

Monthly Update

February 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Again, I thank you for your response to our December appeal to partner with us in the ministry to which God has called us. This enables us to continue our work of “contending for the faith” in this important time for our United Methodist Church.

This edition of the Monthly Update contains a good bit of information on actions from the committee on A Way Forward. We need to be in prayer for the meetings that will take place and for the ongoing work of people associated with this endeavor. This past Sunday, I participated in a “listening session” associated with this with other members of our district at Salem United Methodist Church in Eastover.

When we think of February, we often think of Valentine’s Day – a day that we set aside to show “love” toward that special person – or persons. What is love? One type is shown in the following example:

George’s wife Sue ran off with her old college boyfriend shortly after their class reunion. Convincing herself that she would be happier with him, she married him right after the divorce was final. It took George over a year to recover but, through much prayer and long hours at work, he avoided bitterness and got on with his life.

Eventually, George got word that Sue and her new husband had had a child and had moved overseas to pursue his career. Then, Sue wrote him an unexpected letter to tell him that she had terminal cancer. Her husband, unable to face it, had abandoned her and the child. She was all alone with her son – and destitute!

George sent her some money. Then, he took an unpaid leave of absence from his work to go see them. He stayed with them for several months and was at her side when she died. Then he adopted her son, brought him back to the States, and raised him as his own without ever telling him about his mother’s past.*

This is an example of “selfless” love – a love focused on his ex-wife that was giving and had no thought of what it might get back in return, truly a sacrificial love. It reminds me very much of Christ’s love for us – in that He gave His life for each one of us so that we might have forgiveness for our sins and the assurance of salvation. When we realize what He did for us, how we could not show love and consideration for others?

I thank you for your continued help – through your thoughts, encouraging notes, prayers, and your gifts. I pray that God will bless you richly.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

* From the records of Promise Keepers.

February 2018 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. Trashing Megachurches. Trashing megachurches is often popular. According to the standard stereotype, they're big exurban factories resembling car dealerships with giant parking lots and giant American flags, catering to rich, socially irresponsible SUV driving Sunbelt Republicans anxious to hear superficial, self-serving health and wealth sermons from huckster preachers in flashy suits.

A recent article by Jonathan Merritt cites a liberal advocacy group report asserting that, of the 100 largest congregations in America, none are LGBTQ affirming, over 90 percent have white pastors, and only one has a female pastor. Merritt calls this report "explosive" without directly condemning the churches. But many on social media have predictably issued their disapproving tut-tuts. The originating advocacy group wants to shame these churches.

Megachurches of course aren't generated, subsidized or regulated by government fiat or any centralized authority. They're big because they're popular, typically founded by entrepreneurial pastors who are very talented at presenting winsome messages that broadly appeal. They are almost always Evangelical and theologically more traditional.

There are thousands of churches in America with liberal clergy. They could become megachurches if their messages and appeals were compelling to more people. But they aren't. Growing religion, Christian or otherwise, in America or globally, now and across history, is almost always in some sense traditionalist. It challenges and demands with cohesive beliefs and practices. Where are the growing liberal churches, mosques, and temples around the world? They exist, if at all, in the minds of some Western theologians and sociologists. More permissive and theologically lax religion may sound appealing but it rarely attracts a sustained crowd, anywhere. (No, big crowds don't equal theological truth, but chronically dying congregations are hardly validating spiritually.)

This latest slam against megachurches implies they're racially exclusive because over 90 percent of pastors are white. Megachurches have mostly originated in mostly white suburbs and exurbs, but their congregations are more diverse than commonly imagined. A 2015 survey showed that 10 percent of megachurches reporting no racial majority, while 37 percent of megachurches reported between 20 percent and 49 percent minority presence in their majority white congregations. Megachurches also report that about 20 percent of their worshipers are between ages 18-34.

Compare those stats with "inclusive" liberal Mainline Protestant denominations, whose memberships are 88 percent to 96 percent white, excepting the American Baptist denomination, the least liberal among the seven, which is 73 percent white. Their memberships are also much older. One survey says only 12 percent of Episcopal Church members are millennials. Likely far fewer are active worshipers. One survey says the average age of a megachurch worshiper is 40. For Mainline Protestants it's close to 60. Liberal Mainliners like to boast of LGBTQ inclusion. But I strongly conjecture the average megachurch, even though not affirming LGBTQ causes, still by virtue of its size and variety of programs has more LGBTQ people than the average mostly empty liberal church proudly waving rainbow flags to little effect.

