

Monthly Update

September 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Monthly Update gives the last of the summaries on the meetings of the 58 Annual Conferences that have been held across our United Methodist Church, both in our country and from around the world. As we had written in the August Update, each summary contains much less information than we have published – so if you wish to have a more complete summary, please contact us and we will be glad to send it to you.

I hesitate to start off this letter with a somber bit of advice, but suicide is something that is increasingly a problem in our society. Since we have seen people taking their own lives, and we believe that each time this happens it is extremely tragic, please do not take any chances in this area if you know someone who might be depressed or is thinking of it. If you or anyone else that you know is struggling, the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-TALK (8255) is a potentially life-saving resource. Please do not leave this to chance. Life is the first gift that God has given us and is precious in His sight. In the past I have helped some teens and two men get through times of depression. Through an impassioned message I gave on this, one man changed his mind and – with tears in his eyes – hugged me over and over. We never know where others are on this.

Along with other information, this Monthly Update contains a great deal of news on various efforts being put forth to affect legislation for the “A Way Forward” study on the future of our United Methodist Church. This is understandable. This is so important.

Another interesting bit of news comes out of California with the turmoil in Glide Memorial United Methodist Church that is being investigated by Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño. She has been one of the liberal bishops who advocates for different far-left political causes to include illegal immigration. As we know, “illegal immigration” by its definition is outside a system of rules and laws that have been established to create order in our society. In her advocacy Bishop Carcaño has ignored the potential for disruption this brings to our country and the potential harm that it can inflict on our society. I think of the American citizens who have been injured or killed by illegal immigrants and the turmoil and heartbreak that it inserts into the lives of those families. As it turns out Glide was started by a wealthy lady named Lizzie Glide, one who loved the Lord and wanted to establish an evangelical church in San Francisco. It was subsequently taken over by those who believe in a variety of different things – almost anything except the orthodox Christian faith. At this time, Bishop Carcaño is having to deal with rebellion by the “powers that be” in that church and virtual anarchy. She is reaping a bit of what she has sown with “disruption” in that church. This “anarchy” is what will result if we don’t instill discipline in our own denomination. Let us pray that we can do this.

Thank you for being part of our “family” with your support.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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September 2018 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Churches will grow when the leaders of the Church....

Pray
Preach the Word
Witness
Evangelize
And love unconditionally

– Posted by the Reverend Gary Exman; July 30, 2018.

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The Good Stuff.

+ **Northern Illinois and Illinois Great Rivers conferences.** Illinois bishops: “Steer clear of sports betting”
SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – Bishops Frank J. Beard and Sally Dyck, who lead the United Methodist conferences in Illinois, state their concerns on a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision clearing the way for states to legalize sports betting. “Our concern for Illinoisans is the seduction of an easy way out of our state’s financial mess with unfunded pension liabilities and a backlog of unpaid bills,” the bishops wrote. – United Methodist News Service (UMNS) Weekly Digest; Jul 06, 2018.

+ ***Sexual Integrity on The Rise. Lindsey’ story.*** “I was told a long time ago that the more time I wasted on a man who didn’t care about me, the more time I spent missing out on someone who did,” Lindsey wrote in an article published by Kirk Cameron’s digital platform, *The Courage*. She went on to describe the heartache and difficulty she experienced pursuing unhealthy relationships at a young age, and the great joy she experienced when she realized what she was seeking was a false sense of love. Lindsey’s story took a turn for the better, when she waited for the “right guy”, her husband, to come into her life.
– Abstinence Clearinghouse; Jul 25, 2018. They are located at 3405 S Kiwanis Avenue, Sioux Falls, SD 57105

+ ***Last of detained missionaries arrives home.***

ATLANTA (UMNS) – Miracle Osman, the last of three United Methodist missionaries seeking to leave the Philippines after being placed on a government watch list, arrived July 13 in her home country of Malawi.
– Linda Bloom; UMNS Weekly Digest, Jul 20, 2018.

+ ***"Please Mom. We like it this way."*** I knew of one blended family where the guy had a son and a daughter and the lady had three daughters. When they got married, they had to make pallets for all five of the kids to sleep in one room. The mom really bemoaned the fact that all the kids were sleeping on the floor thinking it was all so chaotic, so she worked hard toward being able to have a room for each one of the kids. After renovations on the house, she finally got her wish with each child having his/her own separate bedroom. The first night that she was checking on them, she went into the first bedroom – but it was empty. She thought, “What in the world?” Then she heard giggles down the hall and went to check on it. She opened the door and there were all five kids – bedded down together. One of the little girls said, “Please Mom. We like it this way.” [It is refreshing that siblings get along so well together – even in blended families. – AOM]

+ ***Kidney transplant "engineered by God"!***

BETHEL PARK, Pa. – Amy Scott, active member and youth ministry leader at First Bethel United Methodist Church, needed a new kidney. Her donor would turn out to be the Rev. Cyndi Bloise, of nearby Jefferson United Methodist Church. – By Jackie Campbell, as reported in *UMNS Daily Digest*; Aug 24, 2018. Jackie Campbell, communications director of the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

Of Interest.

