

The Christian Methodist Newsletter

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The Dark Hole

“While eating dinner in the privacy of my home one day, I started to choke. I remember thinking, “This is a stupid way to die.” I mean, [as an Army captain in the 82nd Airborne Division] I always saw myself being shot while leading a charge on a machine gun nest, or falling on a hand grenade to save my buddies, but to choke to death - that was really a meaningless way to die. The living room disappeared, and I was in a dark room measuring about thirty feet squared. The floor was like a greased funnel with a dark hole in the middle; I was on one side of the funnel slowly sliding into that hole. I could see where I was going; the fear I had experienced during the Vietnam war was nothing compared to the pure terror I felt knowing where I was going. With all of my being I did not want to go into that hole, but there was absolutely nothing I could do to stop the sliding. The only thing I remember is thinking - and it was like a shout inside of my mind – ‘Oh, God, no!’ Finally, after - it seemed like - hours, the hole closed up, the dark room disappeared, and I was again in my living room.

I sensed there was something seriously wrong in my life...”¹

That was the most galvanizing moment I had ever experienced.

At that point in time my accomplishments were numerous: I was a captain in the 82nd Airborne Division receiving what was for me a good salary; spoke four languages; had a master's degree; owned land in East Texas and the house that I'd just had built; drove a sports car; and dated a beautiful girl. All of these did not matter one bit; all that mattered was that I was sliding into this place that caused me pure terror. I describe this experience by saying that I am a paratrooper, career Army man, and veteran of the Vietnam War through Desert Storm (and other operations in between); have almost been killed multiple times; and have been involved in activities considered dangerous. But all of the fear that I have felt in my life outside of that single event was nothing compared to the pure terror I felt when I saw where I was headed.

When I later read the Bible I saw this experience mirrored back to me, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet lose or forfeit his very self?” (Luke 9:25) This passage of Jesus’ message described me exactly. At the moment of death, all of my “accomplishments” meant nothing - absolutely nothing. Other references Jesus used talked about judgment and people’s revulsion at a very unpleasant place: Matthew 5:29-30; 13:50; 22:13; 25:30; 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; 12:9; 13:3; 13:6-9; 13:24-28; 19:10; John 12:48; to list just some. Psalm 116:3 is especially descriptive: “The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow....”

After this “near death experience” I questioned why it had happened? After all, I was a member of Camp Ground UMC, went to church whenever I was in town, volunteered as a youth counselor, and was active in the United Methodist Men. At the moment of death, why was I going into this “awful place”? That question would haunt me for the next four years. This started a search to find out what was wrong in my life – it was not apparent to me at that time.

Then on February 19, 1985, the first night of a Billy Graham crusade in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, I listened to his message and when he gave the invitation to accept Christ as my personal savior, I publicly confessed that I was a sinner and wanted Christ in my life (after having attended Methodist churches over the span of my life, I had never even been told that I needed to do this). The next evening I arrived early - about six. I started thinking about the past year, and how it had seemed like the Lord had worked a miracle in my brother’s life –healing him of his drug habit. At that time I made the decision that, “Since God had given my brother back to me, I would live my life for God.” In that instant, I felt a flush of heat all over my body and an unbelievable sense of peace. My life was dramatically changed in that instant – I really “came alive” to a brighter world.

Afterwards, the Bible was clearer to me. By reading it, praying, and the work of the Holy Spirit in changing me, I came to understand that God’s standard for sexuality was clear – between husband and wife within marriage – period. Finally, I had my answer.

There was one “little problem” with my life at the time of the “dark hole” experience – I’d had a physical relationship with my girlfriend. “So, what was the matter with that? Lots of people did.” People said that this was “okay” and there was nothing wrong with it. The problem was – my actions may have been “okay” with most people, but they were not right with God. The next year I would receive the first of two “Outstanding Young Man of the Year” awards. It is ironic that at that time I would be recognized in this way by human standards – but I was a failure by God’s standards.

Through the years living this way has not always been easy but I learned that our sexual nature is not just about a physical appetite – it has a spiritual dimension to it as well. By lifting this aspect of one’s life up in prayer, God could help him deal with it and make it easier.

Years later - Janice² and I had been to a dinner theater and were on our way home. It was a cold, rainy winter night. As I drove the car, she talked about how it would be good to get to her house so she could fix us a drink and we could relax in front of her fireplace.

