

# Monthly Update

May 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The May Update is devoted to yet more coverage of General Conference of the United Methodist Church (GC2019) in St. Louis. There is a flurry of pronouncements and resolutions about the results of that gathering. The Judicial Council has just released its decisions before it from GC2019; a summary is on the back of this page. A letter I had sent to Bishop Watson is the next page of this Update; in it are concerns about rebellion in our connection here in America. It is time for the bishops to lead.

There are narratives of “hurt” experienced by some in the “LGBTQIA” community that depict those supporting the Traditional Plan as filled with “hate” – but no talk about “sin”; the loving thing is to tell people about destructive practices in their lives. We also know that people are not identified by their sexual practices. We are simply reporting on comments of this type – but stand against these errors and firmly on the revealed Word of God that sexual practice is affirmed only between husband and wife.

I was in a local store when a guy recognized me from my work with Concerned Methodists. He walked up and started talking about what happened at GC2019; he was focused on what is going on in our UMC. He then said, “Maybe what churches need to do is to accept only 25% of their apportionments”; he connected his concern with what is going on in the church to money given by the laity. A related action was conveyed by a conference on the West Coast – but against the Traditional Plan. UMNS reports:

The California-Pacific Conference sent a letter to all their churches with advice on connectional giving options that includes withholding or redirecting apportionment contributions as a demonstration of their rejection of 2019 General Conference votes. Bishop Grant Hagiya and Howard Hudson, president of the California-Pacific Council on Finance and Administration, sent the message on April 10...Hagiya said the letter was prompted by over a dozen local churches that have contacted the conference stating they would be withholding apportionments because of the outcome of the 2019 General Conference. “Most of the churches are just angry with the support of the Traditional Plan and do not want to support the General Conference and larger church in their own mind,” Hagiya said...Hagiya and Howard reminded congregations that 76 percent of local church apportionments stay in the conference. “This is a time when we need every congregation to step up in faithful giving by funding our local mission and ministry at 100 percent and to support the work of the Western Jurisdiction...” (UMNS; 4/12/2019)

Tacit approval to withhold money was given by their leadership. We in Concerned Methodists are strategizing for General Conference 2020 (GC2020) in contending for our Orthodox Wesleyan faith to get our church back on track. What you can do is to pray, inform yourselves, and inform others.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris  
Executive Director

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# May 2019 Update

## **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

“Unfettered sexual eroticism. That is the sacrament by which man declares his independence of God... That has given way to abortion... That has led to infanticide... [That has given way to many different expressions of sexuality.]” ~ AFR

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### **The Good Stuff. Presbyterian Sue Cyre urges United Methodists to persevere.**

[Note: I have known her since the early 1990s when she was a witness to the “Reimagining Conference” in which money from mainline denominations helped support the gathering that featured “goddess” worship, among other things. – AOM]

To my UMC brothers and sisters who upheld biblical standards on sexuality: The recent vote by United Methodist Church delegates to retain the biblical marriage standard for church leaders was an encouraging and significant victory. The vote upheld biblical standards not only for your own members to see, but also for the world. As the largest mainline denomination, the vote was reported by the media & therefore encouraged believers around the globe. That is good news.

The vote of 53-47 percent [for the “Traditional Plan”], however, was not a landslide victory. If an additional 49 delegates out of the 800, had voted to normalize same-sex behavior, the Church would have taken the route of the other mainlines like the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA). The narrow 12 percent difference in the vote may embolden those supporting same-sex behavior to fight harder and longer. Advocates already signaled that they were not done fighting when they declared that they would continue the fight at the 2020 General Conference. I therefore encourage and exhort those who uphold the biblical standard for sexuality to be strong and persevere in the ongoing, wearisome battles that lie ahead.

