

Monthly Update

September 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

In last month's Update we had presented a cursory view of the reports from the annual conferences held across our United Methodist Church earlier this summer; again, if you want more information on your conference, contact us and we can provide you a copy.

September. It is important to remember what happened on the 11th day of that month 18 years ago. It is also important to remember that date was not picked by chance. Consider:

+ October 10, 732. Muslims were invading Europe in a thrust along the Western flanks through Spain and into France. Abd-ar-Rahman, the Muslim governor of Cordoba, led a large army of Spanish Moors. At the Battle of Tours, they were defeated near Poitiers, France by forces led by Charles Martel; Abd-ar-Rahman was killed. The Moors retreated from France. If Martel's forces had failed, the Muslims would have swept into Europe. The Islamic invasion of Europe was halted only by the Battle of Tours/Poitiers on September 11, 732.

+ September 11, 1565. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent dominated the Mediterranean, with intentions of taking Sicily, Sardinia, Majorca, southern Spain, Rome and to invade Europe itself were thwarted when his forces were defeated by the French Knights of Malta on that island.

+ September 11, 1683. The 138,000 Muslim Ottoman Turks who had surrounded Vienna, Austria under Sultan Mehmet IV and led by General Mustafa Pasha were defeated by Polish King Jan Sobieski, who led a coalition of 81,000 Polish, Austrian and German troops and swept through the Muslim force's lines. Indeed, Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) wrote in *The Great Heresies* (1938), "September 11, 1683..ought to be among the most famous in history."

+ September 11, 1697. Prince Eugene of Savoy stopped 100,000 Muslim Turks who were invading Serbia at the Battle of Zenta.

+ September 11, 2001, Islamic terrorists hijacked 4 passenger airliners and used them as missiles to take out the World Trade Centers, U.S. Pentagon and the other was diverted and crashed by the passengers in Pennsylvania (what would have been the attack on the Capitol Building).

+ September 11, 2012. Attack on Benghazi in Libya. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed along with another Embassy staffer and two former Navy seals.

To preserve our freedom, it is important to guard it. This means that we need to remember the past – because it is in so doing that we know the future. In the same way, I ask that you continue to stand with us as we “contend for the faith” in our church.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,
Executive Director

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September 2019 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed over for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free. – President Ronald Reagan

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The Good Stuff.

+ **Francis Asbury.** 300,000 miles on horseback, from the Atlantic to the Appalachians, from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico, for 45 years, he spread the Gospel. This was Francis Asbury, Methodist Circuit riding preacher who was born August 20, 1745.

When the Revolution began, he was the only Methodist minister to remain in America, refusing to return with other Anglican ministers to England, stating: "I can by no means agree to leave such a field for gathering souls to Christ as we have in America." Preaching over 16,000 sermons, Asbury's leadership resulted in the Methodist Church in America growing from 1,200 people to 214,000 with 700 ordained ministers. In 1785, Asbury broke the Methodist movement away from the Episcopal Church, forming its own denomination.

This had tremendous political impact, as Episcopal members of Virginia's Assembly now no longer had a majority. When a vote was taken the next year, 1789, the Episcopal Church lost its position as Virginia's established State Church, thereby allowing other denominations to be treated equally.

Francis Asbury befriended Richard Bassett, a signer of the U.S. Constitution, who converted to being a Methodist, freed his slaves, paid them as hired labor and rode joyfully with them to revival meetings.

Methodist Bishops Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke met with newly elected President George Washington in New York, delivering the message, May 19, 1789: "We...express to you...our sincere congratulations, on your appointment to the presidentship of these States. We...place as full a confidence in your wisdom and integrity, for the preservation of those civil and religious liberties which have been transmitted to us by the Providence of GOD... Dependence on the Great Governor of the Universe which you have repeatedly expressed, acknowledging Him the source of every blessing, and particularly of the most excellent Constitution of these States, which is at present the admiration of the world..."

Bishop Asbury continued: "We enjoy a holy expectation that you will always prove a faithful and impartial patron of genuine, vital religion - the grand end of our creation and present probationary existence..."

We promise you our fervent prayers to the Throne of Grace, that GOD Almighty may endue you with all the graces and gifts of his Holy Spirit, that may enable you to fill up your important station to His glory."

On May 29, 1789, President Washington wrote a reply: "To the Bishops of the Methodist-Episcopal Church..."

I return to you...my thanks for the demonstrations of affection and the expressions of joy...on my late appointment.