I knew what she meant. I said, “Janice, what you are describing sounds very appealing and in other times that would have been a great idea. You have a really nice home, you’re a great cook, and you are a beautiful lady. But when I pull into the driveway, I’ll walk you to the door, say good night, and get in my car and leave.”

She replied, “Don’t I have anything to say about it?”

I responded, “Yes, I will be glad to listen to anything you have to say.” By this time, we had pulled into her driveway, so I switched off the car’s ignition, and turned to face her. I said, “Janice, I used to live that kind of life, but I don’t anymore. You are a very beautiful lady and a lot of fun to be with, and what you have said does sound appealing. It is a cold night and it would be cozy to snuggle up with you. But I know what would follow and I cannot do that anymore. I know it is hard to understand, but it is not right. I just feel so clean inside – and I would not trade that for anything.” She was silent.

I got out of the car, walked her up to her house, hugged her good night, and left. Although we remained friends I never dated her again.

- Allen O. Morris

1. Extracted from *New-Life Witnesses*, chapter 2.

2. Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

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New Philadelphus United Methodist Church

[Note: I was invited to attend a meeting by the members and former pastor of New Philadelphus UMC to try to help give them assistance on their situation. Very briefly, their church’s lay leadership voted to withhold the apportionment until they received clarification on the bishops’ statement that “homosexuality is not a bar to membership” in the United Methodist Church. The pastor did not agree with the decision (he wanted to keep paying the apportionment) but did support the lay leadership’s right to make that decision. He was later removed as pastor and not reappointed to any other church. After he had consulted an attorney and met with various church officials he did receive some redress. Here is a brief summary.

It would seem to me that the accusations made against Pastor Dwayne Lowry about ‘poor’ leadership skills are based solely on one’s getting the apportionment paid. If that is the sole or determining criteria, it is a poor one. Responsible stewardship in the United Methodist Church demands that one look at how money ostensibly “given to God’s work” is really used, something for which we will all be held accountable with the clergy having a higher degree in this.

Upon reviewing this case study, it would also seem that any who made the accusation of ‘poor’ leadership skills against Pastor Dwayne Lowry might need to look at his own skills in this area. The Scripture verses Matthew 7:1-5 are of invaluable assistance here, as in all determinations that we make. – Allen Morris]

Hello, I attend New Philadelphus UMC in Red Springs, North Carolina and our pastor, Dwayne Lowry was forced to resign, was lied on, leaving the congregation to wonder what to do next. We feel we, as well as Dwayne Lowry, were unjustly treated and I took it upon myself to write a letter that I feel may be worth sharing with others as to how things are really done in the United Methodist Churches. Please take time to read my commentary. All comments are welcomed.

Sincerely,
Vivian McNeill

Let’s talk about struggle over money....

Let’s talk about abusing ones’ power....

Let’s talk about HOMOSEXUALITY!

This seems to be at the very core of what’s now a hot debate in our UM Churches: or at least it is for New Philadelphus UMC, the little ‘ole church, as it’s been called, at 7028 Hwy 710, Red Springs NC that took a stand against homosexuality membership, only for its members and their pastor to be ostracized for sharing Gods belief.

As one UMC pastor poignantly put it: “It is a black day on our great Church when godly men and women are punished for Scriptural Holiness while the "Thyatiraian" (the compromising and permissive ones within our Church) are being praised and put into powerful leadership positions.”

This commentary is to set the record straight, to inform everyone what really happened and how some of the top leaders in the United Methodist church wrongfully handle things, abusing their power all the while. We, along with our Pastor, Dwayne Lowry were wrongly forced to accept his unwarranted resignation: a last minute decision, passed down from District Superintendent Leonard Fairly...to Chairperson of our PPRC, ... to tell our pastor. Consultations that were supposed to take place never happened, contact with the appropriate persons was never made, an overall failure to follow procedure according to the 'NEW BIBLE' of leadership – the Book of Discipline.

