegic. So the two guys tried to get the lady into one of the boats and the wheelchair into? the other one, but could not do it. They wound up carrying her through waist-deep water a little over a quarter of a mile to where a larger boat could take her to safety.

A pastor called in and said he was distressed that he could not get to his church because of the water. He had not missed preaching a sermon in over 30 years (when he was not on vacation or on travel). Someone had called in and suggested that he do a video of the sermon, so his wife coached him into giving a sermon while sitting in

his living room; she recorded it on her cell phone. She then posted it on Facebook. The pastor said that he had over 15,000 people view his sermon – with one response from as far away as Venice, Italy. That is an example of how God took this very difficult time and used it for his work.

– Radio station WRAE, Raeford, North Carolina, American Family Radio, 88.7 FM; September 4th, 2017.

+ **God is faster than Facebook!** I'm not quite sure what I need to say, but it needs saying. This will probably be long. I have been at my church (with some of my family not out helping others) for the last 2 1/2 days. I have been processing incoming donations so that we can give them to families in need. Emmalin has been handing out certain food to families as they came through. There were many times today that we nearly ran out of something when someone showed up to donate just what we were running out of. Emmalin came up to me and said, "Mom, I'm almost out of snacks to give out." Two kids walked up with their parents and handed us snacks for those in need. I almost cried over jelly because we had none and someone brought us bags of it. I hugged a random stranger from Powerhouse Church because he brought food we needed. There were so many stories like this all day.

Just before we were done for the day, a truck pulling a trailer showed up from Kansas bringing mostly toiletries. As we were unloading and taking them out to the floor, I heard one of our people who was handing out supplies tell someone that they were having a hard time finding her shampoo because they had run out. This family had driven for TWO days to get here. They were not bringing things we had posted that we needed; God ...knew we would need [them] at this time.

Conversely, we had things I thought we would never get rid of all of it, but we had people who needed it and now it is all gone! My favorite was yesterday when something showed up that we hadn't even had a chance to post to FB that we needed. My mom looked at me and said, "God is faster than Facebook!"

Our God is so good. I love how God shows up and provides exactly what is needed at just the right time!

– Posted on Facebook by Samantha Pantermuehl; September 2, 2017 11:29 PM.
Samantha is an adoptive "niece"; her mother Tammi an adoptive "sister" – AOM.

+ **Advice from Samantha.** As a person who has processed donations for 2 1/2 days, I would like to offer some advice:

1. Buying in bulk saves money, but it is hard to hand out large packages to families. They don't always have room in their car to take it home. If you buy in bulk make sure it can be split up easily (ex: some fruit bars come in 3 boxes in a bigger box.) We can open the big box and still give a sealed package to multiple families. We cannot easily give out 50 lb bags of something.
2. Things that are presorted make our job easier. Try putting all your rice in one bag and cereal in another. The faster we can sort it, the faster we can get it in the hands of those who need it.
3. Do you want to wear underwear that someone else has worn? The people coming here don't need that either. Please buy new underwear.
4. If we tell you that we cannot take something, there is a valid reason. Usually it has to do with hygiene. We could not give out bed pillows that were not in original packaging. We cannot take your word that your house is clean and these have never been slept on.
5. Please don't throw something away just because I cannot take it. I'm sure if you give it a few weeks someone will be happy to take your clothes or shoes. There may be other places taking them now. But when I say I cannot take them, it is because I have a mountain taller than me full of clothes I haven't sorted yet.
6. Feel free to ask what we need most. You can also see if it is on Facebook or the website. We updated ours about every hour because needs changed frequently. Some places had specific needs that didn't change.

– Posted on Facebook by Samantha Pantermuehl; Sep 2, 2017 11:26 PM

+ **Dear CNN.** "Dear CNN, I'm a Texan!! Let's get this straight! The last thing we wanted was to see our Leader [President Trump] break down and sob or pose for photos with Harvey victims! He gave exactly what we wanted and needed! To visit our state and personally offer his support. When he raised the Texas flag and said

“Texas can handle anything” our spirit rose above the flood level! His words of Encouragement and Hope is the Texas way!