For 20 years, I was involved in the struggle to maintain biblical standards of sexual morality in the Presbyterian Church (USA). The votes at the biennial General Assembly and in the local presbyteries consistently supported the biblical position on marriage and sexual expression. After two decades of struggling, however, a majority of pastors and ruling elders who supported a biblical position on sexuality began to talk about their weariness at fighting the spiritual battle, the financial and physical cost of fighting the battle, their desire to get back to the “real ministry of the church,” and their hope of finding a “third way.” It was when this mind-set among the conservatives reached a crescendo that the national vote was lost. The Presbyterian Church (USA) now ordains church leaders who engage in sexual expression outside of the marriage of a man and a woman, and it has redefined marriage to be between any two people. For most of us, confronting evil and falsehood at the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly meetings was difficult. It was emotionally stomach-churning. We spent time and financial resources attending the Assembly and preparing beforehand. We were vilified at the Assembly. Those supporting same-sex behavior told us we were unloving, uncivil, homophobic, and Pharisaical. As conservative pastors and elders, we were tempted to see the positive experiences in our local congregations as the real ministry of the church. Ministry in local congregations is important. It is often in personal, one-on-one relationships that people come to know and confess Christ. It is in the local congregation where people form relationships, are mentored in their faith, are held accountable, and see Christ at work in believers’ lives. However, it is when large national bodies like the UMC General Conference speak that the culture is most affected. For people who are enticed by the culture to engage in sexual immorality that leaves them wounded and in despair, a biblically faithful national body speaks a word of hope. The national body speaks a word of encouragement to the local church, too, by supporting its biblical position, and reminding each congregation that they do not stand alone against falsehood and evil.

The spiritual battle against falsehood is the real ministry of the church. The Gospel always stands in opposition to the gods of this world. That spiritual battle happens in our own lives each time we are tempted by sin. Scripture admonishes us that, “All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”. The spiritual

battle against falsehood and evil also at times infects the local church and leadership must confront it no matter how painful. And the spiritual battle rages at the national level. For the sake of the culture, for the sake of the local churches under its charge, for the sake of Christians who are influenced by the media, I urge all of us to “not grow weary” of the struggle. Jesus describes the battle to his followers saying, “Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” Wherever and whenever Christians confront evil, there will be a struggle. Yet, that is the calling of the national church, the local congregation, and each individual Christian, whether clergy or lay. We confront the evil not with anger but as Peter said, “with gentleness and respect”. The writer of Hebrews admonished his hearers, “Consider him [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”

When the Jewish leaders seized Peter and John and threatened them if they continued to proclaim Christ, Peter and John’s response was to pray for greater boldness. They prayed, “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness”. Only by being bold are we able to “hold out the word of life” to a “crooked and depraved generation”. Paul tells the church at Philippi: “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life...”

May my brothers and sisters in the UMC and all of us pray for greater boldness to shine like stars holding out the word of life?

– By Sue Cyre, March 2, 2019. <https://juicyecumenism.com/wp-content/uploads/Sue-Cyre.jpg> Sue Cyre is a past board member of the Institute on Religion & Democracy. She has served as Executive Director of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry (PFFM), an initiative providing resources to assist adherents in their defense of biblical theology. Cyre also served as editor of *Theology Matters*.

**Of Interest. Groups approve plan to divide slashed budget. Connectional Table ponders role post-GC2019.**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – As conversations happen across The United Methodist Church about possible denominational splits, the Connectional Table wants a place at the table. The two groups responsible for putting together the general church budget approved a plan for how to divide significantly reduced funds. The groups’ votes April 4 culminated nearly a week of discussions about how to slice a much smaller financial pie, while leaving ministries with more than just crusts. The Connectional Table and the General Council on Finance and Administration board each agreed to the Connectional Table’s recommended allocations for most of the 2021-2024 general church budget. During the joint meeting, the Connectional Table, as coordinator of the work of general agencies, approved the plan by a vote of 29 to three. The board of the denomination’s finance agency decided by a much narrower margin, with nine in favor, eight opposed and one abstention. Agency top executives have voice but not vote on the Connectional Table. “We have an agreement,” said North Texas Conference Bishop Mike McKee, president of the finance agency board, immediately after the votes. “I remind you it’s not overwhelming, but it is an agreement.”

At the center of debate was a proposed 35% budget cut for United Methodist Communications, which includes United Methodist News Service, and the budget process itself. The Rev. Steve Wood, chair of the finance agency’s General Agency and Episcopal Matters Committee, acknowledged the tension up front. “All need to share in the reductions as a connectional network including the smaller funds,” Wood told the board. His committee drafted three potential budget models that would instead curtail United Methodist Communication’s budget by 28.2 percent to 31 percent while reducing the budgets of other agencies. “The current allocation to UMCom is disproportionate to the big picture,” he said. With the April 4 action, the General Council on Finance and Administration can begin drafting the reports for the 2021-2024 general church budget that will head to the 2020 General Conference. Ultimately, the denomination’s multinational legislative assembly has final say on the size and allocation of the budget. As it stands, the finance agency is proposing a \$493.8 million budget – the smallest in more than 20 years. According to the Commission on Archives and History, the last time General Conference approved a budget below \$500 million was in 1992. The budget still could face more cuts before heading to General Conference, depending on financial forecasts for the

denomination next February. Nordic-Baltic Area Bishop Christian Alsted, the Connectional Table's chair, noted that behind the numbers are people.