+ *Open Letter to California-Nevada Conference Concerning Glide Memorial UMC.*

Open Letter to the Pastors and Churches of the California-Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church Concerning Glide Memorial United Methodist Church

The California-Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church has a long-standing commitment of support for Glide Memorial United Methodist Church's work with the poor and vulnerable of the Tenderloin District and the greater San Francisco community. The Conference's commitment of support for this work stands today. The concerns that I and the leadership of the California-Nevada Conference have are related to the church life of this congregation.

While there is a remnant of those who claim to be United Methodist and thus Christian, the great majority of the participants at Glide's Sunday Celebrations claim other faiths such as Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim and Wiccan. Atheists and Agnostics, comprise another segment of the Glide community. Leaders from these constituencies are quick to publicly state that they do not want the Celebrations, or the church, to be United Methodist or Christian in any form. Sunday Celebrations are uplifting concerts, but lack the fundamentals of Christian worship. Baptisms are conducted periodically but in the name of the people rather than from a Christian understanding of Baptism. Holy Communion was done away with some time ago and only introduced back into the life of the congregation this past Spring, but outside of the Celebration gatherings and with much resistance. We seek to be in good and loving relationship with persons of other faiths and beliefs, and those who claim no faith. However, this should never cause us to lose our own faith.

There are also serious concerns about the governance and financial administration of the church. The church has no organizational structure to fulfill its responsibilities as per The Book of Discipline, and has not had a United Methodist organizational structure for decades. The only body that functions in any leadership capacity is a group of congregational leaders hand-picked by Cecil Williams who have never been elected or recognized by the congregation. The district superintendent and I have worked with this congregational leaders group and have found them on the whole to be thoughtful and helpful, but without authority to act on behalf of the church. The secular Glide Foundation Board makes all decisions related to the work of the Foundation and the church, and now seeks to determine who Glide's pastor(s) will be. There has not been a church conference at Glide on record for many years.

Cecil Williams retired in 2000 yet continues to act as the senior pastor. Since Williams retirement, the following have been appointed as senior pastors of Glide: Doug Fitch, Don Guest, Karen Oliveto, and Jay Williams. In addition, Theon Johnson III and Deacon Angela Brown have served in associate positions. When Karen Oliveto was elected to the episcopacy in 2016, Bishop Warner H. Brown Jr. served as the interim senior pastor through June 30, 2017. No pastor has been allowed to exercise their rightful authority or responsibilities while serving at Glide. To this day, Cecil Williams and his wife, Janice Mirikitani, make all decisions in the background at Glide.

The Glide Foundation runs the business of the Foundation under the church's 501.(c)(3), yet renders no financial reports through United Methodist disciplinary processes. Appointed pastors are left to alone protect the resources of the church yet have no access to the full financial records of the church, nor do they have any say over the use of the church property.

Over the last 9 months the district superintendent and I have worked diligently to build a relationship with the Glide Foundation Board to determine a way forward that would both support the humanitarian work of the Glide Foundation and allow for the reestablishment of a healthy United Methodist Church. The effort has been complex and difficult. What is clear is that the Glide Foundation Board under the guidance of Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani, have no interest in allowing Glide to have any United Methodist identity nor to be accountable to The United Methodist Church.

On June 22, 2018, I received a letter from Kaye Foster, Glide Foundation Board Chair, challenging my work in relationship to the Glide Church. It included a number of misinterpreted paragraphs from our Book of Discipline. What was most significant, however, was that lawyers Stephanie Petit and Daniel P. Dalton were copied. Daniel P. Dalton is from Dalton and Tomich, a law firm that has been representing conservative United

Methodist churches seeking to break away from the denomination because they oppose the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons. According to their own website, they have done similar work with Episcopal and Presbyterian USA churches and now make themselves available to work with United Methodist churches.

My Cabinet and I with the counsel of our Conference Chancellor have decided to conduct an assessment of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church under disciplinary paragraph 213. We ask for your prayers for this process and invite you to fast with us, as you are able, on Sunday mornings till noon during the summer months. May God give us wisdom and love in all things.