In Texas, our men do not wear panties, they are always armed and ready to protect us. Our women are strong and courageous! We are hard working, God fearing, strong! And that is what we desire in our leader!

CNN, We do not want or need you in our lives and would appreciate it if you would just shut up and keep your critical THOUGHTS all to yourself!!!!

Don’t mess with Texas!!”

Barb Henry’s two additional comments: “Allen, as much as these word reflect my thoughts, I can’t in good conscience, claim them. The instructions were to “copy and paste” so I’m not sure who actually penned them. But I feel them to the core... like those who have done the same from my post! Don’t mess with Texas or Trump!”

”And I might add that I really do not care WHO these pictures might offend. They are history, they are frightening, they are sad, but they are REAL and they are a memorial to all the lives lost that horrific day and the days and weeks after. God bless America!”

Sep 12, 2017 4:52 PM.

– Subject: Dear CNN post by Barb Henry;

+ **Politically incorrect.** Wisconsin Dairy Queen owner Kevin Scheunemann generated a lot of buzz — and a lot of business — when a “politically incorrect” sign he posted on his store door offended an out-of-towner who took to social media to complain. “This restaurant is politically incorrect,” warns the sign Scheunemann posted some four years ago. The poster warns that they “have been known to say” things like “Merry Christmas,” “Happy Easter,” and “God Bless America,” and give away free ice cream sundaes to veterans on Veterans Day. The bottom of the sign, in large letters, reads: “In God We Trust.” The owner first posted the sign after a customer complained about the Christian music he heard being played in the Kewaskum Dairy Queen. Instead of ridding the store of the music, Scheunemann felt it was necessary to post a warning to potential customers about their values, which revolve around “God and country.”

“I felt the sign was appropriate to hang in terms of being transparent about the views of the owner and staff supporting God and country,” Scheunemann explained to CBS 58 TV. “It just seems that those kinds of values and principles are becoming controversial in society,” he added. Despite hanging without a hitch (or a complaint) for nearly four years, the sign recently became national news after an out-of-town customer became triggered by the “politically incorrect” message and posted a snapshot and a complaint to the official Dairy Queen Facebook. “I find this extremely offensive,” whined an Oregon woman who goes by the name Ashley Coleman on Facebook. “Please speak with the franchise owner,” she added. But the community has since rallied around the Dairy Queen store, seemingly in agreement with the sign’s sentiments. “Business is good,” noted local CBS reporter Julie Parise, “thanks in part to a sign that’s hanging on the front door.”

Business owners in the area also came to Scheunemann’s defense. “He posted it on the door so you see it before you walk in,” said local store owner April Serwe. “You don’t have to walk in if you don’t agree with it.”

Some Kewaskum residents even said the sign is unnecessary, since most all of them “share the same values,” notes CBS 58. “In this small community, I don’t think it’s a problem,” said local Liz Torrison. “We’re all just liking each other and having fun.” Even Republican Senator Duey Stroebel, who represents the 20th District wherein the Kewaskum Dairy Queen store is located, got in on the support for Scheunemann, quipping that the sign was “creating a blizzard” of “offended snowflakes.”

Dairy Queen has not dictated the owner take down the sign, but they did distance themselves from the poster in a statement: American Dairy Queen Corporation does not encourage our independently owned and operated franchisees to post non-business related messages in their locations or on their external reader boards. This sign expresses the views of this independent owner only and does not speak for ADQ Corporation or any of our other franchise owners. We expect our franchisees and employees to treat every person who walks through our doors with the utmost dignity and respect. Nothing less is acceptable.

Scheunemann said he’d be willing to make accommodations for anyone uncomfortable with the declarations made on the poster.

Of Interest.