"We pray especially for general secretaries and the people in human resources," he prayed after the vote. "As they are about to make difficult decisions, we ask that you give them guidance...wisdom and also the care that they will need."

The Book of Discipline gives the General Council on Finance Administration board authority to determine the amount available for apportioned funds. The board also makes recommendations on the distribution of the Episcopal Fund, which supports the bishops, and the General Administration Fund, which supports General Conference, the Judicial Council, Archives and History and the finance agency itself. Under the Discipline, the Connectional Table has responsibility for allocating general church giving among the other apportioned funds. Those funds include the Ministerial Education Fund, which supports United Methodist seminaries and clergy development; the Black College Fund, which supports historically black church-affiliated schools; the Africa University Fund; and the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund, supporting cumenical work. The largest is the World Service Fund, which supports the work of eight general church agencies, the Connectional Table itself and a contingency fund. The Connectional Table also proposes allotments for the Central Conference Theological Fund and Young Clergy Initiative – two funds created by the 2012 General Conference to nurture the clergy vocation. The Discipline requires that both the board and Connectional Table agree on the funding levels proposed to General Conference. Adding to the challenges of this budget process is that both groups had significantly less money to distribute.

In August, the finance agency board unanimously approved changes in the formula used in calculating U.S. apportionments to reduce the requested giving from U.S. annual conferences. In November, the Connectional Table asked the board to reconsider but it continued to press ahead with reductions. The formula changes initially meant an overall cut to the general church budget of 17.4%. But because of the planned addition of five new African bishops, the Episcopal Fund actually would need to increase. That meant other funds would have to make up the difference. On March 29, the board voted for further cuts on the recommendation of the Economic Advisory Committee, a group of United Methodist financial forecasters. Following the tumultuous special General Conference and continued losses in U.S. church attendance, the committee urged the board to cut another \$4.9 million, resulting in the overall denominational budget dropping by 18.3%. Of the additional cuts, the board absorbed \$2 million in the two funds it oversees. That left the Connectional Table with \$358.6 million for its funds and agencies – a 23.3% reduction from the current budget.

"We felt we couldn't just apply a 23% reduction across the board and stay faithful to the values we talked about," said the Rev. Brad Brady, a member of the Connectional Table's allocations team. With that in mind, the Connectional Table recommended that the allocations for the Commissions on the Status and Role of Women, Religion and Race and United Methodist Men and the national plans each decrease by less than 1 percent. These groups also received the smallest share of general church apportionments. The steepest cut was the allocation for the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund by nearly 88% – reducing its apportionment from about \$8 million to under \$1 million in 2021-24. The fund disburses grants to ecumenical organizations; however, by the end of 2017 it had accumulated reserves four times its 2017 expenses. "I think we can manage with what is being proposed here, but it will cause us to use up all of those reserves," Bishop B. Michael Watson, the Council of Bishops ecumenical officer, told the Connectional Table on April 2. "I would also say it is unfortunate that we have not had some better guidance on what reserves should be."

More controversial was the Connectional Table's next biggest cut – the 35% reduction for United Methodist Communications, taking it from \$71.6 million to \$46.6 million. The Boards of Global Ministries, Church and Society, and Higher Education and Ministry will each see reductions of 20%. Discipleship Ministries, which has the lowest percentage of net assets compared to expenses, will see a 15.5% cut. Dan Krause, the agency's top executive, told both the Connectional Table and General Council on Finance and Administration in separate meetings that he has never received a clear rationale for his agency's deeper loss compared to its peers.