It shall still be my endeavor...to contribute...towards the preservation of the civil and religious liberties of the American people...

I hope, by the assistance of Divine Providence, not altogether to disappoint the confidence which you have been pleased to repose in me...in acknowledgments of homage to the Great Governor of the Universe..."

Washington continued: "I trust the people of every denomination...will have every occasion to be convinced that I shall always strive to prove a faithful and impartial patron of genuine, vital religion..."

I take in the kindest part the promise you make of presenting your prayers at the Throne of Grace for me, and that I likewise implore the Divine benediction on yourselves and your religious community."

In 1799, Francis Asbury ordained the first African-American Methodist minister, Richard Allen, and dedicated the first African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Unveiling the Equestrian Statue of Francis Asbury in Washington, D.C., 1924, President Calvin Coolidge stated: "Francis Asbury, the first American Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church...made a tremendous contribution..."

Our government rests upon religion. It is from that source that we derive our reverence for truth and justice, for equality and liberty, and for the rights of mankind.

Unless the people believe in these principles they cannot believe in our government...

Calling the people to righteousness (was) a direct preparation for self-government. It was for a continuation of this work that Francis Asbury was raised up...

The government of a country never gets ahead of the religion of a country. There is no way by which we can substitute the authority of law for the virtue of man...

Real reforms which society in these days is seeking will come as a result of our religious convictions, or they will not come at all. Peace, justice, humanity, charity - these cannot be legislated into being. They are the result of a Divine Grace...

Frontier mothers must have brought their children to him to receive his blessings! It is more than probable that Nancy Hanks, the mother of Lincoln, had heard him in her youth. Adams and Jefferson must have known him, and Jackson must have seen in him a flaming spirit as unconquerable as his own...

He is entitled to rank as one of the builders of our nation.

On the foundation of a religious civilization which he sought to build, our country has enjoyed greater blessing of liberty and prosperity than was ever before the lot of man.

These cannot continue if we neglect the work which he did.

We cannot depend on the government to do the work of religion.

I do not see how anyone could recount the story of this early Bishop without feeling a renewed faith in our own country."

– American Minute by Bill Federer. Permission is granted to forward, reprint or duplicate with acknowledgement to vwww.AmericanMinute.com.

+ *Methodism's American Saint: Bishop Francis Asbury.*

"This man has been called 'The American Saint,' 'The Prophet of the Long Road.'"

In the United States, there are towns and cities, hospitals, homes, and schools, from Maine to South Georgia and beyond named for Methodist leader Francis Asbury. Comments from the General Commission on Archives and History (GCFA)

"He was a frontiersman and a pioneer. He could have given Lewis and Clark a map to follow before they embarked on their journey and told them which roads to take and which roads were dead ends. Asbury brought Methodism to America in 1771, and over the next 45 years, he covered some 265,000 miles on horseback, bringing the Good News to the most remote corners of the New World." The Rev. Alfred T. Day III (GCFA)

"The Methodist message that he brought was that God's love can be experienced by everyone and that once it's experienced by everyone the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your life and makes a difference."

The son of working class parents in England, Asbury received little formal education. He apprenticed as a metalworker and became a local lay preacher. At age 22, John Wesley appointed him to serve as a missionary among the American settlements. His became a life on the road and Asbury never married." The Rev. Alfred T. Day III (GCFA)

"We tend to think it was easy. We tend to think it was a direct application. But it was actually quite different. A British Methodist traveling on his circuit could usually get to a town on the same day—go from one town to the next. When you start across the Appalachians, or even across the Potomac, you could travel days before you got to a town, and a day or so from one farm to the next. And once you got into the frontier it was even more lonely." Dale Patterson (GCFA):

And there were more challenges in this new mission field.

Dale Patterson: “There were Methodists who said ‘We need to be able to serve communion. We need to be able to do these things.’ No one was ordained at that point. And Wesley struggled with that. So he set apart Coke to ordain Asbury as one of the other leaders of the Methodist Movement, especially establish a denomination, which was called the Methodist-Episcopal Church.” Under Bishop Asbury’s direction, the Methodist Episcopal Church grew from 1,200 to 214,000 members and more than 700 ordained preachers. Among the men he ordained was Richard Allen of Philadelphia, the first African American minister in the United States.

Dale Patterson: “Someone pointed out that Asbury never really asked any of his preachers or pastors to do anything that he didn’t do.”

Asbury set a high standard by his own example but the constant travel proved too much for some in his charge. He kept a book with detailed critiques of his preachers.