One of the reasons cited for Pastor Lowry's forced resignation is his 'poor leadership skills'. The congregation begs to differ with his 'poor' leadership skills. Below you will find a statistical comparison of average growth at New Philadelphus UMC in the seven years Pastor Lowry was there:

	1999	2006
Sunday school classes	3	7
Avg. Tithes and Offerings	~\$300 - \$400/wk	~\$1000 - \$1500/wk
Avg. Sunday attendance	~30	~70
Avg. Wed. night bible study attendance	~4	~15
Transportation	none	15 passenger van - paid in full

In addition, new converts usually went on to become active, participating members, some taking on roles as Sunday school teachers and program coordinators. More programs than not have been successfully implemented, including the food bank, medical/health assistance to those who can't afford it, substance and alcohol treatment and vocational rehab for those who need it, just to name a few. This does not include participation in the Rockingham District Native American Cooperative Ministry where he has been critical in helping lead work team efforts to Eastern North Carolina, South Carolina, Alaska, Washington, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi. His leadership has saved the Co-op churches thousands of dollars in labor cost as they worked to remodel and upgrade their local churches. Overall participation in the church has superseded what it has been in the past. Now, children as young as two years of age singing before the church. Preteens are quoting scripture and challenging the rest of us to learn and become more knowledgeable. Our congregation now is comprised of a population of people spanning at least a 60 mile radius, all ages, all races, all socioeconomic backgrounds.

As you can see, at just a quick glance, Pastor Lowry has done more than his share to contribute to the Rockingham District, the North Carolina Conference, and the dynamic development of New Philadelphus. We as a church under the leadership of Pastor Lowry have ALWAYS responded to the needs of the community. This is anything BUT poor leadership. Poor leadership WILL NEVER yield exponential growth in a church! These numbers show without a doubt an evolution of ways, a development of renewed Spirit, and an overall improvement for the church, all inclusive of what Christ expects of His people. These advancements have profoundly affected everyone, saved and unsaved alike.

[Among accomplishments during his 7-year tenure, the church had established a food bank that fed over 90 families, repaired 12 homes replacing roofs on 7, medical/health assistance to those who couldn't afford it, substance and alcohol treatment and vocational rehab for those who need it, and purchased a van to use in ministry. This does not include participation in numerous ministries and helping to lead multiple work team efforts to North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Alaska, Oklahoma, Washington, and Bolivia. His leadership...saved the Co-op churches thousands of dollars in labor cost as they remodeled and upgraded their local churches. A more complete list is on the website.]

Yes, we understand the governing body of the (United Methodist) church is a 'connectional one' rather than a 'congregational one', but only when we were paying 100% of our apportionments were we actually 'heard' and our concerns mattered. We need to have our faith in the (United Methodist) system restored. Corrupt leadership will only cause chaos and confusion which is detrimental to the church and will eventually lead to the division and downfall of the

church. Understandably, this is not pleasing to God. New Philadelphus UMC has for the past seven years been a “rainbow covenant church” – going far beyond what was expected of us when it came to giving our apportionments and offerings.

Finally, and most importantly, it is imperative that everyone know it was NOT Pastor Lowry who influenced us in anyway to withhold our apportionments. He merely took a vow to stand by the church’s decision to not tolerate homosexuality in anyway and to stand when everyone else’s knees buckled from the pressure being passed down on them from top leading officials. Many of the top leaders in the Rockingham District were sent numerous letters and signatures on petitions outlining our beliefs on homosexuality, which may or may not have [been] considered by some worthy of reading. Despite these letters, signatupes, and even attempted phone calls, still, many of us have yet to gain clarification on Bishop Alfred Gwinn’s statement: HOMOSEXUALITY IS NOT A BARRIER TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP [This has since been done]. See, we at New Philadelphus UMC decided to withhold our apportionments until we gained clarification on where our Bishop, Al Gwinn stood on the issue of homosexuality. It is no secret that repeated requests for clarifications have been continually ignored. How can anyone expect a true God-fearing Christian to believe this?? If true, then we must open our “hearts, doors, and minds” to people of ALL alternative lifestyles, including drug dealers, alcoholics, prostitutes, sexual predators, the list goes on.

Due to New Philadelphus’ stand on withholding apportionments only subsequent to Bishop Gwinn’s failure to provide clarification, Pastor Dwayne Lowry was denied reappointment to New Philadelphus or any other United Methodist church, leaving members asking the question, “Why should we, the church, suffer punishment from one’s personal vendetta against another because of his vow to support the church’s decision?” One very wise UMC member put it well when he said that Pastor Dwayne “has been unjustly treated because of his Scriptural stand against homosexuality and the broad road it seems that some of our leaders in the General Church want to travel.” Very few will “buck the system” or get involved for fear of losing their appointment. Troubling, but true.

Moreover, as did actually occur, we feel that it’s very inappropriate and demeaning for anyone with leading authority to encourage members to leave our church... because of the decision that was made, rather than encouraging unity and transformation among existing congregations.