Proposed reductions. The Connectional Table and General Council on Finance and Administration board have agreed to the following reductions in the 2021-2024 budget:

Interdenominational Cooperation Fund: -88%  
 United Methodist Communications: -35%  
 Central Conference Theological Fund: -30.4%  
 Ministerial Education Fund (including annual conference share): -27%  
 Church and Society: -20.6%  
 Global Ministries: -20.4%  
 Higher Education and Ministry: -20.4%  
 Discipleship Ministries: -15.5%  
 Black College Fund: -15.5%  
 Africa University: -15.1%  
 Young Clergy Initiative: -14.2%  
 World Service Contingency Fund: -10.6%  
 Connectional Table: -5%  
 Episcopal Fund: +6.7%  
 General Council on Finance and Administration: -22.4%  
 Commission on Archives and History: -5%  
 General Conference: -11%  
 General Administration Contingency Reserve: -52.3%

With the April 4 action, the General Council on Finance and Administration can begin drafting the reports for the 2021-2024 general church budget that will head to the 2020 General Conference. Ultimately, the denomination's multinational legislative assembly has final say on the size and allocation of the budget. As it stands, the finance agency is proposing a \$493.8 million budget – the smallest in more than 20 years. According to the Commission on Archives and History, the last time General Conference approved a budget below \$500 million was in 1992. The budget still could face further adjustments before heading to General Conference, depending on financial forecasts for the denomination next February. Nordic-Baltic Area Bishop Christian Alsted, the Connectional Table's chair, noted that behind the numbers are people. – By Heather Hahn, UM News Daily Digest; April 5, 2019.

### **(UM) Bishops.**

+ ***Bishop Will Willimon on why no plan can unite United Methodists.*** Will Willimon, a prominent theologian and a retired bishop of the United Methodist Church's North Alabama Conference, has some choice words for a denomination in disarray over its views on sexuality. Willimon, like other bishops, couldn't vote on any of the plans presented this week at the special denominational session in St. Louis – one that would continue to restrict church leaders from ordaining or marrying LGBT people, and another that would allow local congregations to make their own decisions. Church rules don't give bishops a voice or a vote. The session's 864 delegates are made up of clergy and lay people from around the world. But as a lifelong Methodist, he said, he saw an unmistakable change in the attitudes of the delegates at the special session in St. Louis. People on either side of the issue talked of breaking away from the 12 million-member global denomination. Willimon, who now teaches at Duke Divinity School in Durham, N.C., left St. Louis on Tuesday (Feb. 26) before the final vote. When asked, "What are you seeing and hearing from the delegates?" he answered,

*It occurred to me there are people in the auditorium who don't care what plan passes or how it passes. They're withdrawing. Once you've made that decision, what difference does it make what plan you've got? Someone was saying, "Unless the Traditional Plan passes exactly as it is, unamended, we're leaving." That's kind of like announcing, "We're leaving." Imagine having a meeting in a local church where people say "Hey, before we have the discussion and all, if this vote in session doesn't go my way, I'm leaving."*

[Note: I know Bishop Willimon personally – and this perspective is sad. We must make a stand for morality. – AOM]

– By Yonat Shimron Yonat Shimron, February 26, 2019. Conversation between

+ ***A Call to Action: “Sacred Witness” – Bishop Ward spoke.*** “There is a movement building to build a fully inclusive future for the United Methodist Church that is erupting all over the US and we want to build a coalition here in the North Carolina Conference and to call others to this sacred witness for inclusion and love. We are planning on a public action to deliver these signatures to Bishop Ward on Thursday March 28<sup>th</sup> at 7pm at the Conference Office in Garner.” Bishop Hope Morgan Ward was invited to speak at the event. She was quoted as saying, “We as a church have lost our way,” Bishop Hope Morgan Ward told the Thursday night rally. Deborah Morgan, a lesbian deacon at Calvary United Methodist Church in Durham, said, “It doesn’t matter what the General Conference says about you. You are a child of God.” Laurie Hays Coffman, a pastor in the Reconciling United Methodist movement, which welcomes LGBTQ people, was a little more defiant. The General Conference, Coffman said, “even gave us a gracious exit opportunity if we wanted to walk out the back door any time. I don’t want to walk out the back door, or the front door. I love this church. It has loved me since I was conceived, and I don’t have any plans of letting them force me out. “I also don’t have any plans of complying with what I believe to be an unjust and inhumane way of being church.”