[Note: This is an interesting turn of events concerning Glide UMC. Originally started under the leadership of Mrs. Lizzie Glide, a firm evangelical Christian, it had devolved to a bastion of radical liberal theology, in the forefront of espousing homosexual normalization and aberrant beliefs. This reflects a lack of sufficient oversight and discipline. – AOM]

Sincerely,
Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño
6/23/2018

– As reported in UMNS Daily Digest – June 25, 2018

+ *Will Large Liberal Congregation Leave UMC?*

Glide United Methodist Church in San Francisco, California, may be on the brink of breaking away from the UMC. The church, as a whole, has systematically distanced itself from the governance and theological beliefs long held by the UMC, and yet has still clung to the title of being a United Methodist congregation, according to Bishop Minerva Carcaño.

Bishop Carcaño addressed an open letter to the California-Nevada Conference, outlining issues within Glide that she found to be troubling. She described Glide’s “Sunday Celebrations” as “uplifting concerts,” which “lack the fundamentals of Christian worship.” She went on to write that the congregants don’t want the church to be United Methodist or Christian in its practices. According to her, baptisms are performed “in the name of the people rather than from a Christian understanding of Baptism” and Holy Communion was abandoned for a number of years before being reintroduced, “with much resistance,” but only outside of the Sunday Celebrations.

Her allegations against Glide do not end there. In the letter, she says that Cecil Williams, a prominent retired pastor who led the congregation from 1963-2000, made “all decisions in the background of Glide.” According to a 2004 profile, Williams and former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown “stood together in defense of militant communist Angela Davis, and again, prominently, in defense of the Rev. Jim Jones of the Peoples Temple,” with Glide (under Williams’s leadership) even presented Jones with a humanitarian award in 1977, the year before Jones led a mass suicide of 913 people. Williams later expressed regret for his misjudgment of Jones.

Bishop Carcaño said Williams keeps control through his handpicked selection of individuals serving on the Glide Foundation board. The foundation, running on a \$12 million budget, provides social services such as meals, healthcare, support for single mothers, and training for unemployed adults. These are indubitably good things, but these works have eclipsed theological teaching. According to Jenny Strasburg, a writer for SF Gate, the “Glide Foundation runs the church.”

All this apparently happened under the nose of Karen Oliveto, who was senior pastor of Glide from 2008 until 2016, when the Western Jurisdiction provocatively voted to elect her as a bishop for their region of the denomination, despite her being an openly partnered lesbian activist, in open violation of the UMC’s ban on ordaining “self-avowed practicing homosexuals.” The legitimacy of Oliveto’s election and her right to claim the status of bishop remains hotly disputed in the denomination. But her supposed management of this large congregation was widely cited by her supporters as showing she had sufficient skills and experience to be a bishop. However, Oliveto doesn’t seem to have led the congregation well, as there was major decline in attendance during her eight years as pastor. While claiming a rise in (apparently inflated) membership from nearly 12,000 to over 13,000 during Oliveto’s tenure, actual attendance dropped from 3,000 to 1,899.

Bishop Carcaño also reported, in an opinion article she wrote on June 28, that, she was initiating an assessment of the internal workings of Glide. The reasons stated included “the lack of an appropriate governmental structure and the lack of financial transparency.” For the duration of the assessment, she reassigned the remaining pastors to other churches. This temporary measure has the potential to lead towards reconciliation between the congregation and the annual UMC conference.

Glide’s response to Bishop Carcaño’s letter was to draft one of their own, stating that they “remain open to dialogue with the UMC,” but are determined to continue in its ways with or without the UMC’s support. In order to continue an affiliation with the UMC, Glide’s leadership requires the UMC to “[return] to the attitude of tolerance that [they’ve] enjoyed.” In its responses, the church has also levied two allegations against Bishop Carcaño. First, they claim she is pushing a “conservative” agenda, even though Carcaño is well known for her outspokenly liberal views. During her time in the UMC, she has consistently urged the church to liberalize its views on sexuality. The second accusation is that it is “her mission to create more ‘Disciples of Christ’.” Glide leadership apparently believes it is a bad thing for a UMC bishop to strive towards helping individuals become followers of Christ.

Other responses given by the Glide community has included holding a rally at city hall, joined by the mayor-elect of San Francisco, London Breed. Meanwhile the national, purely secular, partisan, left-wing political group MoveOn.org has gotten involved, with an online petition demanding that Bishop Carcaño reinstate the pastors.

When individuals flaunt lifestyles contrary to Scriptural teaching, it opens the door for endless misunderstandings of biblical texts. Glide Church is a clear example of what a Christian community looks like when that happens. Under Oliveto’s oversight, it appears that this congregation was hardly recognizable as United Methodist and was only loosely tethered to Christianity.

Until Glide is willing to come under the leadership of the UMC’s most basic doctrinal and structural standards, it should not be attached to the UMC name. – Commentary by the Institute on Religion and Democracy; July 28, 2018.