We feel that it is not only crucial that we be heard, we long to be understood as well. Everyone needs to know how most of the congregation at New Philadelphus UMC feels, and why we feel like we do. We will continue to withhold our apportionments until we obtain further clarification on the issue of homosexuality. This may in turn not only have caused us to lose Pastor Dwayne Lowry, we expect it may lead to the pad-locking of our church doors.

We may not all be educated, literate, high-dollar, high-staked people, but we all at New Philadelphus UMC are prayed up, read up, and led by the spirit of God to do what is right, what coincides with our biblical teachings. We... hope that you and others are as well.

‘New Philadelphia’, the Church that is praised in the Book of Revelation, continues to be faithful and alive. We urged those directly involved to reconsider this drastic decision, to no avail. It is these people that are now responsible for disruption of a harmonious group of Gods people; and this is something that they *will* have to answer for. To others facing this obstacle: don’t be afraid to stand up for what is right! Write letters, ask questions, buck the United Methodist system! Pray for the leaders in charge that have so tarnished and abused their authority. And lastly, pray that God allows people to continue worshiping in unity, doing good works, and growing under the guidance and direction of a strong pastor - a pastor like we used to have: Pastor Dwayne Lowry.

Thank you and God Bless.

- Vivian McNeill

Summary. A more complete narrative and the sequel to this situation can be found at the Concerned Methodists’ website: <http://cmpage.org/news/CMNJUNE2K7.htm>

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Greetings Mr. Morris,

I wanted to email you and give you an update as to what has happened since we met on 7/20/06. I want to forewarn you on the length of this letter. Tony Revels (chair of PPRC) and Philip Tyler (vice-chair of PPRC - who was at the meeting) met with the Bishop on 7/31/06 in Raleigh. Preacher Dwayne (Lowry) did go with him and the meeting was about 2 hours long. I’m not really sure what was discussed (details haven’t been disclosed) but Preacher Dwayne did tell me the following: that he (Bishop) was unaware of situation w/NP-UMC (New Philadelphus UMC) and that he had signed a grant for Preacher to be appointed (somewhere). He said that if he had to say where he thought Preacher was, he would have said NP-UMC, and he had no idea what had happened. Preacher told him how he was done/treated, the Bishop

apologized for such error and oversight, and Preacher told him that he expected no less than a written apology from Sylvia Collins, pastor at Branch Street UMC and director of the Co-op, and Leonard Fairly no later than Wed, Aug 2, 2006 - 5:00pm or his lawyer (who agreed to take on Preachers case pro-bono would have (Preachers) letter delivered to him (the Bishop) Thurs, Aug 3, 2006 at 9:00am. Well, on 7/31/06 and 8/1/06, the Bishop called Preacher twice. Once to ask for an 'extension' on time limit for the letters of apology because he had been in Seoul, Korea (which Preacher flat out refused to give) and the second time to ask Preacher 'what could be done to make things better, to 'appease' him'. Well, Preacher reminded him of the expected letters of apology and told him to reappoint him back to NP-UMC and put it in writing that he wouldn't be moved until he or the congregation said so. Bishop said something like "Bro. Dwayne, now I just don't know if I can do that...." Preacher at that point cut the conversation short and hasn't heard from the Bishop since. Well, in the meantime, Sylvia and Leonard both left message on Preachers answering machine on (I think) Tues, Aug 1, 2006 stating that they would be delivering the letters on Wed, Aug 2 per his request. Preacher went onto work, but they both, personally delivered letters of apology to the Preacher's house - his wife, Theresa, got them and gave them to Dwayne. Preacher said that he felt Leonard's was heartfelt, and even called him upon reading the letter and told him that apology was accepted, all was forgiven and if he could do anything for him (Leonard), to let him know. On the other hand, he said that Sylvia's letter was a little less heartfelt and per the letter was only written at the request of her 'district supervisor'. So, all that being said, I sent a copy of my letter straight to the Bishop's email with this note on 7/31/06:

Bishop Gwinn,

I thought you might be interested in the efforts that have been made on behalf of Pastor Dwayne Lowry and New Philadelphia UMC. Although you have 'indirectly' provided clarification on your statement re: homosexuality and church membership (per newsletter dated 11/3/05), I think it is still important that people know how New Philadelphus UMC was disregarded in attempts at gaining your "personal" clarification on the issue at hand.

MANY people have received and reviewed my letter and I have met with newspapers and publicists, who have agreed to publish the letter and the events surrounding it.