[Note: This gathering was problematic in several ways. It included calls for disobedience, words by a pastor identified as “lesbian” and a comment from a UM bishop who had evidently attended the rally. “Sacred” is used loosely. – AOM]

– Jason Butler; March 31, 2019. Martha Quillin, Raleigh News & Observer; March 28, 2019. Bill Norton; nccumc.org

**(UM) General Board of Church and Society. *Methodist Lobby Chief Slams Church on Sexuality Vote.***

In the wake of an historic vote by the United Methodist Church’s General Conference, the head of the denomination’s Washington, D.C.-based lobby office has chastised the denomination’s governing body. “The 2019 General Conference brought unbearable pain to the body of Christ,” the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) wrote in high dudgeon. “The delegates’ resistance to hear and honor the presence and voices of LGBTQIA people has created a wound. The wound may one day be healed by the grace of God, but the scar left behind will be visible forever....The 2019 General Conference chose to further deepen the divide in The United Methodist Church,” excoriated Henry-Crowe. “The plan adopted by a slim majority is punitive, contrary to our Wesleyan heritage, and in clear violation of the mandate given to us in 1 Corinthians 12.”

Henry-Crowe has served as the agency’s top executive since 2014. Her comments were delivered in a GBCS press release appearing on the agency’s web site using church letterhead. It was disseminated using church resources. Writing that there were moments “that broke the heart of God” at General Conference, Henry-Crowe struck a defiant tone, focusing upon the agency’s “work for LGBTQIA equality”: “We will seek justice for LGBTQIA migrants. We will seek to end conversion therapy, the dangerous and discredited idea that you can change someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity. We will work to ensure that no one is fired from their job or prevented from access to housing because they are LGBTQIA. We will work to end hate crimes against LGBTQIA people, especially LGBTQIA people of color. We will seek a climate in which LGBTQIA children are protected and enabled to live full and flourishing lives.

General Conference speaks for the entirety of the 12.6 million-member global church. Since 1972, the body has upheld language in the denomination’s Book of Discipline that regards the practice of homosexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching.” Henry-Crowe, in contrast, wrote to persons identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA) telling them “your relationships are sacred and holy.”

LGBT groups within the church have unsuccessfully attempted to modify or remove the language at each successive General Conference, stymied by an alliance of U.S. Evangelicals and a growing international contingent largely rooted in the Global South. United Methodists in Africa and Southeast Asia consistently report growth, resulting in a greater voice within the General Conference’s proportional representation system

that allots seats for voting delegates. The share of overseas delegates is again expected to increase for the regularly scheduled 2020 General Conference.

– By Jeffrey Walton, IRD; February 28, 2019

**(UM) General Conference 2019 (GC2019):**

**+ *Global church wrestles with post-GC2019 pain.***

[Note: It should be observed that those who do not support traditional Christian morality view what happened in St. Louis as nothing short of a catastrophe and causing “pain” – because they did not win. They need to heed the Bible. – AOM]

About a month after the special General Conference, United Methodist leaders from Austria to Zimbabwe were still reckoning with what happened and expressing pain all around. Members of four denominational leadership bodies took time out of a joint meeting to plan 2020 General Conference legislation to discuss what had just transpired at GC2019. The special session of the denomination’s top lawmaking assembly – intended to find unity amid longtime divisions over homosexuality – seems to have left the denomination even more polarized. Many of the roughly 75 church leaders gathered also wondered what the special session ultimately means for the future of a denomination struggling to be both democratic and global in nature. “The question I have is: Can we continue to be a global church?” Bishop Eduard Khegay, whose Eurasia Episcopal Area includes Ukraine, other former Soviet republics and the whole of Russia. “How much unity do we want? How much contextualization?” The special General Conference, by a vote of 438 to 384, adopted the Traditional Plan that strengthens enforcement of bans on “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy and same-sex weddings. However, the plan is already facing resistance from people who [do not adhere to Biblical morality]. Many of those at the Philippines meeting wanted to make clear that LGBTQ church members are not the only ones who are hurting. United Methodists in the central conferences – church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines – who supported the Traditional Plan said they too feel pain. Specifically, they said, they feel dismissed by United Methodists in the U.S. Khegay said his area is getting pushback for its delegates’ support for the Traditional Plan, including people emailing him that they no longer want to support his area financially. “I find it kind of threatening,” he said. “The question my people ask: Are we a church that wants to support those in need even if they think a different way? Or do we only support those who think like us?” Simon Mafunda, a General Conference delegate from the East Zimbabwe Conference, said that in the votes’ aftermath, the Africans he has spoken to feel looked down upon. “There is also a feeling they are being treated like perpetrators and another group of people are the victims for the simple act of exercising their right to support what they believe,” he said.

Still others observed that the Traditional Plan does more than reaffirm the status quo. The plan also includes provisions, previously held unconstitutional, that require conferences to certify they will comply with ordination standards related to homosexuality or lose funding and the right to use the denominational logo. The Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, will review the plan’s constitutionality later this month.