+ *New World Outlook. Mission magazine to end print editions.*

ATLANTA – In a tribute to “New World Outlook,” the mission magazine of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, Thomas Kemper announced that the magazine’s final issue as a print publication will be in October. “What comes next is a matter of serious, prayerful consideration by Global Ministries’ directors and staff,” wrote Kemper, the mission agency’s top executive, in the magazine’s summer issue. – UMNS Daily Digest, Jul 25, 2018.

+ *Arkansas Conference - Conference newspaper moves to digital, ceases print.*

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. – The Arkansas United Methodist newspaper, first published in 1880, will discontinue its print edition following the July issue. The publication will continue as an online magazine. – Caleb Hennington reports. UMNS Daily Digest - Jul 25, 2018.

A Way Forward.

+ *New group pushes Simple Plan as way forward.*

[Note: The following report reflects a plan that is “highly suspicious” and should be read with skeptical caution. If the “other side” cannot win by one approach or if they see they will lose a forthcoming decision, they will often try another approach. This appears to be the case here but is offered for your information and analysis. – AOM]

A new group of United Methodists has formed to champion a “Simple Plan” at the special General Conference in 2019. If approved, the legislation would open the door to full participation of LGBTQ individuals in the life of the church, said Methodists for the Simple Plan. The proposal eliminates all restrictions in the denomination’s Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality. So far, 115 United Methodists – including 13 General Conference delegates – have signed on to support the plan. In a statement released Aug.

28, the unofficial advocacy group insists the three plans proposed in the Commission on a Way Forward report “have significant theological, moral and ecclesiological flaws.”

“The Traditionalist Plan expands enforcement of oppression; the Connectional Church Plan resurrects the racist logic of the Central Jurisdiction; and the One Church Plan sanctions segregation regionally,” the statement says of the commission’s proposals. In contrast, the statement contends, the Simple Plan is grounded in “our experience of God’s blessings in the lives and loves of LGBTQIA+ persons, along with our first General Rule to ‘do no harm.’”

[Note: This would be enough to cause a high degree of suspicion. – AOM]

“I pray that delegates receive the statement as a principled and provocative articulation of a ‘still more excellent way,’” said the Rev. Jay Williams, the statement’s lead writer and lead pastor of Union United Methodist Church in Boston. The statement bears the title “Ain’t I a Christian?” – a reference to the famed speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” by the Methodist abolitionist and itinerant preacher Sojourner Truth. “Hopefully, it invites reflection and sparks conversation that takes seriously the experiences of LGBTQIA+ persons as collaborators in the future of the church, instead of as ‘objects’ of debate,” Williams said. The Simple Plan is not the only alternative to the commission’s report submitted to the special General Conference on Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis. In addition to the 48 petitions contained in the commission’s three plans, 61 other petitions are being reviewed to determine the validity of formatting, said the Rev. Gary W. Graves, the secretary of General Conference. Another 18 petitions have been found to be invalid due to errors in formatting or other requirements, Graves said, but these decisions will be reviewed by the General Conference Committee on Reference. The same committee will review petitions submitted by any person or group other than the Commission on a Way Forward to determine if they are in harmony with the call to the special session.

The majority of United Methodist bishops recommended the One Church Plan. The Rev. Mark Holland, a General Conference delegate, has launched an unofficial group Mainstream UMC to champion the plan. Both the unofficial advocacy group Uniting Methodists and the denomination’s official Hispanic/Latino caucus MARCHA (Methodists Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic/Latino Americans) also have endorsed the One Church Plan, which allows more freedom at the conference and local church levels with regard to homosexuality. An unofficial advocacy group, the Africa Initiative, has endorsed the Traditional Plan, which aims to maintain church restrictions against homosexuality and enhance enforcement. The bishops initially called the plan Traditionalist, but the legislation identifies it as Traditional.

The UM Queer Clergy Caucus, an unofficial advocacy group that started in 2016, submitted the eight petitions of the Simple Plan. However, the group Methodists for the Simple Plan is separate from the caucus and seeks to be a grassroots effort that also attracts laity and people who do not identify as LGBTQ. The plan shares some similarities with the One Church Plan, which leaves decisions of whether to allow same-gender weddings up to local churches and gay ordination up to annual conferences. However, the Simple Plan does not include provisions the One Church Plan adds with the aim of protecting freedom of conscience of those who believe the practice of homosexuality is sinful. The Simple Plan also removes bans on general agencies and annual conferences from using church funds to “promote the acceptance of homosexuality ...” The One Church Plan leaves those parts of the Discipline untouched.

At this point, General Conference rules have not been finalized for how the plans will be presented to delegates. But unlike U.S. elections for candidates or state initiatives, General Conference voters will not simply face a ballot and mark whichever plan they support. Instead, they will be able to refine petitions and possibly mix together provisions of multiple plans.