He responded back on same day with:

Dear Ms. McNeill,

On July 16 I left for the World Methodist Conference in Seoul, Korea and returned on the night of July 29. Today I met with the New Philadelphus Pastor Parish Relations Committee chair and another member of your church to discuss the issues of concern for the congregation, some of which you mention in your e-mail. We have planned for a meeting on August 13 at New Philadelphus at which time I will speak personally regarding my agreement with our church's stand that we do not condone homosexuality and find it "to be incompatible with Christian teaching."

The Grace and Peace of our Lord,

Bishop Al Gwinn
1307 Glenwood Ave.

Mr. Morris,

An email I received on 7/30/06 strongly encouraged me to obtain a DVD made December 14, 2005 entitled "Bishop Gwinn Statement To [The] SPRC. I did just that...to review and use as ammo if needed when the meeting 8/13/06 took place. I got it, reviewed it, and typed word for word every single word of his 6 min. statement. So,

I...We...anxiously awaited the Bishops arrival on 8/13/06 at NP-UMC. I felt like a lawyer with all my paperwork in hand, reviewing every little note I had made, rehearsing in my mind how I was going to present my argument.

The Bishop, the DS, and the current pastor, George Locklear - and most of the congregation were present. Tony Revels opened with a word of prayer and then reminded us all that we were all there to get clarification on the Bishop's stand on homosexuality, and NOT to discuss Preacher Dwayne's departure - not unless it was something that he, the Bishop, wanted to bring up and discuss. Bishop started by saying that he left a meeting early and was pushing the speed limit to get to NP-UMC for the meeting, and he stood by the Bible's teaching of homosexuality, and that the events surrounding Preacher Dwayne's leaving (and lack of consultation with the appropriate persons) was not handled in the right way, and he took full responsibility for any and all decisions that were made, and the DS should be given a little leeway because he's only been over appointments/ duties for a year, and he (Bishop) should have been more involved in assisting the DS.

"All well and good", I thought to myself. After many had their say, finally, my time came. I told him, pleaded if you will, that while I appreciate him "taking responsibility" for what had happened, he had the opportunity to nullify any and all decisions that had been made re: Preachers leaving, since (as he put it) the buck stops on his desk - and he makes all final decisions re: appointments, etc. and share in (what could be) a victorious day for NP-UMC. I reminded him of his statements he made to the SPRCs about consultation being valued (with PPRC/SPRC) because "provides meaningful dialog wherein important information is both shared and received before any final decisions are made". I also reminded him of his statement that "longevity of clergy leadership is an indispensable ingredient of healthy congregations." I informed him that NP-UMC was a vibrant, healthy, thriving church until we were blind-sided with this situation, and that poor decision making on his part (*hint*hint* - POOR LEADERSHIP SKILLS) is directly responsible for separation in the church. Again, I quoted him: "Separation most always deepens the problems that are causing the conflict and rarely ever heals anything". I brought back his memory that he was the one who said that "When a congregation and/or a clergy person feels that the "season" of ministry is completed, then you may contact your district superintendent in December or January, and that superintendent will guide you toward the next steps".

It was at the end of a well winded speel that I thought George Locklear was going to lose his breath saying "no, no...he can't do that... things aren't done that way...no, Dwayne ain't coming back here". While others were getting in an uproar, the Bishop, for the moment, lost his focus on me and my plight and moved onto the next question/comment.

I got the chance to again confront him with the church's need for his clarification on homosexuals and membership. I told him we were all gracious that he made the long trip to Red Springs and while we ALL agree with Biblical teachings re: homosexuality - I wanted to know how he felt re: homosexuality not being a barrier to church membership. About 10 minutes passed with him never answering my question directly. I brought to his remembrance the (I hope I'm saying this right) pastoral letter that the article at the UMC.ORG website made reference to: United Methodist bishops affirm church membership open to all (11/03/2005).

Basically, he proceeded to say that the whole letter was somewhat shady with grey areas and that everything was not presented in the way it should have been re: homosexuals in the church. Again, I asked him (reminding him that when Preacher Dwayne was there, we never had to guess where he stood on issues because he 'gave it to us straight (no pun intended)' if he felt that homosexuality was or was not a barrier to church membership. He responded in sorts, that homosexuals, when accepted into the church as members, need on to be in the process of 'changing' not completely 'changed' -in a sense, just working on it.

