

Monthly Update

July 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Things are really getting interesting! Even though we have received many of the reports from the annual conferences that have been meeting across the country and around the world, we are including only one report in this Monthly Update – and shall include more in the August edition. To help you keep things in perspective when you do get your next edition of the Update, we are including yet again a copy of our fact sheet “Homosexual Practice”; by way of information, we don’t use “homosexuality” in our title since we do not want to infer that this type of practice defines the character of people. Please keep in mind the truth of the practice that we are discussing.

Another article lays out details for any churches who might consider separating from the United Methodist Church – depending on how the sexuality issue is decided in our denomination. Some on both sides are talking about exiting the church. We in Concerned Methodists are called to “contend for the faith” in the United Methodist Church and consider that to be our mission field. We believe that there are millions of people in our church who do not have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In this issue we devote a lion’s share of coverage to two speeches that were given commemorating the D-Day Invasion of France on June 6, 1944. Both presidents Ronald Reagan & more recently Donald Trump gave presentations whose words highlight the bravery of the men who fought that battle; more than anything, this describes the traits of many people in our country – a positive thought with issues that are going on in our world today.

As we celebrate our independence on July 4th we need to recognize and cherish the things about our country that make it unique in the world. We take freedom for granted – but really shouldn’t because freedom is a commodity that is in short supply among all of the countries in the world today. With all of its faults it is still the best place to live. There has never been a country in history that has spent so many lives of the cream of its youth to fight for the freedom of people in other lands – while not annexing one square foot of territory for ourselves; imperialistic we are not. Indeed, it was Richard Wurmbrand who helped me understand just how bright is the light of freedom that shines from this country throughout the world. He told about when he was in prison and saw prisoners being tortured by the Communists. The thing that gave them the ability to withstand what they were enduring was the thought, not of family, friends, or even of safety, but of the freedom that existed in America; it served as a beacon of hope. Think of Hong Kong today: upwards of 2,000,000 people marching for freedom against the tyranny of Communist China – with the song “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord” in defiance.

We in Concerned Methodists wish you a happy, safe, and joyous Fourth of July. As we celebrate our independence, cherish all that our nation is. And don’t forget to thank any veterans you know for their service to our country.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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July 2019 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate. ~ Nikka, age 6 [A lot of wisdom here]

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The Good Stuff.

+ In Reference to D-Day that was celebrated June 6th – Ronald Reagan had offered this message when he was president:

“40 years ago at this moment, the air was dense with smoke and the cries of men, and the air was filled with the crack of rifle fire and the roar of cannon.

At dawn, on the morning of the 6th of June, 1944, 225 Rangers jumped off the British landing craft and ran to the bottom of these cliffs.

Their mission was one of the most difficult and daring of the invasion: to climb these sheer and desolate cliffs and take out the enemy guns.

The Allies had been told that some of the mightiest of these guns were here and they would be trained on the beaches to stop the Allied advance.

... The Rangers looked up and saw the enemy soldiers -- the edge of the cliffs shooting down at them with machineguns and throwing grenades.

And the American Rangers began to climb.

They shot rope ladders over the face of these cliffs and began to pull themselves up. When one Ranger fell, another would take his place.

When one rope was cut, a Ranger would grab another and begin his climb again. They climbed, shot back, and held their footing.

... Soon, one by one, the Rangers pulled themselves over the top, and in seizing the firm land at the top of these cliffs, they began to seize back the continent of Europe. Two hundred and twenty-five came here.

After 2 days of fighting, only 90 could still bear arms.”

Reagan continued: “The men of Normandy had faith that what they were doing was right, faith that they fought for all humanity, faith that a just God would grant them mercy on this beachhead or on the next.

It was the deep knowledge -- and pray God we have not lost it -- that there is a profound, moral difference between the use of force for liberation and the use of force for conquest.”

President Reagan

+ *Remarks by President Trump on the 75th Commemoration of D-Day.*

The White House • June 6, 2019. In Normandy, President Trump honored veterans 75 years after D-Day.