As to female clergy, my own United Methodist denomination to which I'm committed has ordained women since the 1950s. All the liberal Mainline denominations ordain women. But the vast bulk of global Christianity doesn't, including of course Catholicism, Orthodoxy and most of global Protestantism. Much of global Pentecostalism does though women pastors are a small minority. Almost no other major global religions have female clerics, such as Islam, Hinduism, etc. Although I'm happy in my tradition, I'm loathe to condemn as intrinsically bigoted the vast majority with different teachings. If megachurches are chauvinistic and bigoted

why do they more successfully attract women and non-whites than the ostensibly more enlightened liberal churches?

I've never desired to worship at a megachurch. To my own tastes they seem too choreographed and overwhelming and often too dependent on the pastor's personality. Some of the stereotypes about them have grains of truth! I prefer smaller, more traditional churches. But megachurches can reach many more with the Gospel and provide a variety of ministries that my preferred churches cannot and likely never will.

So thank you, megachurches. For some of us you're just too glitzy. But please ignore often peevish critics, and keep feeding many spiritually famished souls who otherwise might go hungry.

[Note: Mark Tooley is a champion "contender" in the renewal movement with deep insight into the issues. – AOM]

– IRD article by Mark Tooley; Facebook post: "Trashing Megachurches"; Date: January 5, 2018.

Two replies to Mark's article are:

#1 – William says: "The correlation between declining UMC membership plus worship attendance and its growing liberal theology and social justice political positions has been well documented over and over. Yet, it seems inept at reversing this. The liberal leadership seems paralyzed and frozen in its own self absorption. It is real simple what needs to take place in the seminaries and sanctuaries — start teaching and preaching Wesleyan theology again. Preventive Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace needs to be the core of seminary education and the customary and routine sanctuary preaching. Now, UMC where this is enthusiastically happening are growing in a number of places, some even hiding their affiliation with the UMC. An interesting thing is going on here. A number of these megachurches are actually preaching Wesleyan evangelism as the UMC in too many places seems to be distancing itself from its Wesleyan roots. Wesleyan theology, when taught, preached, and practiced is a powerful force. My prayer is that those working so hard to bring it back front and center in the UMC are ultimately successful. We are at that proverbial crossroads right now. May God lead us home." [January 2, 2018]

#2 – Bill Bouknight says: Most mega churches grow because they are faithful to Scripture and reach out in loving ways to their communities. God's word, carried on the wings of the Holy Spirit, is the real power for church growth. [Jan. 6, -18]

A Way Forward.

+ Way Forward fleshing out 3 possible futures.

"Time is running short and we need to focus. Simple is better than complex. Reasonable detail is better than ambiguity. Fewer disciplinary changes is better than more."

DALLAS (UMNS) – The Commission on a Way Forward is fleshing out the details of three possible models for how the denomination treats LGBTQ inclusion. The multinational group, appointed by United Methodist bishops, held its seventh meeting behind closed doors Jan. 18-20 in Dallas. Each model has its supporters among the 32 commission members with no single plan having a clear majority, commission members told United Methodist News Service. "Some commission members prefer one sketch; others prefer a different sketch," the Rev. Tom Lambrecht said. "There's no one sketch that predominates how we think is the best way to go forward." Dave Nuckols, another commission member, said that it's less relevant which model commission members prefer than that they provide the bishops what they need.

The bishops also have asked the commission to draft a theological statement that both informs the three models and creates a compelling narrative for them. "Ultimately, the final report of our work is really not going to be our final report," Nuckols said. "It's going to be what the bishops make of our work because we are supporting them."

The three options, in no particular order, are:

1. Affirm the current Book of Discipline language and place a high value on accountability. The church policy book says the practice of homosexuality "is incompatible with Christian teaching" and lists officiating at a

same-gender union or being a “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy member as chargeable offenses under church law.

2. Remove the Book of Discipline's restrictive language and place a high value on contextualization. This sketch also specifically protects the rights of those whose conscience will not allow them to perform same-gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ people.

3. Create multiple branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice. This model would maintain shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops.

All three models come with a way for churches to exit the denomination.

While United Methodists have bandied about the first two options in earlier church discussions, the third is different from what comes before. “The multi-branch option is intended to provide a space within the overall church where different groups could operate according to their conscientious beliefs,” Lambrecht said. “Structurally, that’s still under development as how that would look. But I think the intent is that it would abide by one of the principles we operate under, which is that there would be no winners or losers in this scenario.”