At that point, at least half of the church members present got up and walked out. Surprisingly, it was the young/middle aged members - who you would *expect* to be more mainstreamed and accepting and tolerant of 'alternative lifestyles', that left and the elders who support the new pastor, George Locklear (who agrees with the Bishop's stand on homosexuality and how a person can be in a 'changing mode' when accepted into the church) were the ones who stayed.

In closing, this is what I'm almost certain is going to happen: the half that walked out need someone like Preacher Dwayne. They need someone who will guide and direct them in the right way...allowing more time to focus on the needs of the community and each other. Preacher Dwayne is now involved in a non-profit organization called Sacred Pathways

- donation/faith based - which meets pretty much all the needs of the community from substance abuse counseling and assistance/food bank/clothing/housing/financial assistance, etc.

In one of the last conversations I had with Preacher Dwayne, he said that so far this year, Sacred Pathways has served close to 2,000 meals to the community. This is proof of God's phenomenal power working through those who truly serve Him.

Speaking of helping the needy, one NP-UMC church member who an assistant to Preacher Dwayne when he was in charge of the food bank at NP-UMC, said that shortly after George began preaching there, he asked her if she was the one who was over the food bank when Dwayne was at NP-UMC. She said yes, and he said that 'well, we need to get that started back up'. She said, "OK....that's fine. So, how many days will you be giving up on your other job (with housing authority) to help out?" He gave her a surprised look, like a deer in the headlights so to speak, and said 'HUH?!?' She said, "Yeah, I mostly did the paperwork...but it was Preacher Dwayne who gave up 2-3 days a week from his own job to run the food bank". Needless to say, that was the end of that conversation and the idea of a food bank at NP-UMC.

George has been quoted as saying, "My job might require I work some Sundays, but I'll never volunteer to work on them (Sundays)." Again, this is something we never had to worry about with Preacher Dwayne - we knew he would always be in church, if not NP - somewhere, every Sunday morning. Man, what an example he set for us!

As for the present, we are all kind of scattered - going to different churches, awaiting Preacher Dwayne to get a church. I've thought a lot about what you said about 'just staying and not giving up/giving in'.... Well, the price Jesus paid for us all is unimaginable. However, every time someone chooses not to serve Him, and go to hell...even *He* has to count it as a loss. Unfortunate, but true.

I feel like my home (New Philadelphus UMC) was invaded and I was being forced to either comply or leave. As for me and my family (me, my husband NJ and our daughters Kennedy and Madison) and others, we have decided to leave. We are currently attending Union Chapel Holiness Methodist Church in Pembroke, NC. Angela, Philip and Andrea Tyler, Dwayne Lowery and his son, Roman and my dad, Joel Lewis all go there. Preacher Dwayne even joined the church sometime early Oct. 06. It's a very nice church...has taken some time getting used to everyone and the routine so to speak on Sunday mornings...but it's starting to feel like home.

From what I hear in circles, NP-UMC is "drying up and withering away". It appears as though the people who used to be the strong voices of the church are now taking that 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' attitude. Seems that the people are becoming stagnated, fixated if you will, and not pushing any issues, not bucking or questioning ANYTHING - almost at a loss of what to do next. I never thought that the people who chose to stay would do so out of convenience or because that's where 'momma has always gone'. I thought they would either stay and FIGHT or leave. This seems so "black and white" in my mind, but for other, they seem to be in a grey place - not a place I would want to be. I'm not sure if that church had charge conference yet - not sure how the votes went re: apportionments.

We appreciate receiving the newsletter from the Concerned Methodists. I was quite surprised to see that last year the Methodists lost approximately 88,000 members, more or less due to the homosexual issue.

We have not heard from anyone, not DS Fairley, the Bishop Al Gwinn, not even from the church we used to attend, since the meeting 8/13/06. I feel sad for the whole situation, but accepting of what has transpired, and it's getting easier everyday.

I'm sorry this is so lengthy, but so much has happened since we met. Everything in this letter is, to the best of my knowledge, true. Again, I thank you for all you have done. If I can be of any further assistance to you, please feel free to contact me. Take Care and God Bless.