+ *Praying to Muhammad – Presbyterian Church (USA) (PCUSA) prayers.*

“Allah bless us and bless our families and bless our Lord. Lead us on the straight path – the path of all prophets: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.”

These were the words that rang out over the congregation at The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA meeting in Portland, Oregon. Wajidi Said, co-founder of the Muslim Education Trust, led the attendees in the prayer to the Islamic deity – a move arranged by the Ecumenical and Interfaith ministry staff at the assembly. [Note: This is syncretism, even paganism. Is it any wonder that the PCUSA is losing members and dying? – AOM]

– Jews News, as posted on Facebook; August 29, 2017.

+ *Membership statistics in the United Methodist Church.* Worldwide Professing Membership (2015):

Total Professing Lay members in the Jurisdictional Conferences (United States) 2015 — 7,067,162.

North Central Jurisdiction--1,183,494; Northeastern Jurisdiction--1,185,305; South Central Jurisdiction--1,639,870; Southeastern Jurisdiction--2,745,407; and Western Jurisdiction--313,086. Total Lay Members--12,719,550 (worldwide).

– 2015 Membership and Attendance by Conference, United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration. Note: 2016 data will be available in one or two months.

+ *Top Evangelical Leaders Back New Nashville Statement on Sexuality.* More than 150 Evangelical leaders representing churches, seminaries, and ministries have signed a statement affirming Biblical themes of marriage, gender, and sexual morality. The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) released the coalition statement, called the Nashville Statement, on Tuesday after gathering key Evangelical leaders for a meeting hosted by the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission last week in Nashville, Tennessee. CBMW President Denny Burk says the statement’s goal is to “shine a light into the darkness” and offer clarity in an age where “confusion reigns over some of the most basic questions of our humanity.” While Burk is responsible for spearheading the statement, CBMW told the Institute on Religion and Democracy that key Evangelical leaders such as John Piper, Albert Mohler, and Daniel Akin advised the proclamation’s spiritual architecture. “The Nashville Statement is a Christian manifesto concerning issues of human sexuality,” said Piper, a co-founder of CBMW. “It affirms with joy that no form of sexual sin is beyond forgiveness and healing.”

The statement’s preamble reads, in part: “Evangelical Christians at the dawn of the twenty-first century find themselves living in a period of historic transition. As Western culture has become increasingly post-Christian, it has embarked upon a massive revision of what it means to be a human being. By and large the spirit of our age no longer discerns or delights in the beauty of God’s design for human life. Many deny that God created human beings for his glory, and that his good purposes for us include our personal and physical design as male and female. It is common to think that human identity as male and female is not part of God’s beautiful plan, but is, rather, an expression of an individual’s autonomous preferences. The pathway to full and lasting joy through God’s good design for his creatures is thus replaced by the path of shortsighted alternatives that, sooner or later, ruin human life and dishonor God.

Top Evangelicals leaders within the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination representing over 47,000 Baptist churches across the United States, signed the statement. Other major signatories include Anglican pastor and apologist Sam Alberry, popular author and pastor Francis Chan, Charisma Media’s founder and CEO, Steven Strang, and Asbury Theologian’s Visiting Distinguished Professor of Old Testament John N. Oswalt.

[Note: I have signed onto this statement. – AOM] – Chelsen Vicari;
<https://juicyecumenism.com/author/chelsen-vicari/>

+ ***Churchgoers stand with immigrant “Dreamers”***. United Methodists are calling for Congress to act on behalf of unauthorized immigrants who came to the U.S. as children. Specifically, they are seeking ways for “Dreamers” to remain in the U.S., continue contributing to their communities and be on the pathway to citizenship.

[Note: This is lobbying for illegal immigrants. The average age of these so-called “Dreamers” is 26 years old. Each of them is projected to become an “anchor baby” and able to bring in up to 26 more people from their country. In addition, each person allowed to stay is taking the job that could be held by someone who is currently unemployed. – AOM]

– Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS) Weekly Digest; Sep 08, 2017.