On June 6, 1944, a coalition of 160,000 American soldiers and other Allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, France—a moment that foretold the end of Nazi occupation in Europe and forever changed the course of history. President Donald J. Trump spoke just yards from Omaha Beach at Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial this morning, paying tribute to the sacrifice these heroes made. “We are gathered here on Freedom’s Altar. On these shores, on these bluffs, on this day 75 years ago, 10,000 men shed their blood, and thousands sacrificed their lives, for their brothers, for their countries, and for the survival of liberty,” he said. “They came here and saved freedom.”

This historic site is now the resting place for 9,388 American service members who gave their lives for our freedom. More than 170 World War II veterans attended today’s ceremony, including more than 60 who landed as part of the D-Day operation. French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Theresa May also spoke.

Pausing during his address, President Trump walked over and hugged one of the American veterans who joined him onstage. Private First Class Russell Pickett had been wounded in the first wave of soldiers that landed on Omaha Beach during D-Day. As he received treatment at a hospital in England, Private Pickett made it clear that his service wasn’t finished. “I’m going to return,” Pickett said. Six days after D-Day, he rejoined his company. He would be

gravely wounded twice more, including a third injury that caused him to lay unconscious for 12 days. He looked unlikely to survive. And, today, believe it or not, he has returned once more to these shores to be with his comrades,” President Trump said before embracing the 94-year-old veteran. “Private Pickett, you honor us all with your presence.”

Before concluding, President Trump gave a few lasting words of appreciation to the veterans of this Greatest Generation: “The men behind me will tell you that they are just the lucky ones. As one of them recently put it, “All the heroes are buried here.” But we know what these men did. We knew how brave they were. They came here and saved freedom, and then, they went home and showed us all what freedom is all about.

The American sons and daughters who saw us to victory were no less extraordinary in peace. They built families. They built industries. They built a national culture that inspired the entire world. In the decades that followed, America defeated communism, secured civil rights, revolutionized science, launched a man to the Moon, and then kept on pushing to new frontiers. And, today, America is stronger than ever before.

Seven decades ago, the warriors of D-Day fought a sinister enemy who spoke of a thousand-year empire. In defeating that evil, they left a legacy that will last not only for a thousand years, but for all time—for as long as the soul knows of duty and honor; for as long as freedom keeps its hold on the human heart.

To the men who sit behind me, and to the boys who rest in the field before me, your example will never, ever grow old. Your legend will never tire. Your spirit—brave, unyielding, and true—will never die.

. . . And our children, and their children, will forever and always be free.”

His complete speech: Normandy American Cemetery, Colleville-sur-Mer, France

THE PRESIDENT: President Macron, Mrs. Macron, and the people of France; to the First Lady of the United States and members of the United States Congress; to distinguished guests, veterans, and my fellow Americans:

We are gathered here on Freedom’s Altar. On these shores, on these bluffs, on this day 75 years ago, 10,000 men shed their blood, and thousands sacrificed their lives, for their brothers, for their countries, and for the survival of liberty.

Today, we remember those who fell, and we honor all who fought right here in Normandy. They won back this ground for civilization.

To more than 170 veterans of the Second World War who join us today: You are among the very greatest Americans who will ever live. You’re the pride of our nation. You are the glory of our republic. And we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. (Applause.)

Here with you are over 60 veterans who landed on D-Day. Our debt to you is everlasting. Today, we express our undying gratitude. When you were young, these men enlisted their lives in a Great Crusade – one of the greatest of all times. Their mission is the story of an epic battle and the ferocious, eternal struggle between good and evil.

On the 6th of June, 1944, they joined a liberation force of awesome power and breathtaking scale. After months of planning, the Allies had chosen this ancient coastline to mount their campaign to vanquish the wicked tyranny of the Nazi empire from the face of the Earth. The battle began in the skies above us. In those first tense midnight hours, 1,000 aircraft roared overhead with 17,000 Allied airborne troops preparing to leap into the darkness beyond these trees.

Then came dawn. The enemy who had occupied these heights saw the largest naval armada in the history of the world. Just a few miles offshore were 7,000 vessels bearing 130,000 warriors. They were the citizens of free and independent nations, united by their duty to their compatriots and to millions yet unborn.

There were the British, whose nobility and fortitude saw them through the worst of Dunkirk and the London Blitz. The full violence of Nazi fury was no match for the full grandeur of British pride. Thank you. (Applause.)