“When the decision was made on the last day, many of our people indicated to me – this is no longer my church. I lost a home in my beloved United Methodist Church,” Bishop Harald Rückert of the Germany Area said. “Not only because of the exclusiveness toward LGBTQ people but because this plan tries to implement a spirit of mistrust and punishment.”

He spoke after the executive committee of The United Methodist Church in Germany announced that it would not impose the Traditional Plan. The committee also said it was forming a roundtable to search for ways to preserve unity.

The General Conference’s Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters – the one denominational leadership body with a majority of members outside the United States – facilitated the Philippines conversation. “Going into the 2019 meeting in the Philippines, the officers knew that the Special General Conference on homosexuality had changed dynamics and conversation within the worldwide church,” the standing committee executive committee said in a statement released April 3. “It would be important to provide safe and open space for sharing and listening to each other.”

In addition to the standing committee, the gathering also included the Committee on Faith and Order, the Ministry Study Commission and the Connectional Table. The groups had come together to work on a long-

running project authorized by the 2012 and 2016 General Conferences to determine what parts of the Book of Discipline can be adapted in Africa, Europe and Asia. However, the groups broadly agreed that fallout from GC2019 meant they needed to slow down that work and deal with the trust deficit in the wider church.

Meanwhile, conversations across the multinational denomination are already considering possibly splitting the church. Part of the debate is deciding who gets to call themselves United Methodist. Complicating matters is that United Methodists in the U.S., where the denomination began, still fund the bulk of general church operations. The Rev. Jay Williams, who identifies as a queer pastor, told those gathered in the Philippines: “If exclusion of LGBTQ folks is essential to being United Methodist, then there is no way for us to remain together.” The Rev. Adilson de Almeida, a delegate from the Western Angola Conference, later told United Methodist News Service he thinks it’s time for people who want to change the policies related to LGBTQ individuals to leave. “Some people have to go, but they can choose to go in a nice way – not in the way I’m seeing things going,” he said. “That’s an option. I’m sorry if that makes some people unhappy. We have made a decision and it should be respected.” Khegay told UMNS that something like the One Church Plan would absolutely be unacceptable for the church in Russia, where United Methodists already face restrictions and anything deemed as “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” can be fined.

The Rev. Kimberly Reisman, a delegate from the Indiana Conference, spoke to those gathered about her experience as executive director of World Methodist Evangelism that serves the Wesleyan family beyond The United Methodist Church. “There are ways for us to be together that are creative and life-producing as long as there is enough space for us to be ourselves in that context,” she said. “I am not sure we’re there yet in that conversation or what that would look like for The United Methodist Church itself. But there are ways for people to be together in mission in following Christ.”

Jorge Lockward, an openly gay delegate from the New York Conference, said he thinks the special General Conference “has given us a beautiful gift. It’s the gift of a mirror that shows us where we are,” he said. He said the regional divisions show how The United Methodist Church began as a colonial enterprise. “We’re trying to cover that up the best that we can with good intentions and good words,” he said. “But now it’s coming to a head and we need to be honest about that.” – Heather Hahn; United Methodist News Service (UMNS); April 8, 2019. Manila, Philippines

**+Did African Methodists Save Their Denomination or Perpetuate Bigotry?** The United Methodists “rejected an effort by more progressive members of the global church to lift the denomination's ban on same-sex marriage and LGBT clergy.” Had the vote been left to American United Methodists, the new measure would have passed. But since it was a global vote, the conservative voices of United Methodists in Russia and ...throughout Africa, rejected this measure.

Should we commend these conservative voices for holding to plain biblical truth, as historically affirmed by the Methodists? Or should we condemn them for perpetuating unchristian bigotry based on a misreading of Scripture? In a paper titled, “How Do United Methodists Know a Sin When We See It?,” Catherine L. Kelsey wrote, “The cultures from which American Methodists formed their common sense were and are quite varied, north to south, east to west, rural to urban. How do we evaluate today’s divide in the Methodist church? Is the divide simply one of culture, without clear scriptural support either way? Or can one side claim scriptural authority and historic affirmation?”

Before the vote, which affirmed the “Traditional Plan” and rejected the “One Church Plan,” Rev. Tom Berlin, a “progressive” Methodist, warned that “you will be putting a virus into the American church and it will make it very sick and it will be sick quickly.” He said, “Whether you like it or not [gays and lesbians] feel that their church is exhibiting itself as being against gay people along with others.” In contrast, after the vote, delegate Nancy DeNardo said, “The One Church Plan does not agree with the words of our savior and in so doing deceives young persons into believing that same-gender marriage is OK with God when clearly it is not.”