However, Nuckols – a Minnesota Conference lay leader and treasurer of the Connectional Table – sees the first and third options as ultimately untenable. He favors something along the lines of the second option, which offers more local decision-making. “Our bishops requested ‘contextual differentiation,’” he said. “That means allowing more space so that we can each succeed in varied mission fields and so that we no longer litigate a single uniform church law treating married homosexuals differently than married heterosexuals.” He said the second option offers space within one church, while the third offers space between different branches. “The simpler Space Within approach cultivates greater tolerance as a sustainable path to unity, discipleship and mission,” he said. “The well-intentioned but complex Space Between approach offers structural co-existence, but in my opinion, its long-term consequences will be instability and schism.”

Lambrecht [maintains] “I think it’s fair to say most evangelicals would prefer to see an option similar to option one – whether that’s realistic at this point is up for grabs,” he said.

The bishops will use the commission’s work to develop legislation that will go before the 864 lay and clergy delegates of a special General Conference on Feb. 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis, Missouri. The special meeting of The United Methodist Church’s top lawmaking assembly will be limited to acting on a report by the Council of Bishops.

Nevertheless, at least some United Methodists are already drafting their own plans to propose as substitute legislation. While the Wesleyan Covenant Association has not decided whether to submit its own legislation, Lambrecht said he knows of individuals who are working on their own proposals.

At the beginning of the recent commission meeting, Council of Bishops President Bishop Bruce R. Ough offered some advice to the commission members. “Time is running short and we need to focus,” he said, according to a commission press release. “Simple is better than complex. Reasonable detail is better than ambiguity. Fewer disciplinary changes is better than more. Honor the parameters and values of the ‘mission, vision and scope’ document – unity, contextualization and enhanced mission.” Retired Bishop David Yemba of the Democratic Republic of Congo also urged the commission to keep the denomination’s global nature in mind. Yemba is one of three bishops serving as commission moderators. “Many United Methodists outside of the United States would like to see the context be taken into consideration seriously,” he said, according to the press release. “Whatever models the Council of Bishops will come up with and recommend to General Conference as a way forward, it is expected that such a recommendation will provide space to focus on what unites us and not what separates us as well as what we can say together as basic principles on human sexuality in the light of the Gospel.”

The Council of Bishops will have a special meeting in February to review the commission’s work. The commission has two more meetings scheduled this spring. The bishops have a deadline of July 8 to submit their petitions to the special General Conference.

– Bishop Bruce R. Ough, speaking to the Commission on a Way Forward, as reported by Heather Hahn in the Daily Digest, UMNS; Jan. 22, 2018.

+ *The EUB-Methodist Merger and the Way Forward*. 2018 marks the 50th anniversary of the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB)-Methodist merger. The Evangelical United Brethren Church was itself a merger of two churches, the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Association in 1946. The Methodists merged three denominations--the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church--in 1939. The merger that brought about The United Methodist Church was approved in 1968 by the General Conferences of the Methodist and EUB churches. The decision to merge was the easy part. The difficult part was to figure how to take two traditions, two structures, sets of bishops and superintendents, two understandings of doctrine and social activism, two publishing houses, and make them function as one.

From 1968 to 1972 these issues were discussed and debated with proposals brought to the 1972 General Conference for approval. It was then that the new United Methodist Church accepted a total restructuring of the denomination, reaffirmed its traditional doctrinal standards, set a new direction for Social Principles and how they will be used in the denomination, abandoned some old traditions and set in place some new traditions.

Throughout the coming year there will be some celebrations and some recognition of the 50-year EUB-Methodist merger. For the moment, it might be helpful to see if there are insights from that merger that can apply to United Methodism's present prospects for re-direction, re-structuring, and perhaps even division that will come about when the specially-called 2019 General Conference considers the future of United Methodism in light of serious differences in the denomination over issues of human sexuality (especially the practice of homosexuality), Biblical authority and the meaning of Christian unity.

For sure United Methodism today is facing painful decisions and probably disruption of some kind. "Disruption" does not need to be viewed negatively. The crossing of the Red Sea by the Hebrew people was a disruption. Pentecost was a disruption. Martin Luther's Reformation was a disruption. But disruption can also mean a break in relationships, separation and set-back.