+ ***Browns Staged Largest Anthem Protest Last Week – Now They ALL STAND For Flag Because of One Man.***

While the protests of the national anthem in the NFL have not been as widespread as last season, they have nonetheless continued. The Cleveland Browns saw 12 players kneel during the anthem during their preseason game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, but the very next week, something very different happened.

During this Sunday’s game, not a single player knelt during the national anthem. Every single one was on their feet, just five days after their previous protest. Instead, the players stood together and linked arms. What made the difference?

Some say it is none other than Jim Brown himself. Brown, the legendary running back and NFL hall-of-famer, was asked about Colin Kaepernick and the national anthem protests he started. Brown said that he wouldn’t “desecrate my flag and my national anthem”. A prominent civil rights activist, Brown allegedly spoke to the team himself and laid down the law. Brown explained his viewpoint in an interview with ESPN. “I want to be in his corner, and I do think, ‘God bless him,’” he said of Kaepernick. “I’m going to give you the real deal: I’m an American. I don’t desecrate my flag and my national anthem. I’m not gonna do anything against the flag and national anthem. I’m going to work within those situations. But this is my country, and I’ll work out the problems, but I’ll do it in an intelligent manner.”

He also pointed out that Kaepernick is sabotaging his own career. “Colin has to make up his mind whether he’s truly an activist or he’s a football player,” he continued. “Football is commercial. You have owners. You have fans. And you want to honor that if you’re making that kind of money.”

“You have to understand there’s intelligence that’s involved, OK? I can’t be two things at once that contradict each other. If I sign for money, then the people I sign with, they have rules and regulations.”

[Note: If “Gratitude is the mother of all virtues” – then what is ingratitude? – AOM]

– Cassy Fiano, August 28th.

+ ***Taking a knee***. To the NFL players who took a knee during the playing of the National Anthem.

“So, you want to take a knee?”

Take a trip to Valley Forge in January. Hold a musket ball in your fingers and imagine it piercing your flesh and breaking a bone or two. There won’t be a doctor or trainer to assist you until after the battle. Wait your turn while listening to the screams of pain from the wounded.

Then take a knee.

Go to Normandy where man after American man stormed the beach, dodging dead bodies and withering machine gun fire,...the very sea stained with American blood. Imagine that your fellow players are your dead brothers in arms.

Then take a knee.

Take a knee in the sweat soaked jungles of Vietnam. Over 60,000 Americans died in those jungles. There was no playbook or million dollar contracts for doing your job, but they understood what our flag represented. When they came home, they were protested by their fellow Americans.

Then take a knee while they spit on you.

Take another knee in the blood drenched sands of Fallujah in 110 degree heat...Trade in your pads for a Kevlar helmet and battle dress...You'll have to stay hydrated, but there won't be anyone to squirt Gatorade into your mouth. And watch out for those IEDs when you take a knee.

There's a lot of places to take a knee. Americans have given their lives all over the world. When you use the banner under which they fought as a source for your protest, you dishonor the memories of those who bled for the very freedoms you have. That's what the red stripes mean. It represents the blood of those who spilled it defending your liberty.

So while you're on your knee, pray for those that came before you, not on manicured fields striped and printed with numbers to announce every inch of game yardage...but on nameless hills and bloodied beaches and sweltering forests and bitter cold mountains...every inch marked by an American life lost serving that flag you protest.

No cheerleaders, no announcers, no coaches, no fans...just American men and women on the land, air, and sea, delivering the real fight against those who chose to harm us...so you would have the opportunity to dishonor their service by "taking a knee."

You have no clue what it took to get you where you are...but your "protest" is duly noted. Not only is it disgraceful to a nation, it points to your ingratitude for those who chose to defend you under that banner that will still wave long after your stats and game jersey are forgotten...