Who is right? Who is representing the heart of the Lord? Who is standing with Jesus and who is standing against him?

Nowhere was the contrast in opposing views clearer than in the contrast between Africa and America. As reported in the Washington Post, “Jerry Kulah, head of the UMC Africa Initiative, said he was sorry the church



had spent so much time and money debating questions about homosexuality. ‘The progressive groups are loud, but they don’t have the numbers,’ he said. If the church had voted to affirm LGBT inclusion, he said, it would have become a ‘laughingstock’ in Africa. “I’m happy to go back to old ladies and old men in villages who received the Bible from missionaries and let them know that the Bible hasn’t changed,” he said. But Will Willimon, a retired Methodist bishop and a prominent theologian at Duke Divinity School, said that preaching to the ‘old’ is a failure of the church. “We’re sending a signal we are here to minister to the spiritual needs of the elderly,” he said, adding that he has trouble explaining this debate to his adult children. He added, “The traditional plan is a misnomer. We really have nothing in our tradition to justify this sort of punitive, exclusionary mentality.” [Note: As one who knows Willimon, I find this very disappointing. – AOM]

Again I ask, who is right? Does Kullah stand for historic, biblical truth and does Willimon stand against it, or is the opposite true? Without a doubt, Kullah and those who voted against the One Church Plan voted for historic, biblical truth. First, despite claims to the contrary, the Bible is quite clear on the subject of homosexual practice, regardless of the nature of the same-sex relationship. In all cases, homosexual relations are forbidden by God. In no cases are they justified or approved or blessed by Him. (For forthright and respectful dialogues on this subject, see here and here.) Second, contrary to Willimon’s statement that “We really have nothing in our tradition to justify this sort of punitive, exclusionary mentality,” the Methodist church has always held to a strong moral code, one that expressly forbade adultery, fornication, and homosexual practice. It is completely absurd to argue that now, without a shred of scriptural evidence to support the position, practicing homosexuals could be ordained and same-sex “marriages” recognized. Based on what biblical criteria? Based on what statements from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, or the Methodist Book of Discipline? Writing for *Christianity Today* in 1996, Don Thorsen noted that, “Wesley, the founder of Methodism, affirmed the primacy of scriptural authority. But he also acknowledged the genuine, albeit secondary, religious authority of tradition, reason, and experience. By doing so, Wesley simply made explicit what is implicit in all theological reflection, even when it ostensibly is based on Scripture alone.” He asked, “Given this so-called quadrilateral of religious authority, how should Methodists – or any Christian interested in considering a breadth of relevant data – view homosexuality? Although Wesley did not specifically deal with the issue of homosexuality, his theological legacy provides a comprehensive and integrative way of evaluating it.” The article was titled “Revelation and the Gay Experience: What Would John Wesley Have Said About This Debate?” and it is quite relevant for the Methodist debate today. After evaluating these four pillars of Methodism – scripture, tradition, reason, and experience – Thorsen gave his verdict on the major vote that had just taken place in the Methodist church, with outcomes similar to the vote this week. He wrote, “I applaud the decision of the United Methodist Church to reaffirm its stance that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. This affirmation not only conforms to Scripture, which remains the primary source of religious authority, it also conforms to church tradition, logical reasoning, and experience as understood from a Wesleyan perspective.” But, he added, “I also applaud the ongoing concern of United Methodists for the holistic well-being of homosexuals and for their civil rights. A Wesleyan approach not only lends itself to a comprehensive and integrative approach to homosexuality; it understands and treats people realistically and compassionately, because, as Mildred Wynkoop says, Wesley’s theology is ‘a theology of love.’”

Yes, if we are to be scriptural, we must be loving. Genuinely loving. Sacrificially loving. Loving as Christ loved. Absolutely. Without that, we are no better than religious hypocrites. That’s why Thorsen closed his article with these wise words: “Above all, Scripture tells us we are to love our neighbors and have compassion on those who struggle with temptations. Jesus called people to repentance, but he also astounded others by the compassion he demonstrated toward those caught in temptation and sin. Can it be said of us that we surprise others by the sympathy and compassion we extend toward homosexuals?”

This is the heart of the Lord, and ideally, this counsel would be followed by the whole United Methodist church today.