“We suspect that it was going to be about discerning and trying to perfect whichever plan that is first presented to the body, or voting it down if there is not room for improvement,” said the Rev. Alexandre da Silva Souto, one of the plan’s submitters and a General Conference delegate from the New York Conference. He hopes delegates will work on perfecting the Simple Plan. “If the Simple Plan is voted down, then it might at least have informed the legislative body of how we could have minimized the systemic harms perpetrated against LGBTQIA+ members of the body of Christ,” he said. “These values of the Simple Plan would still hold true and be additive even if the legislative body works first on the other plans.” The Rev. M Barclay, a provisional deacon in the Northern Illinois Conference who identifies as non-binary trans, said the hope is

delegates will receive the plan “as an invitation to reflect with their own hearts and minds about the possibilities for a faithful compromise that does not sacrifice the dignity or well-being of an entire community of people and requires no theological or ecclesial gymnastics to justify.”

The Rev. Anna K. Blaedel, another supporter of the plan who identifies as queer, said they want “no more crumbs” from the denomination they serve. The campus minister at the University of Iowa Wesley Center has faced three formal complaints under church law since identifying as “a self-avowed practicing homosexual” at the 2016 Iowa Annual Conference. “We must follow Jesus in siding with people over doctrinal policy, and practicing a love ethic that risks it all for what is right,” Blaedel said. Blaedel and other Simple Plan supporters criticize the idea of pursuing church unity at all costs. Williams said he doesn’t want a false unity but one based on integrity. However, other plan supporters stress that they aren’t ready to pack it in on the denomination where they seek to live out their Christian faith. “While we LGBTQ persons are often asked why not just leave the denomination, it is important that your readership understand that we have absolutely no plan to leave The United Methodist Church,” said the Rev. Pamela R. Lightsey, a United Methodist elder and vice president at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago. “Our intention is to help it be what it professes to be in its Social Principles. We are committed to that vision and intend to show up at GC2019 undeterred by years of bigotry.”

[Note: Terms such as “non-binary trans”? “queer”? This is a sad commentary on the state of our church. – AOM]

– By Heather Hahn, as reported in the UNMS, Nashville; August 28, 2018.

+ ***Brief summary by UMAction Director John Lomperis.*** In other news, you may have heard of a new unofficial caucus called “Uniting Methodists,” whose main (or only?) purpose is apparently promoting the so-called “One Church Plan” proposal as supposedly embodying the “centrist” identity and “middle Methodism” that this group of bishops, denominational agency officials, Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) activists, and celebrity clergy like Adam Hamilton and Mike Slaughter claim to represent. They recently held a big, national conference at which one of their invited panel speakers openly admitted, “I think the Bible’s wrong.” Shortly afterwards, the Uniting Methodists’ allies in the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSa) held their own national convocation. These caucuses, to whom many leading bishops are urging our denomination to pander, promoted an openly Machiavellian, winning-by-any-means-necessary approach to church politics and took their “Only I get to choose how to live my life” ethos to the extreme of defending clergy who cohabit with partners outside of marriage. Dan further reports how some official speakers at this event denounced the United Methodist Church as “dead,” accused orthodox United Methodists of “terrorizing” people, and even questioned if UM outside of their liberal faction were actually Christians.... Those demanding that our denomination remove our prohibitions against same-sex weddings and clergy being homosexually active (or otherwise sexually active outside of marriage) frequently cite John Wesley’s rule to “First, do no harm” as a proof-text for their agenda. [Note: In actuality, un-Christian behavior is extremely harmful. – AOM]

– John Lomperis, UMAction Director, IRD, 1023 15th Street NW, Washington, DC; August 27, 2018.

+ ***African leaders support Traditional Plan.***

NAIROBI, Kenya – Speakers at a gathering of the Africa Initiative offered support for the Traditional Plan that will be under consideration at the special General Conference in 2019. They also called for African conferences of The United Methodist Church to move toward economic self-sufficiency. “You do not know how much strength you have until having strength is your only option,” said the Rev. Edwin Momoh, an Africa Initiative leadership team member from the Sierra Leone Conference. Founded in 2008, the Africa Initiative offers training for the annual and provisional United Methodist Church conferences of the continent in a range of areas, including cross-cultural evangelizing and missions, discipleship, leadership development and resource mobilization.