If you really feel the need to take a knee, come with me to church on Sunday and we'll both kneel before Almighty God. We'll thank Him for preserving this country for as long as He has. We'll beg forgiveness for both of our ingratitude for all He has provided us. We'll appeal to Him for understanding and wisdom. We'll pray for liberty and justice for all...because He is the one who provides those things.

But no protesting allowed. There will only be gratitude for His provision and a plea for His continued grace and mercy on the land of the free and the home of the brave.

May He continue to bless America, the ignorant and selfish sinners we all are. What an incredible gift He has given us!

– Anonymous.

Sexuality Issues.

+ UMC Annual Conferences Reject Bishop's Liberal Pro-Homosexuality, Anti-Liberty Agendas Within our United Methodist Church, there is plenty of well-known bad news about the leadership (and lack thereof) by our American bishops. But fortunately, despite all the considerable power and privileges our bishops enjoy, we often see more local United Methodist leaders refusing to follow the liberal direction in which even their own bishops have tried to move the church. We saw a couple of powerful examples of this earlier this spring and summer in the Philadelphia Episcopal Area. This area is comprised of both the Peninsula-Delaware and Eastern Pennsylvania Conferences, and is presided over by Bishop Peggy Johnson. At their 2017 annual conference sessions, actions were taken that amounted to rejecting Bishop Johnson's liberal agendas in opposing the UMC's orthodox teaching on homosexuality and in opposing basic legal protections for the freedom of conscience for Christians who do not share her liberalism.

In 2015, Bishop Johnson made a choice to join Bishops Thomas Bickerton and Jeremiah Park in releasing a public letter advocating for the then-latest LGBTQ activist cause, in a way that not only ignored the traditionalist United Methodist teachings on marriage each bishop vowed to uphold, but also rather lovelessly misrepresented the character of Christians who do not want to be forced to directly participate in same-sex union ceremonies. Their letter took a rather extreme position of limiting religious liberty to only "the right to our own personal beliefs," as long as it does NOT extend to protections for people being allowed to actually behave according to their personal beliefs outside of church walls. At the time, IRD Director Mark Tooley noted troubling questions raised by the Bickerton-Park-Johnson letter. More recently, Bishop Johnson proudly marched in the Philadelphia Gay Pride Parade, and then wrote a blog post celebrating the participation of some area United Methodists and a picture of herself and one such minister holding a "GOD IS GENDER QUEER" sign. Encompassing much of the "blue" states of Delaware and Maryland, the Peninsula-Delaware Conference, located within the rather liberal Northeastern Jurisdiction, has hardly been a bastion of any sort of conservatism.

So when a group of activists affiliated with the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) had good reason to expect quick approval of a resolution essentially promoting the stance of the conference's own bishop of broadly opposing any government or private actions that, in the resolution's words, "misuse the principle of religious freedom in ways that do harm by denying services...to anyone." This Resolution #R-3 did go a bit further by targeting not only businesses and governments, but also "non-profit and religious organizations" that violate this principle. But it was driven by the same basic anti-liberty approach of Bishop Johnson. Both the Bickerton-Park-Johnson letter and the resolution entitled "Rejecting 'Religious Freedom' as a Means of Discrimination" took care to avoid any direct and honest acknowledgement of the actual cases that are driving these recent debates over religious liberty as it relates to same-sex weddings. At the same time, both statements make such allusions as, in the words of the bishops' letter, acknowledging that "[r]ecent events have highlighted the discomfort some religious people experience about providing goods and services to same-sex couples seeking to be married." Such allusions indicate the authors' awareness of the cases. For a quick refresher, here are links to some of the more high-profile cases of Christian small business owners (such as bakers or florists) who do not want to be forced to directly support spiritually harmful same-sex wedding rituals, or otherwise forced to endorse homosexual practice, facing heavy-handed government punishments under the banner of "anti-discrimination" laws – ranging from these brothers and sisters in Christ being forced by the inherently violent force of the government to pay crushing fines as high as \$135,000, lose their livelihoods, print messages with which they morally disagree, or be thrown in jail (the latter potential punishment NOT being isolated to one state).