There were the Canadians, whose robust sense of honor and loyalty compelled them to take up arms alongside Britain from the very, very beginning.

There were the fighting Poles, the tough Norwegians, and the intrepid Aussies. There were the gallant French commandos, soon to be met by thousands of their brave countrymen ready to write a new chapter in the long history of French valor. (Applause.)

And, finally, there were the Americans. They came from the farms of a vast heartland, the streets of glowing cities, and the forges of mighty industrial towns. Before the war, many had never ventured beyond their own community. Now they had come to offer their lives half a world from home.

This beach, codenamed Omaha, was defended by the Nazis with monstrous firepower, thousands and thousands of mines and spikes driven into the sand, so deeply. It was here that tens of thousands of the Americans came.

The GIs who boarded the landing craft that morning knew that they carried on their shoulders not just the pack of a soldier, but the fate of the world. Colonel George Taylor, whose 16th Infantry Regiment would join in the first wave, was asked: What would happen if the Germans stopped right then and there, cold on the beach – just stopped them? What would happen? This great American replied: “Why, the 18th Infantry is coming in right behind us. The 26th Infantry will come on too. Then there is the 2nd Infantry Division already afloat. And the 9th Division. And the 2nd Armored. And the 3rd Armored. And all the rest. Maybe the 16th won’t make it, but someone will.”

One of those men in Taylor’s 16th Regiment was Army medic Ray Lambert. Ray was only 23, but he had already earned three Purple Hearts and two Silver Stars fighting in North Africa and Sicily, where he and his brother Bill, no longer with us, served side by side. In the early morning hours, the two brothers stood together on the deck of the USS Henrico, before boarding two separate Higgins landing craft. “If I don’t make it,” Bill said, “please, please take care of my family.” Ray asked his brother to do the same. Of the 31 men on Ray’s landing craft, only Ray and 6 others made it to the beach. There were only a few of them left. They came to the sector right here below us. “Easy Red” it was called. Again and again, Ray ran back into the water. He dragged out one man after another. He was shot through the arm. His leg was ripped open by shrapnel. His back was broken. He nearly drowned. He had been on the beach for hours, bleeding and saving lives, when he finally lost consciousness. He woke up the next day on a cot beside another badly wounded soldier. He looked over and saw his brother Bill. They made it. They made it. They made it. At 98 years old, Ray is here with us today, with his fourth Purple Heart and his third Silver Star from Omaha. (Applause.) Ray, the free world salutes you. (Applause.) Thank you, Ray. (Applause.)

Nearly two hours in, unrelenting fire from these bluffs kept the Americans pinned down on the sand now red with our heroes’ blood. Then, just a few hundred yards from where I’m standing, a breakthrough came. The battle turned, and with it, history. Down on the beach, Captain Joe Dawson, the son of a Texas preacher, led Company G through a minefield to a natural fold in the hillside, still here. Just beyond this path to my right, Captain Dawson snuck beneath an enemy machine gun perch and tossed his grenades. Soon, American troops were charging up “Dawson’s Draw.” What a job he did. What bravery he showed. Lieutenant Spalding and the men from Company E moved on to crush the enemy strongpoint on the far side of this cemetery, and stop the slaughter on the beach below. Countless more Americans poured out across this ground all over the countryside. They joined fellow American warriors from Utah beach, and Allies from Juno, Sword, and Gold, along with the airborne and the French patriots.

Private First Class Russell Pickett, of the 29th Division’s famed 116th Infantry Regiment, had been wounded in the first wave that landed on Omaha Beach. At a hospital in England, Private Pickett vowed to return to battle. “I’m going to return,” he said. “I’m going to return.” Six days after D-Day, he rejoined his company. Two thirds had been killed already; many had been wounded, within 15 minutes of the invasion. They’d lost 19 just from small town of Bedford, Virginia, alone. Before long, a grenade left Private Pickett again gravely wounded. So badly wounded. Again, he chose to return. He didn’t care; he had to be here. He was then wounded a third time, and laid unconscious for 12 days. They thought he was gone. They thought he had no chance. Russell Pickett is the last known survivor of the legendary Company A. And, today, believe it or not, he has returned once more to these shores to be with his comrades. Private Pickett, you honor us all with your presence. (Applause.) Tough guy. (Laughter.)