The Africa Initiative Prayer and Leadership Summit, held Aug. 6-11 in Nairobi, carried the theme “Standing on the Promises of God” (Isaiah 41:10) and brought together more than 80 leaders from the central conferences

in Africa, many of them General Conference delegates. Episcopal leaders present included Bishop Kasap Owan Tshibang, South Congo Area; Bishop John Wesley Yohanna, Nigeria Area; and Bishop Daniel A. Wandabula, East Africa Area. Kasap promised the group that he would take the lead in dispelling the notion, held by some members of the African College of Bishops, that the Africa Initiative tries to offer an alternative leadership structure to the bishops. “I am a founding member of this group and it is not in opposition to what we do as bishops,” he stressed, adding...leadership training that benefits United Methodist Churches across Africa. Wandabula praised the Africa Initiative for preparing delegates for General Conference and lobbying to have more African representation on church boards and commissions. “As we prepare for the 2019 special session of the General Conference, we should look at the Bible as the true words of God,” he said.

The Traditional Plan is one of three contained in the Commission on a Way Forward report that will be considered in St. Louis. It calls for retaining the church ban on ordination of “self-avowed practicing homosexuals,” as well as the prohibitions on clergy officiating same-sex weddings or churches hosting them. It would retain the church’s official position that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. In addition, the Traditional Plan would call for greater enforcement of those restrictions including requiring congregations and conferences to form their own Methodist denominations if they won’t pledge to abide by church rules on homosexuality.

Bishops do not have a vote at General Conference, but Yohanna addressed the choices facing delegates. “I am not speaking for the College of Bishops in Africa, but come the Special General Conference in 2019, we will support you our brothers and sisters who are advocating for the Traditional Plan,” he said. Yohanna was one of the 32 members of the Commission on a Way Forward. Those attending the Nairobi meeting received training on how General Conference works, with an emphasis on the special General Conference that’s set for Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis. The Rev. Keith Boyette, president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, was among the speakers. “If The United Methodist Church decides not to follow Jesus Christ by adopting any plan other than the Traditional Plan, we the members of the Wesleyan Covenant Association will follow Jesus Christ,” Boyette told the Africa Initiative gathering.

The central conferences in Africa continue to be heavily supported financially by the U.S. church, and that needs to change, Momoh said. Momoh offered no specific plan for gaining autonomy, but he noted that the church’s growth in Africa is an advantage and offers the chance to continue and even expand ministry by drawing on local membership and resources. He added that the Africa Initiative can help through training initiatives. “The Church belongs to God and He will ensure that it survives whether in Africa, the United States, or any part of the world,” Momoh concluded.

– By E Julu Swen, as reported in the UNMS, August 22, 2018. Swen is a communicator in Liberia.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS).

+ ***United Methodist Church Proposes New Position Statement Saying “We Support Abortion”***. Due to action of The United Methodist Church’s 2012 General Conference and to negotiation of church leaders, the General Board of Church and Society held listening sessions on the Social Principles throughout the church. From them, Church and Society learned that the Social Principles need to become “more theologically grounded, more globally relevant, and more succinct” (according to a 04/12/18 UMNS press release). Then the 2016 General Conference voted to continue Church and Society’s work in revising the Social Principles. On April 11, 2018, “The United Methodist Social Principles”/“Working Draft 1” was released. Church and Society aims to propose a complete revision of the Social Principles to the 2020 General Conference.

The Social Principle on Abortion: A Brief History.

Since the birth of The United Methodist Church in 1968, the Social Principles’ paragraph on abortion has been contested. The 1972 paragraph stated: “We support the removal of abortion from the criminal code, placing it instead under laws relating to other procedures of standard medical practice. A decision concerning abortion should be made only after thorough and thoughtful consideration by the parties involved, with medical and pastoral counsel.”

Following the United States Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wadecision, which knocked down state laws against abortion, United Methodism reflected Roe; its 1976 abortion paragraph included this sentence: “We

support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures.” Since 1976, many General Conferences have considered and debated petitions that would alter the church’s teaching on abortion. Some passed. Gradually, the paragraph became more skeptical, critical, and prohibitive of abortion. That is, the Social Principle became more protective of the unborn child and mother. In 2018, while The United Methodist Church’s Social Principle on abortion (Paragraph 161K in the 2016 Book of Discipline) “support[s] the legal option of abortion,” it also contains many phrases and statements that are protective of the unborn and mother. That Social Principle has now been rewritten – thoroughly.

The Revised Title. The revision of this Social Principle is boldly announced in its title change: from “Abortion” to “Reproductive Health.” Why? “Abortion,” as a title, might be considered too controversial, harsh, specific. In contrast, “Reproductive Health” might be understood as more medical-clinical, gentle, and general. Against this retitling, four objections can be raised.

First, the new title assumes that abortion is, as a matter of fact, just another medical procedure required for the “reproductive health” of women. However, many inside and outside the medical profession, especially those of various religious persuasions, would disagree.

Second, should not a Social Principle dedicated to abortion, by commonsense, be titled “Abortion?” One would think so: a thing should be called what it is.