Your Sister in Christ,
Vivian McNeill

Mission projects from 1999-June 2006 for New Philadelphus Church:

<u>Mission Project Location</u>	<u>Number of days</u>
Montero, Bolivia South America (Guarani Indians) (3 trips)	42
Chugiak, Alaska (2 trips)	17
Anchorage, Alaska	10
Bellingham, Washington (Nooksak tribe)	6
Philadelphia, Mississippi (Choctaw tribe)	11
Ten Killer Reservation, Oklahoma (Western Band of Cherokee)	7
Brighton Indian Reservation, Florida (two trips)	9
Holly Hill, South Carolina (Santee tribe)	11
Hamer, South Carolina (Fairview UMC)	5
Jordan Chapel Community-Burgaw, North Carolina (Hurricane Floyd relief)	49
Tarboro/Princeton, North Carolina (Historical Primitive Baptist Church)	2
Camp Rockfish, Hope Mills North Carolina	6
Rowland, North Carolina (Pargoe Home)	9
Rockingham, North Carolina (Trinity UMC)	2
Pembroke, North Carolina (St. James UMC)	6
(West Robeson UMC)	5
Lumberton, North Carolina (Branch Street UMC)	2
St. Pauls, North Carolina (Miller's Chapel UMC)	2
Clinton, North Carolina (Coharie UMC)	6
Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana (Fact finding)	5
Dulac, Louisiana (Houma tribe) Rita (two Trips)	17
Biloxi, Mississippi (Dial Home) Katrina	4
Local Projects to renovate homes within the Church and community at large	20
Lettering on the Coop trailer	2
Food bank stocking and distribution	30

These events from a "part-time" local pastor who also taught bible-study on Wednesday Nights as well as, Sunday school and delivered sermons on Sunday mornings

Mr. Morris,

We applaud your efforts in helping us, former United Methodists, be 'heard'. You have proven to be instrumental in getting the truth out as to what really happened at New Philadelphus UMC. Thank you. Please feel free to contact me in the future if needed.

Sincerely,

Vivian McNeill

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Methodist Conference locks up Ohio church

Miller, OH - Imagine being locked out of your church in the morning with padlocks and a note on the door. That's what members of a small country church in Miller, Ohio faced, but they did something about it. The Forest Glen United Methodist Church did not hand over money to the UM Conference. The doors were locked and a no trespassing sign was taped to the door. The signs & locks were removed and the 15 members of the church planned on resuming services on Sunday morning.

Arlie Ramey has attended Forest Glen for almost fifty years. She says she can't believe the Methodist Conference would try to lock them out. "What I think is unfair is they think all of the money is theirs when they haven't supported our church in any way," said Ramey. According to Ramey, the church was in the process of breaking away from the Methodist Conference and changing its name to the Forest Glen Independent Church. In the process, she says the Methodist Conference is asking for all records and funds. "We don't object to paying the church the appraised price, but we object to them taking all the money in our treasury," Ramey elaborated. Mrs. Ramey said the congregation voted to surrender all financial records and accounts in July, but didn't realize that included an estimated \$7,000 the church saved to repair the roof.

Rev. David Brown with the West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church gave WSAZ the following statement regarding the Forest Glen's grievances: "They broke the agreement by not completing the sale of the property and transfer of the funds. That's why I've taken these actions."

According to Mrs. Ramey, the church planned on opening for Sunday School at 10 a.m. on Sunday and for their regular 6 p.m. services on Sunday and Wednesday.

Rev. Brown said that it will be up to the bishop of the West Ohio Conference to make a decision whether or not he wants to press charges against church members for trespassing.

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Dr. Maxie Dunnam Comments on Bush Library Controversy

The following statement was written by Dr. Maxie Dunnam, [former] chancellor of Asbury Theological Seminary.

I'm no supporter of the way our President has handled the war. Huge, catastrophic mistakes have been made. This confession is to introduce my concern for the opposition of a group of faculty at Southern Methodist University to The Bush Library being situated on that campus. The petition opposing this action originated with the faculty of the School of Theology, and at my last information, was also signed by 8 bishops of the United Methodist Church. The petitioners contended that it would not be good for the library to be there because the President has held himself apart from the tradition out of which SMU was berthed and strengthened.

What arrogant judgment! My question is how closely has SMU held to the Methodist doctrine, spirit, discipline and tradition that gave her birth, and under whose name she still identifies herself. My question to the bishops who signed the petition is how concerned have you been about the teachings of our Methodist schools and their faithfulness to our Wesleyan way?

If we could put aside the question of the war, who best represents the position of the United Methodist Church on issues like the unique place of Jesus in the salvation of the world, abortion, the family, the practice of homosexuality, same sex marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexual persons, the persecution of Christians around the world, faith-based initiatives that serve the poor and marginalized...who best represents and speaks publicly on these issues in a way that is most in harmony with how we United Methodists have defined ourselves...the President or the faculty?