But since the denomination is so divided, it will likely go the way of a major split, with the “progressives” breaking away and forming a new denomination. (The opposite would have likely happened had the vote gone in the other direction.)

If that split does take place, this is what you can expect: Those churches which affirm Scripture, with love, will grow and thrive. Those churches which seek to rewrite Scripture in the name of love will decline and die.

– American Family Association; March 1, 2019. P.O. Drawer 2440 Tupelo, Mississippi 38803

**(UM) General Conference 2020 (GC2020): Dakotas-Minnesota team prepares to host GC in 2020.**

+ While most delegates and visitors in St. Louis [were] laser focused on what is happening at the 2019 General Conference, at least one group is looking ahead to 2020. Nearly a dozen Minnesota and Dakotas United Methodists came to St. Louis to work, volunteer, observe, and learn so they can provide the best possible welcome when United Methodists from around the world come to Minneapolis for General Conference 2020, which takes place May 5-15. They are members of the Dakotas-Minnesota Area’s 2020 Host Team, which has been meeting since 2016. “General Conference is a wonderful opportunity for us to see that Methodism is global and that it brings in a wide variety of different cultures and languages and understandings that we have to be open to understanding,” said Carol Haun, a member of Spirit of Hope UMC in Golden Valley who serves on the Host Team and oversees convention services. In St. Louis, Haun had been working for the General Conference business manager’s office, and her observation has inspired numerous ideas for 2020. Becky Boland, a member of Hennepin Avenue UMC in Minneapolis, is also part of the Host Team. Jan Russell, known by many Minnesota United Methodists as their Cokesbury representative, was recently selected as volunteer coordinator for the Dakotas-Minnesota Host Team. In that role, she’ll be responsible for both recruiting and communicating with several thousand hospitality volunteers. Russell is also a member of Hennepin Avenue UMC in Minneapolis. Bea Stucke, coordinator of ministry operations for the Dakotas Conference and a member of the Dakotas-Minnesota Host Team, looks forward to introducing visitors to a region of the country that isn’t a typical tourist destination. Rev. MaryAnne Korsch, a deacon who is working with Haun on convention services and serves First UMC (The Coppertop) in Duluth, was also in St. Louis for a couple of days to observe and appreciated the opportunity to see firsthand what a General Conference is like.

– By Christa Meland, as reported in the UM News Daily Digest; March 18, 2019. Christa is director of comms for Minnesota A.C.

**+ Pre-General Conference Briefing set for Jan. 23-24.**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) – United Methodist Communications will host the 2020 Pre-General Conference Briefing Jan. 23-24, 2020, at the Omni Nashville Hotel. The event is designed to help church communicators and delegates prepare for the lawmaking assembly's meeting, set for May 5-15, 2020, in Minneapolis. It will include sessions on how General Conference works as well as presentations on major topics that will be considered. More details will be forthcoming.

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UM News Weekly Digest; Apr 05, 2019

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To not say anything – is to say something; to not take a stand is to take a stand. ~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

**Global Outlook**

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. ~ King Solomon, Proverbs

13:20

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**Mozambique. UMCOR grants aid initial cyclone response.**

MAPUTO, Mozambique (UMNS) – United Methodists are starting to respond to those affected by Cyclone Idai, which left devastation in parts of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The United Methodist Committee on Relief has allocated three \$10,000 grants to meet immediate basic human needs.

~ Linda Bloom & Joao Sambo report, UMNS Daily Digest; Mar 21, 2019.

**National Council of Churches (NCC). *NCC calls for global effort to combat racist violence.***

WASHINGTON – In the wake of the mass shootings at two mosques in New Zealand, the National Council of Churches issued a statement calling for a worldwide effort to combat racist violence. “The events in Christchurch are part of a pattern of racist and anti-immigrant shootings at mosques, synagogues, churches and other houses of worship. We remain faithful to interfaith dialogue and to solidarity with our Muslim sisters and brothers,” the statement reads.

[Note: The NCC calls for a “worldwide effort to combat racist violence” yet ignores the far more egregious persecution and brutal murder of Christians worldwide by those involved in Islamic “jihad” as mandated by the Muslim faith/ideology. This would seem to be at a minimum misplaced priorities. It demonstrates a disconnect from reality of world affairs. – AOM]

*Daily Digest*; March 18, 2019.

~ *UM News*

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If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! ~ Proverbs 24:10