By the fourth week of August, Paris was liberated. (Applause.) Some who landed here pushed all the way to the center of Germany. Some threw open the gates of Nazi concentration camps to liberate Jews who had suffered the bottomless horrors of the Holocaust. And some warriors fell on other fields of battle, returning to rest on this soil for eternity.

Before this place was consecrated to history, the land was owned by a French farmer, a member of the French resistance. These were great people. These were strong and tough people. His terrified wife waited out D-Day in a nearby house, holding tight to their little baby girl. The next day, a soldier appeared. “I’m an American,” he said. “I’m here to help.” The French woman was overcome with emotion and cried. Days later, she laid flowers on fresh

American graves. Today, her granddaughter, Stefanie, serves as a guide at this cemetery. This week, Stefanie led 92-year-old Marian Wynn of California to see the grave of her brother Don for the very first time. Marian and Stefanie are both with us today. And we thank you for keeping alive the memories of our precious heroes. Thank you. (Applause.) 9,388 young Americans rest beneath the white crosses and Stars of David arrayed on these beautiful grounds. Each one has been adopted by a French family that thinks of him as their own. They come from all over France to look after our boys. They kneel. They cry. They pray. They place flowers. And they never forget. Today, America embraces the French people and thanks you for honoring our beloved dead. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you. Thank you.

To all of our friends and partners: Our cherished alliance was forged in the heat of battle, tested in the trials of war, and proven in the blessings of peace. Our bond is unbreakable. From across the Earth, Americans are drawn to this place as though it were a part of our very soul. We come not only because of what they did here. We come because of who they were. They were young men with their entire lives before them. They were husbands who said goodbye to their young brides and took their duty as their fate. They were fathers who would never meet their infant sons and daughters because they had a job to do. And with God as their witness, they were going to get it done. They came wave after wave, without question, without hesitation, and without complaint.

More powerful than the strength of American arms was the strength of American hearts. These men ran through the fires of hell moved by a force no weapon could destroy: the fierce patriotism of a free, proud, and sovereign people. They battled not for control and domination, but for liberty, democracy, and self-rule. They pressed on for love in home and country – the Main Streets, the schoolyards, the churches and neighbors, the families and communities that gave us men such as these. They were sustained by the confidence that America can do anything because we are a noble nation, with a virtuous people, praying to a righteous God. The exceptional might came from a truly exceptional spirit. The abundance of courage came from an abundance of faith. The great deeds of an Army came from the great depths of their love. As they confronted their fate, the Americans and the Allies placed themselves into the palm of God's hand.

The men behind me will tell you that they are just the lucky ones. As one of them recently put it, "All the heroes are buried here." But we know what these men did. We knew how brave they were. They came here and saved freedom, and then, they went home and showed us all what freedom is all about. The American sons and daughters who saw us to victory were no less extraordinary in peace. They built families. They built industries. They built a national culture that inspired the entire world. In the decades that followed, America defeated communism, secured civil rights, revolutionized science, launched a man to the moon, and then kept on pushing to new frontiers. And, today, America is stronger than ever before. (Applause.) Seven decades ago, the warriors of D-Day fought a sinister enemy who spoke of a thousand-year empire. In defeating that evil, they left a legacy that will last not only for a thousand years, but for all time – for as long as the soul knows of duty and honor; for as long as freedom keeps its hold on the human heart.

To the men who sit behind me, and to the boys who rest in the field before me, your example will never, ever grow old. (Applause.) Your legend will never tire. Your spirit – brave, unyielding, and true – will never die.

The blood that they spilled, the tears that they shed, the lives that they gave, the sacrifice that they made, did not just win a battle. It did not just win a war. Those who fought here won a future for our nation. They won the survival of our civilization. And they showed us the way to love, cherish, and defend our way of life for many centuries to come.

Today, as we stand together upon this sacred Earth, we pledge that our nations will forever be strong and united. We will forever be together. Our people will forever be bold. Our hearts will forever be loyal. And our children, and their children, will forever and always be free. May God bless our great veterans. May God bless our Allies. May God bless the heroes of D-Day. And may God bless America. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much.