In retrospect there are a number of positive things that came about as the result of the Methodist-EUB merger. For one, the merger gave the church the opportunity to do away with the segregated Central Jurisdiction in which congregations, primarily African-American, had been segregated into separate districts and conferences. Secondly, the merger opened the door to "inclusiveness" which meant that other voices in the church needed to be heard in addition to old, white male liberals. For example, in the quadrennium 1968-72 (before the restructuring was approved) the Methodist Board of Education, a key agency in the church which had responsibility not only for church school education but also for higher education, was composed of thirty-nine members, thirty-seven of which were white male liberals. The merger actually called, in some instances, for a quota system outlining how many women, minorities, former EUBs, youth, and persons with handicapping conditions were to be represented on church agencies.

While there were positive things that came about because of the merger there were also some negatives. The EUBs gained much from the merger. The EUB pension system was inadequate and the former Methodist conferences almost universally addressed the unfunded liability of the former EUB pastors. EUBs also had some funding issues with some of their institutions including colleges and camps and homes that the merger helped address. The negative side was that EUBs were sometimes simply swallowed up in the more dominate Methodist structure and church culture. EUBs lost their publishing house, some camping facilities and some traditions. EUBs, for example, had allowed for freedom of conscience in baptism. The EUB Discipline carried a service of infant dedication which implied that there was an alternative to infant baptism. While promised that their tradition would be honored, that never took place.

Evangelicals both won and lost in the merger. On the positive side the merger and consequent restructuring brought about more freedom for evangelicals. Before the merger, in an effort to control evangelical influence, the Methodist Discipline basically disallowed evangelical Sunday school literature to be used in the church school. And it was not just Sunday school material; music and hymn books and audio-visuals were "to be in

harmony with Board of Education standards.” Doctrinally what was approved was not historic Methodist doctrinal standards but “present Methodist tradition” standards. At that time only one point of view, that of theological liberalism, mediated through modern education theory (“we don’t memorize Bible verses in Methodist Sunday schools”), was allowed, at least officially, to function. In addition churches were to support only “approved” evangelists and use only “approved” missionaries. The EUB tradition which allowed for much more freedom, moderated the heavy institutionalism of the Methodists.

The new doctrinal statement spoke of “pluralism.” While pluralism on the one hand is an anathema to evangelicals (suggesting there is no central core of truth) it did open the door for discussion as to whether “pluralism,” which if properly understood, would allow for evangelical teaching in seminaries and in educational materials. Albert Outler, the father of the new doctrinal statement, so interpreted the intent of the doctrinal statement and the word “pluralism” to evangelicals.

What does any of this have to do with United Methodists’ “Way Forward” and the future of the denomination? No matter what course the 2019 General Conference will take, United Methodism is in for a time of disruption. The “disruption” does not need to be negative. Any direction taken will allow for much more freedom for local churches and for annual conferences. It is quite possible that any plan will allow for local churches to withdraw from the denomination and not lose their property. And if some annual conferences will be given freedom to set their own ordination standards, other conferences should be freed up to support what seminaries they wish to support and determine what seminaries will be approved to train United Methodist pastors. It is quite probable that some restructuring will be done with the general church boards and agencies, since these agencies will now be required to serve a more theologically diverse constituency. This new direction will surely deal with the question, “Do we even need many of our present agencies.” It is also quite possible if given new freedom in the way forward local churches will have more say as to how apportionment money will be directed.

Whatever happens, things are going to be different. As with the EUB-Methodist merger there will be positives and negatives but the hope is that with more latitude in how ministry will be conducted the church can be strengthened. At least that is our hope and prayer.

– By Dr. Riley Case, as received by E-mail. The Confessing Movement, Indianapolis, Indiana

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). Faith groups put human face on migration.

“We regret any and all violence committed against migrants in the past and resolve to work to eliminate racism and violence directed towards newly arriving migrants to the United States.”

UNITED NATIONS (UMNS) – The head of the United Nations recently called the world’s ability to deal with record levels of global migration a profound test of international cooperation – and religious leaders, including United Methodists, agree. For the Rev. Liberato “Levi” Bautista, who heads the U.N. office of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, “the concern of faith-based organizations is indeed about forced migration. While the global compact aims for safe, regular and orderly migration that is not really the problem.” Bautista played a chief role in organizing the symposium, along with leadership from the World Council of Churches, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and ACT Alliance, an ecumenical humanitarian organization. For the United Nations, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect was a co-sponsor, on behalf of the U.N. Inter-Agency Task Force on Engagement with Faith-based Organizations. The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, Church and Society’s top executive, acknowledged the “vitaly important” relationships across faith communities – including the ones represented at the symposium – that help the international community remember the human face of migration. “Current realities are driven by fear and anxiety, often framed as issues of national security and detrimental to economic wellbeing,” Henry-Crowe pointed out. “For those of us who are people of faith, fear and anxiety are not responses which grow out of our faith traditions. Our faith traditions are about life and hope.”