Dale Patterson: “It would be, you know, ‘Jones’ and the word ‘useful’ next to it. ‘Peters, a bawler’ which means as he sings or he preaches he just sort of kinda yells constantly. He’s a bawler. Someone else, ‘needs practice.’”

Rev. Alfred T. Day III: “There were times in the conflicts, in the development of the American Methodist Church in the colonial era when he could have drawn a very hard line in the sand. But he seemed to have the knowledge and insight to know that when enforcing the rules too strictly might have a negative and deadly effect on his developing the American Methodist Church and the American Methodist church of his legacy by 50 to 75 years after his life, was the largest church body in America.”

Dale Patterson: “There’s a statue of him in our nation’s capital. I think it’s appropriate there’s a statue here at Drew in one of our seminaries. Asbury’s road goes through all those places. Asbury was one who reached out, he traveled, he spoke to a variety of people. He was comfortable talking to the upper crust and he was comfortable talking to slaves. He was comfortable talking to backwoods poor people and shopkeepers. I think that statue reminds us that the church needs to be in all of these places, reaching out in all of these kinds of ways.”

– Taken from a transcript by The Rev. Alfred T. Day III, General Commission on Archives and History

Of Interest. Happenings Around the Church – GRIEVING FOR THE CHURCH By Riley Case

For 61 years I have attended my annual conference. I am now attending #62. I go back so far that in one of my first conferences I was not sure where I was to be appointed. Like days of yore I was told you’ll know when the bishop reads the appointments. But “conference” has always been one of the highlights of my year. I would see old friends, hear great sermons, take part in spirited singing, rejoice in the victories of the past year and anticipate the challenges of the next year. In those days we actually discussed and debated reports (now all on the consent calendar). Churches dismissed their Sunday services so that persons could attend Sunday services at “conference.”

I admit I am, to use a term from many years ago, an “old croaker,” a term given at one time to retired preachers who longed for the good old days of long ago and complained about the present. Our conference is big and impersonal. Before mergers and consolidations seven different conferences operated in the place of the one. In our present day the cost of one banquet ticket (\$48) would just about have covered the cost for a person to attend the entire conference.

I grew up in an Indiana county-seat Methodist Church. To the churches around, a county-seat church was “liberal,” or “formal.” It usually was one of the dominant churches in the county. The country churches were known for revivals; the county-seat churches were known for their organs. Our church did things by the “book” (as in the Discipline and institutional policies). We used the official hymnal and the official Sunday school material and observed all of the conference approved special days. My family was so faithful I received the perfect attendance Sunday school pins for eight straight years. But my family had other influences: my mother’s fundamentalist relatives and some para-church ministries my family was interested in. So, I was well aware of the tensions between liberals and what we in those days referred to as “fundamentalists.” I remember debating the Virgin Birth even in our youth group and at church camp.

Somehow, I gained a reputation as a “conservative” before I even started preaching. The first questions directed to me from the Board of Ministerial Qualifications (now BOM) were: what did I think of Methodist Sunday school material? This was followed with: what did I think of the Methodist hymnal? (in addition to:

“Did I smoke?”). I assume the committee must have thought that since I was attending a Methodist seminary my theology was satisfactory without examination. They seemed to know of my causes. My mother fought the Sunday school material for most of her years as a Methodist. The material was, as she well knew and let it be known, “liberal.” There was much more about being kind to others than memorizing Scripture. Jesus was never presented as hanging on the cross until junior high. One preacher explained we needed to use the official material because we were a county-seat church and needed to be an example to the other Methodist churches around us.

But we lived with that. Our youth program was a big part of my life. We had huge sub district and district rallies. The camping program was great. I never wanted to be anything other than Methodist. The liberal pastors I knew were always supportive. When I entered pastoral ministry there was a close fellowship among preachers of the spectrum of theological backgrounds.

That is not to say there was no theological push-back. The Good News movement started in 1968 to give voice to “The Silent Minority,” faithful Methodists whose evangelical convictions were not always recognized, let alone affirmed. Our conference evangelical fellowship was organized in 1970 and for years functioned more as a spiritual support group than political caucus. When we, on the national level as well as the local level, dealt with church affairs we addressed Sunday school material, the lack of theological diversity in seminaries, the doctrinal statement, the de-emphasis on evangelism in missions, Biblical language and the Consultation on Church Union. Of course, the critics of evangelical United Methodism were sure there were other sinister factors at work: a right-wing political agenda, a desire to split the church, rigid doctrinaire theology, a probable connection with South Africa, and racism. And then as the LGBTQ agenda began to sweep through American secular culture and had worked its way more and more into United Methodist institutional leadership, homophobia.