– President Donald Trump. Issued on: June 6, 2019, 12:34 P.M. CEST (Central European Standard Time)

Of Interest.

+ *Exiting congregations face hefty price tag.*

COLUMBUS, Georgia – U.S. conferences are calculating how much a church must pay if it leaves the denomination under legislation approved by General Conference 2019. Some, such as the South Georgia Conference, have already approved policies related to disaffiliation. For congregations that want to leave The United Methodist Church, a breakup also could get very expensive.

Delegates to the special General Conference in February approved two measures that enable churches to exit based on disagreements related to the status of LGBTQ people in the church. The disaffiliation plan in effect suspends the denomination's centuries-old U.S. trust clause under limited conditions. That means for the first time in its history, the denomination has set procedures for U.S. congregations to withdraw from the denomination and take their buildings with them. Before a departure, those congregations could be on the hook for anywhere from tens of thousands to more than a million dollars. Annual conferences – church regional bodies – have the final word on what their churches owe. As U.S. annual conferences meet this year, some already are reckoning with how to calculate those costs.

“This is a new day with the new legislation,” said Wilson Hayman, outgoing president of the United Methodist Church Conference Chancellors Association – comprising conference attorneys. Hayman is the chancellor for the North Carolina Conference. Previously, he said, his conference would close a church and sell its property if a congregation lost too many members to be viable. The new rules change the dynamic, but conferences still need to account for the financial impact of a church's departure. For an exiting church, the biggest cost will likely come from what their conference determines is a fair share of unfunded clergy pension liability – that is, what conferences will owe retirees.

A church's pension contribution not only supports the church's current pastor but those who previously served the congregation, said Andrew Hendren, general counsel for Wespath Benefits and Investments. Wespath manages investments for pensions and other retirement-plan assets on behalf of conferences. Conferences are pension plan sponsors and legally responsible for paying benefits. “Every local church in an annual conference has in some way benefited from the promises that these pension programs represent,” he said.

The special General Conference made dealing with the future of U.S. clergy pensions their top priority even before passing the Traditional Plan that strengthens bans against same-sex weddings and “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy. They later passed legislation that permits disaffiliation by Dec. 31, 2023, “for reasons of conscience” related to homosexuality. The disaffiliation legislation is now the new Paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline, the denomination's policy book. In upholding the legislation, the Judicial Council – the denomination's top court – spelled out that any disaffiliation must include:

- Approval for disaffiliation by at least a two-thirds majority of a church's professing members present at the vote.
- Establishment of terms and conditions between the exiting local church and the conference board of trustees.
- Ratification of a church's disaffiliation by a simple majority at annual conference.

Exiting churches also must satisfy any loans from the conference and pay for transferring the building title or other legal work. They additionally must pay two years of apportionments – the amount conferences apportion to their churches to support regional, national and international ministries.

Still, pensions are where the dollars can add up because conferences have substantial obligations for increasingly long-lived clergy in an uncertain stock market. The South Georgia Conference acknowledged this challenge at its June 2-5 meeting when its members approved its own pension and disaffiliation policies meant to augment what General Conference passed. The Rev. Derek McAleer, the conference's treasurer and benefits officer, told those gathered that the conference has to make sure it can pay the promises it has already made. “The amount of money is so huge that everybody has to stop and take a deep breath,” he said. “We're talking about 586 churches and \$30 million bucks. There is no way to divide \$30 million into 586 and get a small number.” The South Georgia policy includes a formula based on what churches pay in salary and housing for clergy members – using seven years between 1990 and 2019 to represent the pension liability over a span of pastors.

The United Methodist Church Conference Chancellors Association also addressed the new legislation in an April 27 resolution. The resolution urges conferences to follow the Golden Rule “in all matters related to disaffiliation and allocation of unfunded pension liabilities” regardless of a departing church’s stance on human sexuality. The resolution also calls on Wespeth to provide current information on unfunded liability no later than Oct. 1. That’s something Wespeth essentially already does, Hendren said. Each fall, the pension agency provides each U.S. conference with a report on its pension valuation, the basis for long-term contributions, and the market valuation that would be required if church plans were subject to the federal pension law, Employee Retirement Income Security Act. The report also