[Note: The GBCS advocates for unrestricted immigration, whether legal or not, no border wall, and in effect – no accountability in this area. Someone has said that “a country without border security is not a country.” This

area poses a serious threat to the future survival of our country. Increasingly, we will see warm fuzzy words about immigrants, children, and “dreamers” – but we need to focus on the illegal aspect of these actions. We are a nation of laws – and that is one of the things that has made America great – as our constitution wraps a legal framework around our Christian base working within the free-market, capitalistic system. On a personal level, on January 19th when I was in Washington, DC going to visit one of my senators, I heard a ruckus from the office of Senator Tom Cotton; it was a group of “dreamers” that had stormed in and was disrupting the staff. This “mob mentality” helped solidify my position on their status.

As far as the quote above, overwhelmingly the violence perpetrated has been against American citizens – and not vice versa. I have participated in “Set Free Prison Ministries” and have learned that a disproportionate of inmates – upwards of 24% – are “immigrants”! – AOM] – By Linda Bloom, UMNS, January 25, 2018

(UM) Judicial Council. Judicial Council cancels spring meeting.

CHICAGO – The executive committee of the United Methodist Judicial Council has canceled the council’s April meeting in Atlanta. To be good stewards of church funds, the council will defer the two docket items that had been submitted for April to its October meeting, said the Rev. Luan-Vu “Lui” Tran, council secretary.

The Judicial Council is the highest judicial body or "court" of The United Methodist Church. Its nine members are elected by the General Conference. The Judicial Council determines the constitutionality of acts or proposed acts of the General, Jurisdictional, Central, and Annual Conferences. It acts on these either on appeal of lower rulings or through requests for declaratory decisions. It also rules on whether acts of other official bodies of the denomination conform to The Book of Discipline. This is done in accordance with procedures established in The Book of Discipline.

Members of the 2016-2020 Judicial Council are: The Rev. Dennis Blackwell, Beth Capen, Lídia Romão Gulele, The Rev. Øyvind Helliesen, the Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko, Ruben T. Reyes, Deanell Reece Tacha, The Rev. Luan-Vu Tran, and N. Oswald Tweh Sr. – UMNS, Daily Digest; January 16, 2018

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If God were small enough for your minds, He would not be big enough for your needs. – Anonymous

Global Outlook

God doesn’t call the qualified, He qualifies the called. – Anonymous

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Liberia. *United Methodist sworn in as new president of Liberia.* New Liberian President George Manneh Weah said the best way to help the poor is to ensure that public resources do not end up in the pockets of government officials. Weah, a United Methodist and former soccer star, was officially sworn in as president of Liberia at a ceremony in the country’s capital Jan. 22. Weah succeeds fellow United Methodist Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. During the induction ceremony, Weah said the overwhelming mandate he received from the Liberian people during his campaign was to end corruption in public service. “I promised to deliver on this mandate,” he stressed. “Though corruption is a habit amongst our people, we must end it.” Weah, a member and usher at Georgia Pattern United Methodist Church, pointed out that it is time for government officials to put the good of the people above their own selfish interests. “We must pay civil servants a living wage, so that corruption will not be an excuse for taking what is not theirs,” he warned.

Amidst huge applause, Weah told the Liberian people that corrupt officials who will not refrain from enriching themselves at the expense of others will be prosecuted. He said the government owed citizens clarity on fundamental issues, such as their rights to land, freedom of speech, and how national resources and responsibilities are going to shift from the capital of Monrovia to the rest of the counties. He further pointed out that people expect better cooperation and more action from the government. “We can do better, together,” he

said, adding that the fundamental human rights that people deserve must be held up and measured against the actions of their government.

– By E. Julu Swen, UMNS, January 22, 2018.

Haiti. Two young men in our church wrote me today saying, “Happy New Year, Mother.” They both lost their mothers at a young age. One was by her side as he watched her suffer and finally yield up the ghost. The other one was far away when he learned that his mother was killed in a horrific traffic accident. He had almost gone with her that day, but stayed behind to work on music with a friend. We are sending them both to a university. One is in his first year studying agronomy. The other (who stayed behind to practice music while his mother went out to the country) is in his third year as a Music major. I’m so blessed that we can help these two & blessed to be a “mother” to them. If you would like to help them too, you can send a check to: The Lord’s Table, PO Box 11049, Goldsboro, NC 27532 & earmark it Haiti/Scholarship. – Dana Adams, wife of Rev. Prit Adams; E-mail from Rehoboth Ministries, January 2, 2018.