Third, the Church through the ages has routinely used the word “abortion;” so United Methodism should regularly use the same word.

And fourth, abortion names a morally significant (and objectionable) incident: that is the taking of the life of an unborn child. To put such a serious incident under the heading of “reproductive health” disguises and diminishes what happens to the child in the womb.

For these reasons, the title “Abortion” should remain.

The Revised Text. According to the three needed improvements reported by the listening sessions, how does the revision measure up? Is the revision “more theologically grounded?” For starters, the revision mentions God once. But not Jesus Christ. And not the Holy Spirit. The Bible is cited twice, but not quoted. Church tradition is not referenced. The revision seems trapped in the modern worldview of individualism, public health, and social science. It seems anthropocentric (centered on humanity), and neglectful of God and God’s creation, commands, and redemption. Unlike the standing paragraph, the revision opens up very little to the presence and power of God. So the revision is not “more theologically grounded” than what was revised. Its theological grounding is reduced.

Is the revision “more globally relevant?” To be globally relevant, the revision would need to use terms that are universally understandable and applicable. The Church speaks the most universal language of all. Its words – for example, God and humanity, birth and death, good and evil, joy and suffering, love and loyalty, and so on – appeal to most people worldwide. While occasionally using such words, the revision reverts to a Westernized, individualized, medicalized mindset. This mindset results in the revision’s inability to affirm the humanity of the unborn. Such thinking is better suited for an international political agency than for a global Christian church. While the standing Social Principle on abortion is imperfect on the matter of global relevance, it lacks the revision’s predetermined Westernized agenda. So, on its global reach, the revision fails.

Is the revision “more succinct?” Yes. The revision is roughly one-third as long as the current Social Principle (approximately 220 words to 660 words).

Editing Out the Gospel of Life. When the standing Social Principle on abortion was revised, what phrases and sentences were deleted? “Sanctity of unborn human life.” “Sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.” “We support parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed....” “We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection or eugenics....” “We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice....” “We entrust God to provide guidance, wisdom, and discernment....” “We mourn and are committed to promoting the

diminishment of high abortion rates.” “They [the Church and its congregations] should also support those crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers....” “We particularly encourage the Church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption... .” These phrases and sentences emerged from historic, ecumenical Christianity’s witness for life and opposition to abortion – and were approved by General Conferences.

If the theologically superficial, globally distant, brief revision is adopted, as is, by the 2020 General Conference, that would basically nullify, in one vote, all General Conference decisions that have been protective of the unborn child and mother. That nullification, in one vote, would: silence the voices of many United Methodists around the world; increase distrust in The United Methodist Church today; set The United Methodist Church more strongly against the consensual teaching of historic, ecumenical Christianity on life and abortion; and lead possibly to the destruction of more unborn children and bring harm to their mothers.

That nullification, in one vote, would not be good. That nullification is unacceptable.

– Report by the Reverend Paul Stallworth, Washington, DC; August 28, 2018. Posted on Facebook by LifeNews. Note: Rev. Stallworth is pastor of Whiteville (NC) United Methodist Church, the president of the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, and editor of its quarterly newsletter Lifewatch. This appeared in Lifewatch; June.

+ ***West Virginians Pushing Back.*** Some faithful United Methodists have started to push back against the effort to eliminate the term “abortion” from the Social Principles. As UMAAction member Dan Moran reports, within even the generally liberal-leaning Northeastern Jurisdiction, the West Virginia Annual Conference has overwhelmingly passed a resolution opposing the GBCS’s efforts to remove concern for unborn human life from our Social Principles.

– John Lomperis, UMAAction Director, IRDemocracy, 1023 15th Street NW, Washington, DC; August 27, 2018.

+ ***My analysis of the GBCS’s proposals.*** I have reviewed the proposals that the GBCS is offering of their updating of the Social Principles of the UMC. The text contains a lot of grandiose statements and refers, among many other things, to “climate change” – an outgrowth of the concept of “global warming” which is a discredited concept; the number of scientists who debunk this concept outnumber its supporters by a ratio of 17:1 – to include the founder of “The Weather Channel” – himself a respected climatologist. On one occasion I saw him being interviewed on TV and he was passionate about debunking this pseudo-science. We should engage in practical conservation to have industry and businesses to have environmentally sound practices – but to buy into these discredited theories is problematic. Probably the GBCS needs to remove controversial statements that reflect unproven theories or “junk” science.

In addition the statement seems to flirt with pantheism – the idea that God is in everything to include nature. Another concern is that this statement appears to equate human beings with other aspects of creation such as the animals – and not unique and reflecting the image of God.