includes an appendix that lists the liabilities of other U.S. conferences. What’s different under the new legislation is the requirement that Wespeth determine total funding obligations of each conference “using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider.” Commercial annuities contract to make regular payments. Hendren said that a commercial annuity provider would charge about 110% of the market value of liabilities to account for the increased assumption of risk, such as increasing lifespans. Basically, it’s the cost of paying out all benefits immediately plus a premium to cover risks such as market downturns and longer years in retirement. Wespeth has a process for a conference chancellor, treasurer or benefits officer to request, at any time, this valuation for the whole conference. However, Hendren said, the valuation is only good for three months. “After that, we suggest a conference request a new one from us because the assets in the plan may have changed with market fluctuations, and sometimes the plan liabilities may have changed based on interest-rate movements,” he said. In determining what churches owe, Dale Jones – Wespeth’s managing director for church relations – urges conferences to consider a congregation’s financial capacity. Generally speaking, the larger a church and more pastors on staff, the larger its pension obligations are likely to be.

It will take time to deal with the full ramifications of the new legislation, said Hayman. “The chancellors I know are all working with their bishops, boards of trustees, treasurers and other conference officers to try to determine the best path forward, to interpret the legislation and to move on with this with all deliberate speed,” he said. But he added, “Nothing happens quickly in The United Methodist Church.”

– By Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), June 13, 2019.

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues. Missouri’s last abortion facility just sent its 74th patient in 10 years to the hospital earlier this month as a result from a botched abortion. That’s about a medical emergency every seven weeks. [Note: A court has issued a stay; this action is being litigated. –AOM]

– Alliance Defending Freedom; Jun 3, 2019.

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In prosperity our friends know us; in adversity we know our friends. ~ Churton Collins

Global Outlook

If we forget what we did, we will not know who we are. ~ President Ronald Reagan

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West Africa. Dealing with AIDS in West Africa.

+ ABIDJAN, Côte d’Ivoire (UMNS) – A May 19-21 summit in Côte d’Ivoire will encourage United Methodists in the West Africa Central Conference to create their own plans of action for the continuing health crisis related to HIV and AIDS. The event is sponsored by the United Methodist Global AIDS Committee. Linda Bloom has a preview. As the hub of the denomination’s healthcare system in Côte d’Ivoire, Dabou Methodist Hospital offers general medical, surgical and dental care and is known for its maternity ward. Patients also come for treatment of HIV/AIDs, as participants in the United Methodist Global AIDS Committee West Africa Summit will discover when they visit the hospital the day before the May 19-21 workshop. The summit, in the capital city of Abidjan, is co-chaired by the Rev. Donald Messer, executive director of the Center for Health and Hope in Centennial, Colorado, and the Rev. Isaac Broune, a pastor and communicator in Côte d’Ivoire. The host country has been in charge of the planning and details, Messer said. “Isaac has done a great job and we feel so fortunate for his key leadership.”

Roughly 30 participants will come from The United Methodist Church's West Africa Central Conference's Health and HIV committees, the U.S. and local and international partners. The West Africa Central Conference includes four episcopal areas, six annual conferences and ministry in six countries – Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The goal of the summit is to give participants the tools to establish a plan of action for HIV/AIDS ministry within their own cultural and church contexts. That includes sharing practical information about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment; looking at practical ways to involve religious leaders in the fight against HIV/AIDS; exchanging experience and best practices related to HIV/AIDS ministry; discussing stigma against those living with HIV/AIDS and setting up networking opportunities. While there has been considerable international focus on periodic Ebola outbreaks, the same cannot be said for "the enduring, continued crisis of HIV/AIDS in Africa," Messer pointed out. "When you are in these countries, you know it's far from over," he said. "The issue is how to get people information about prevention and how to get them tested and treated." Messer said about 40 percent of Africans not being reached "in a meaningful way" about HIV/AIDS prevention and testing and a large percentage of that number may already be HIV positive.