World Council of Churches (WCC). *WCC meets with China Christian Council.*

SHANGHAI (WCC) – Christian unity was the overarching theme of a January visit from a World Council of Churches delegation with the China Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The delegation also visited the East China Theological Seminary, one of the five regional seminaries of the China Christian Council.

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Christian unity was the overarching theme of a visit from a World Council of Churches (WCC) delegation with the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) in Shanghai on 9 January. “How can Christians realise and respond to Christ’s call to be one in our time and context?” asked WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit during his meeting with CCC and TSPM leaders. Tveit and his delegation were received by a delegation led by Rev. Feng Gao, CCC president, and Rev. Baoping Kan, CCC vice president and general secretary. “We are called to raise and revitalize our work on the unity of the churches for the sake of the unity of humankind,” Tveit said. “The example and experience of post-denominational Christianity in China offers a significant entry point to explore questions of unity further as the WCC reflects on how churches across the world can move forward towards a unity which is not self-serving but which can be shared for the wellbeing of others”.

Welcoming the delegation, Gao expressed his joy and gratitude for the consistent support and inspiration that the CCC has received from the WCC. “As a developing church faced with its own challenges the CCC remains committed to its Christian call and witness in accordance with biblical teaching and through its various ministries. We thank the WCC for this visit, which is an encouraging sign and assure you of our contribution to the cause of Christian unity”.

Kan outlined the historical association of the CCC with the WCC, since resuming its full membership in the WCC in 1991 and its contributions to the theme of unity. “The CCC has strived to live out a life of common witness in the Chinese post-denominational context by emphasising the commonalities while holding in proper balance the respect for differences and the common striving for united witness” said Kan.

On 10 January, the WCC delegation also visited the East China Theological seminary, one of the five regional seminaries of the CCC, where they were welcomed by the vice president of the seminary Rev. Xu Yulan and other members of the faculty. Rev Yulan introduced the seminary which was started in 1985 to the delegation and outlined the development of the seminary and its curriculum as an attempt to respond to the needs of the growing church in China. “Through its various courses the seminary is committed to the training of candidates to both lay and ordained ministries of the church.” Yulan also explained how the seminary seeks to ensure that its theological education is deeply rooted in context especially through its programme on sacred theology and music where students are encouraged to develop lyrics and liturgy which reflect the Chinese context and make use of Chinese musical resources in developing their theologies. The seminary also places

high emphasis on personal formation. “The cultivation of spirituality, morality, wisdom, physical performance, fellowship and personal merits are also considered important in the process of ministerial formation,” said Yulan. Rev. Sang Chang, Asia president of the WCC and a member of the WCC delegation expressed her happiness about the high proportion of women students as well as female leadership in the seminary and in Chinese churches in general. “As a former theological education and a strong proponent of women’s leadership I am encouraged to see women in positions of leadership in the Chinese churches”, said Chang, former president of the EWHA women’s university in Seoul. Commenting in general on her visit to China, Dr Chang said, “I came here with an openness of mind and readiness to learn. The experience so far has been deeply inspiring. The story of the Chinese churches will make a great contribution to the goal of full unity of the ecumenical movement”.

Tveit also reflected on the visit in the context of the 70th anniversary celebrations of the WCC. “The context of the 70th anniversary of the WCC is fortuitous for us to explore further what the call to be one means for Christians across the world in the midst of the changing political, economic and historical dynamics of the world order. The experience that the Chinese churches provide have the potential to address questions about the shape that Christian mission, diakonia and witness should take in our world today as living expressions of our common call to unity in a fresh manner,” Tveit said.

[Note: The “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” is known as a front organization under control of the Chinese Communist government and lacks credibility as a voice for orthodox Christian people. Of greater credibility – and influence – are the individual members of the “underground church” that meet in secret in China and that are growing. Pronouncements by spokesmen for the “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” are akin to “Potemkin Villages” – and not believable. The fact that the WCC would give a platform and voice to this movement is a reflection on their leftward political leaning. – AOM]

– World Council of Churches release, as reported in UMNS, 19 January 2018.

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Success is like anything worthwhile. It has a price. You have to pay the price to win and you have to pay the price to get to the point where success is possible. Most important, you must pay the price to stay there. – Vince Lombardi