In addition the proposed statements on health care, economic justice, et. al. call on the government to address these areas rather than looking at private industry, the free enterprise/capitalistic system, and churches to work on solutions. Another area of concern is that of looking on the international community – the United Nations – to resolve problems and to deal with issues in various areas in terms of a “global community”. This harks back to the bishops’ view of world versus national sovereignty as reflected in their study In Defense of Creation in the 1985-1986 time frame, in which they called for a “world without borders” concept.

In looking at this, the varied statements I read casts doubt on the ability of the GBCS to formulate statements that reflect balance and truth – and a solidly Christian worldview. It reflects a grandiose attempt to address a wide variety of issues in order to come up with solutions. It makes me think that maybe the GBCS needs to scrap the whole idea.

– Allen O. Morris, my analysis of the contents.

Islam.

+ Muslims hate pork, dogs, beer, bikinis, Jesus and freedom of speech. My question is, “What in the world do they come to America for?” – posted on Facebook by The Reverend Ben McKee

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If My people who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and will heal their land. – 2

Chronicles 7: 14

Global Outlook

Stand up for what you believe in, even if you’re standing alone. – Sophia Scholl

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Congo. Raising awareness about Congo voting.

KINDU, Congo (UMNS) – With the Democratic Republic of Congo’s long-awaited presidential elections to replace President Joseph Kabila set for Dec. 23, voter education is focusing on semi-electronic voting – a first for the country. The United Methodist Church is helping pastors and laypeople learn how to use the new technology through demonstrations and voting simulation. – Chadrack Tambwe Londe, as reported in UMNS Weekly Digest; Jul 13, 2018.

Haiti.

+ **Haiti unrest strands mission teams.**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Some U.S. mission groups, including at least three United Methodist teams, were stranded in Haiti after protesters took to the streets following a government-ordered fuel price increase. Teams from Providence United Methodist Church in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, reported they were told to “shelter in place.” Most teams expect to be able to leave Haiti in the next few days. Other teams include one from Chapin United Methodist Church in Chapin, South Carolina, and another from FUMC in Rockingham, North Carolina.

– UMNS Weekly Digest, 2018.

Venezuela. [Note: This country has one of the largest proven reserves of oil in the world. This should make it a very prosperous country – and it was until a dictator took it over and turned it into a socialist country. This is to all of us in view of the fact that many of the university “elites” and youth are now embracing the idea of socialism. – AOM]

CARACAS, Venezuela – This city is unraveling fast: Water doesn’t reach most homes, mass transit is grinding to a halt and businesses are closing in the face of hyperinflation expected to top 13,000% this year. Shotgun-toting troops wearing camouflage run checkpoints. Cash is so scarce people can’t pay for the smallest necessities like bus fare. [Note: I saw a picture of a dollar bill in front of a stack of Venezuelan currency worth about the same value. – AOM]

People line up to buy baguettes in a bakery located in the Palos Grandes neighborhood of Caracas. “There are an enormous number of properties [for sale] because everyone wants to leave,” said Aura Corzo, who was a real-estate agent here until fleeing to Colombia recently. “They’re desperate to go.”

The Lights Have Gone Out in Caracas. A once vibrant city has fallen into decay and depression amid hyperinflation, failing services and crime. “Everyone wants to leave.”

And so it goes...

– By Ryan Dube; May 13,

2018.

Zimbabwe.

+ **Despite challenges, church in Zimbabwe flourishes.**

HARARE, Zimbabwe (UMNS) — Despite social, economic and political challenges, The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe continues to strive for financial sustainability, raising funds within membership.

Annual Conference Reports

Northwest Texas Annual Conference. The 2018 Northwest Texas Conference met June 7-9 at Polk Street United Methodist Church in Amarillo, Texas. Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe presided. Worship attendance: 17,143, down 671. Professions or reaffirmations of faith: 676, up 79. Baptisms: 646, up 49. Membership statistics were not available.

– Submitted by Angie Brokaw, digital media specialist

Red Bird Missionary Conference. The 50th session of the Red Bird Missionary Annual Conference was convened by Bishop Leonard Fairley on May 12 at the Hope United Methodist Church and Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Kentucky. Membership statistics were not available. – The Rev. Robert Amundsen, conference secretary

Rio Texas Annual Conference. The 2018 Rio Texas Conference was held June 6-9, in Corpus Christi, with Bishop Robert Schanse presiding. Membership stands at 114,663, down 988. Worship attendance stands at 43,045, down 828.

– Submitted by the Rev. Will Rice, communications director

West Virginia Annual Conference. Officiating bishop: Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball. Membership stands at 1.07% down from the previous year. of communications – Submitted by the Rev. Deborah Coble, director

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Never give in! Never give in!

Never, never, never, never.

In nothing great or small,
large or petty, never give in...

...except to convictions or honor or good sense!

– Winston Churchill