A 2017 report jointly published by UNICEF and UNAIDS, showed that West and Central Africa lagged behind in HIV prevention and treatment for children and adolescents. In 2016, an estimated 60,000 children were newly infected with HIV in West and Central Africa, with the highest number among those aged 15 to 19 years. In addition, the use of life-saving antiretroviral therapy among children living with HIV is the lowest in the world, the report said, because of the limited capacity to perform the tests needed for early infant diagnosis of HIV. The West Africa summit was proposed by Patrick Abro, a United Methodist missionary in Congo who served on the Global AIDS Committee from 2008 to 2016. Previous educational forums sponsored by the committee have taken place in East Africa (Nairobi), the Philippines (Manila) and the United States (Indianapolis).

When General Conference 2016, the denomination's top legislative body, approved continuation of Global AIDS Committee, the West Africa summit was among the budget items. The actual funding came from contingency funds of the United Methodist Connectional Table, Messer said.

– By Linda Bloom, UMNS; May 16, 2019.

Annual Conference Reports

Sierra Leone Annual Conference. At the 139th session of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference, United Methodists celebrated the 10th episcopal anniversary of Bishop John K. Yambasu, resident bishop of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. The conference commenced Jan. 23 with a march led by United Methodist school bands from UMC House in central Freetown to King Memorial United Methodist Church where the session was hosted. Many partners and friends of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference from Liberia, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire, the United States, Germany and Norway attended the celebrations. Bishop Yambasu was the officiating bishop of the conference, while Bishop Julius C. Trimble of the Indiana Conference assisted. Thomas Kemper, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, spoke on the theme "Celebrating the Vision, Embracing the Future" during his keynote speech. In his remarks, he stated that Yambasu, during his 10 years of leadership, has succeeded in unifying, reconciling and reviving The United Methodist Church. He noted that the bishop has built ecumenical collaborations, shared his vision with the connection and stood up for the human rights of others. From Colossians 3:12-17, Kemper said that United Methodists are one family, and he encouraged delegates at the conference to be unified in mission and clothe themselves with the act of love, humanity and forgiveness for others. During his episcopal message, Bishop Yambasu highlighted his achievements over the past 10 years and looked at the challenges the future poses to the denomination as well as the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. At his installation in 2009, Yambasu shared a 10-year vision. One pillar was the establishment of United Methodist University in Sierra Leone. That dream was realized in 2018, when the first faculty of United Methodist University – the Bishop Wenner School of Theology – was launched. Other notable achievements that were highlighted include:

Improved infrastructure, including building or rehabilitating health facilities, schools and churches across the country.

A robust and sustainable pension plan for clergy.

Expansion of the denomination into new districts across the country.

Recovery of land and buildings that were at risk of being taken over by defrauders.

Infrastructure improvements at Kissy General Hospital and Lowell and Ruth Gess Eye Hospital, and transformation of Rotifunk Hospital into a functional facility with an excellent surgical suite. Mercy Hospital in Bo also now has a surgical wing.

Providing scholarships for needy children and salaries for seven recently established United Methodist schools that are not government assisted.

In September 2019, The United Methodist Church in Sierra Leone will establish one of the most comprehensive entrepreneurial training centers in Taiama: The Taiama Enterprise Academy. The facility is under construction.

With such achievements, the bishop said, the Sierra Leone Annual Conference deserves to celebrate and thank God for leadership, empowerment, partnership, love, protection, mercy and grace. Bishop Yambasu also launched a new vision code: Vision 2030. Key among the priorities in Vision 2030 are:

Promoting abundant health for all, especially children and women, and expanding health-promotive measures.

Promoting primary, secondary and tertiary education with a specific focus on Christian and moral values, academic performance, rehabilitation and strengthening of schools, rather than constructing new ones, and expanding the curriculum at the Bishop Wenner School of Theology.

Community development, economic sustainability and agricultural investment with the aim to improve the livelihood and economic status of communities through the rehabilitation of schools, building of toilet facilities, providing clean water, and creating agriculture and microfinance opportunities.

Evangelism, discipleship and church growth.

Sustaining the payment of pastors' salaries and pensions by mobilizing resources locally and internationally.

Four people were ordained as elders in full connection, while five people were commissioned ministers and five women were ordained into diaconal ministry as deaconesses. 4 clergy and 18 head teachers retired. Membership is 285,000.

– Keziah Kargbo, for the Sierra Leone Conference; Jan 28, 2019. As reported in UMNS Daily Digest, June 20, 2019

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A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

A brain is only as strong as its weakest think.