It always was, and still is, a mystery as to how a major group in the church in the United States and abroad (namely the evangelicals) which have affirmed historical Methodism, including Wesleyan theology, the doctrinal standards and the General Rules, should be accused of being disloyal or divisive or hateful. But we lived with that. The positives about United Methodism were always so much stronger than the negatives.

But the crisis is now greater than ever before (except maybe before the M.E. Church split over the issue of slavery). Word from various annual conferences already held this year tell of conflict and dissension. Claims that UMs are a people who live in unity based on love ring hollow. In our local churches discouraging stories are being told about individuals, families and in some instances, whole congregations leaving the denomination. For some of us these are people we have ministered to and with. In some cases these are family members. In many instances when our children leave home they are finding other kinds of churches. Some finding other churches are progressives who believe the UM Church is hateful and anti-gay. Still others are ordinary UMs who simply don’t want discord in the church. Others (and probably the larger number) are evangelicals who have become disillusioned with institutional progressivism which they feel has abandoned Biblical teaching.

But there are more problems. I spoke with a woman who is a delegate to our upcoming annual conference. I asked her if she wanted some voting suggestions. She replied, “No, because we are on opposite sides” (I did not know). But it was painful to be involved in talk about “sides.” Unfortunately, the lack of civility, the efforts to intimidate, the angry arguments that once were mostly limited to general conference are now finding their way into our annual conferences. What is particularly painful is that many of those now identified as “the other side” are, or at least have been, close friends. I have heard people speak of “enemies” in the church.

Can it get worse? It can. We are now facing wholesale defiance of that which has in the past held us together, namely our corporate culture deriving from our common Discipline. The church, it seems, is waging war against its own people. Bishops, asked to guide us in a “Way Forward” by some strange twist of logic, proclaim they will not honor their own episcopal vows, will not accept the actions of the recent General Conference which affirmed the Traditional Plan, and are proclaiming the church’s Discipline as anti-gay and hateful. In several cases bishops are said to be counseling churches who are withholding apportionments as a protest. The consequence is not “unity,” a value which in the past bishops seemed to worship as the highest

value of the faith, but disunity and confusion. To what end? It is difficult to find anything positive in bishops, Boards of Ordained Ministry and conferences who are in rebellion against traditional United Methodism.

So, I go to annual conference with a grieving heart. Must we continue to bite and devour one another? Amicable separation is the only fair and equitable Way Forward at this point. The Confessing Movement has proposed this, or at least suggested this when other options have failed. If we love one another we do not need to engage in conflict until one side “wins” and the other “loses.” If love means anything it means that we respect one another as persons and offer others the freedom to pursue their own visions.

– By Riley Case, The Confessing Movement

+ *Hiwassee College closing in May.*

MADISONVILLE, Tenn. (UMNS) – Hiwassee College, a United Methodist-related college founded in 1849 to educate first-generation college students in rural Appalachia, is closing May 10 for financial reasons.

– Vicki Brown and Annette Spence; UM News Weekly Digest, Apr 05, 2019.

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Friends are like balloons; once you let them go, you might not get them back. Sometimes we get so busy with our own lives and problems that we may not even notice that we’ve let them fly away. Sometimes we are so caught up in who’s right and who’s wrong that we forget what’s right and wrong. Sometimes we just don’t realize

what real friendship means until it is too late. – Anonymous

Global Outlook

Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.

– Sir Winston Churchill

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Sierra Leone. *Sierra Leone Conference helps kick-start new school.*

SAYLLU, Sierra Leone (UMNS) – About 100 students now have the materials they need to attend a new United Methodist primary school in this remote community. The children received backpacks, uniforms, shoes, books and other learning materials from the Sierra Leone Conference's Community Empowerment for Livelihoods and Development. The school is in the home village of Bishop John K. Yambasu. – Phileas

Jusu; UM News Weekly Digest, Apr 05, 2019

Zimbabwe. *Church embraces cyclone survivors in Zimbabwe.*

CHIMANIMANI, Zimbabwe (UMNS) – The United Methodist Church has rallied to provide relief to those affected by Cyclone Idai, which ravaged parts of Zimbabwe two weeks ago.

– Eveline Chikwanah and Kudzai Chingwe; UM News Weekly Digest, Apr 05, 2019.

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We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are