This is yet another example of liberal United Methodists like Bishop Johnson and the RMN crowd being far less willing to extend basic Golden-Rule compassion towards those outside their ideological tribe than we have seen from some more secular gay-rights advocates. Apparently for them, in order to maintain their rejection of biblical teaching about sexual self-control, they feel they must also choose to reject other biblical teaching, such as the obligation to be in solidarity with parts of the body of Christ suffering bullying, harassment, death threats, ruinous fines, and the threat of jail, all for their desire to not run their small businesses divorced from Christian values. And both the letter and the resolution seem far more interested in caricaturing the victims as being somehow unloving (for declining to encourage people to pursue a form of self-harm!) than actually listening to the nuanced, compassionate, and incredibly gracious perspective of such brothers and sisters. Thankfully, the majority folk of even the Peninsula-Delaware Conference evidently feel rather differently. They voted to reject this resolution which, at its core, basically affirmed Bishop Johnson's anti-liberty, anti-ecumenical approach. Given the great deference bishops typically enjoyed, this rejection of her agenda was rather striking.

Another proposed resolution noted that our denomination's membership "holds diverse opinions regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression," but called on us to come together to support "gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender teens" who are at risk for bullying, depression, and family rejection. While there are problems with assigning such identities to children, and the resolution's WHEREAS statement unhelpfully cited a sloppily bad past UMC resolution on "heterosexism" that has actually expired (and so is no longer an official UMC position), traditionalists can acknowledge that such resolutions do highlight a real, legitimate concern, as I have noted elsewhere. But in a pleasant surprise, this resolution was amended to ultimately expand its concern to include "all youth" (rather than ONLY those who check any sort of LGBTQ box) and express the goal "that they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to fully embrace and live out their true identity in Jesus Christ."

A month later, the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference met and considered a large number of resolutions. This group ended up passing neither proposed resolutions in favor of religious liberty protections nor a proposed resolution opposed to such protections. The former were likely hurt by tying the cause of religious liberty to efforts to repeal the Johnson Amendment and allow churches to legally endorse political candidates (an issue that is very different from and more controversial than more modestly saying that Christian bakers should not be jailed). More significantly however, the Rev. Herb Snyder submitted a resolution that would have promoted participation in LGBTQ "pride" parades and other events. As noted, Bishop Johnson is rather public about strongly favoring this position. She even touted the resolution on her aforementioned blog post. However, the

Eastern Pennsylvania Conference voted by a strong majority to gut the resolution by taking out the strong, specific, LGBTQ-affirming language, leaving in place a statement more non-controversially and broadly calling for congregations to welcome all people. When it became clear that they could not get the affirmation of LGBTQ activism, lifestyles, and “pride” that they wanted, despite even the bishop’s clear liberal biases, the sponsors withdrew the resolution.

– John Lomperis, UMAction; September 8, 2017

+ *Trans Christians share stories.*

CHICAGO (UMNS) — “Rooted” – a three-day conference for trans and gender-expanded Christians, gave participants an opportunity to share faith stories and struggles. [Note: UM money going to support a conference for those who experience gender confusion, rather than ministering to them on the basis of the Bible’s teachings: man/woman. – AOM]

– Kathy L. Gilbert reports, UMNS Weekly Digest – Sep 08, 2017

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During the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson served as a major in the Tennessee militia. At a key moment in the battle, the morale of his troops appeared to be at an all-time low. Tensions ran high, and the soldiers under Jackson’s command were arguing, talking bad about each other, and fighting amongst themselves. Jackson pulled the troops together and said,

“Gentlemen! Let’s remember that the enemy is over there!”

He encouraged his troops to keep a proper perspective about their real enemy and not turn on each other.