Apart from all this, SMU would publicly pride her self in being "open-minded" and the champion of intellectual pursuit. Opposition to the Library doesn't sound too "liberal" or "Inclusive", or open to expansive intellectual inquiry.

- As reported by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Washington, DC. February 22, 2007.

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Why the Homosexual Issue is Important

Those of us in Concerned Methodists have been accused of being "preoccupied" with the issue of homosexuality. One of our supporters in the Northern Illinois Conference recommended that we deal with "other, more important things". That is precisely the point - we are talking about souls and their eternal futures; nothing's more important. Others have accused us of "division"; there is division in the church - but it does not come from us. We stand squarely on the orthodox Christian faith, Jesus as fully Lord and Savior, the Bible as being the Word of God, and our Wesleyan heritage.

The area of homosexuality is not an issue of "hate" or "discrimination" - but of sin, obedience, and holiness. I have an adoptive sister who has been involved in lesbian practice. I love her but cannot affirm her lifestyle. An accurate understanding of this area is important to us for several reasons:

1. To advocate for this practice is to go against the truth of Scripture. The Bible invariably speaks out against this practice: Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:18-32, I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:8-10 directly, while Genesis 19, Judges 19, II Peter 2:6-10, and Jude 7 do so indirectly. Professor David A. Seamands has stated in his writing "Blessing the Unblessable" that "every passage which speaks of homosexual behaviors is clear, unambiguously negative and morally hostile towards the actions" themselves.
2. Promotion of homosexual practice denies the transforming work of Jesus Christ in changing our lives.
3. Apology for this practice gives people involved in it a false sense of security. If we truly believe the Bible and its warnings, we find that these individuals do not have a very good spiritual future when they leave this life. In actuality, the Bible tells us that any form of sexual immorality is a sin and calls us to purity and holiness. Jesus himself raised the standard in this area.
4. If this practice is normalized in the United Methodist Church, it would lead to the disintegration of our church as we know it today. Look at what is happening in the Episcopal Church. It is in serious disarray, provides confused moral guidance for its members, and risks declining into a sect.
5. Normalization of this practice in our denomination would cause us to lose our overseas church, especially in Africa. They are the ones who faithfully follow the orthodox Christian faith; it is no coincidence that this is the part of our church that is growing rapidly. In the past, the leaders in this area of the world have asked questions as to why our church leadership in the United States is not more faithful to the teachings of the Bible. The answer to that question would lead to an understanding of our church's decline and possibly into revival.
6. Advocacy for homosexual practice violates the intellectual integrity of our faith, since the stated belief of historical, orthodox faith is obedience to the teachings of Christ. Truth in this area does not seem to be of importance to folks who support this practice. This is only one outward manifestation of disbelief of our orthodox Christian faith by some of our church leaders, who in reality disbelieve the virgin birth, the need for the cross, the resurrection of Jesus, and the truth of the Bible. Dr. Robert Gagnon, a foremost authority on the Bible, recognized that one cannot be intellectually honest and support this practice while believing the truth of Scripture.

In addition, there are some who push this agenda while appearing to be orthodox. They use the "stealth" approach behind "busy work" and aggressive church activity at the local, district, conference, and general church levels to draw attention away from their attempts to advance this very cause of normalizing homosexual practice in our church. In doing this, they've become "false shepherds" to the laypeople.

Please pray for our United Methodist Church – that we remain steadfast in our traditional Wesleyan faith as we go into our annual conferences to pass legislation and elect delegates to next year's 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, Texas.

- Allen O. Morris

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Active Homosexual accepted into Church Membership in Controversial United Methodist Case

*“United Methodism officially declares that homosexual practice,
like other sex outside of marriage,
is ‘incompatible with Christian teaching.’”
- UMAAction Executive Director Mark Tooley*

Washington, DC--The homosexual man who precipitated the two year national controversy over the Rev. Ed Johnson has been accepted as a member at South Hill United Methodist Church in South Hill, Virginia by Rev. Johnson's successor. Two years ago, then-pastor Ed Johnson had declined immediate church membership for the homosexual man, who was cohabitating with his same-sex partner. Bishop Charlene Kammerer intervened, demanding immediate church membership for the homosexual man. When Johnson refused, the bishop put him on unpaid administrative leave. Rev. Johnson was restored to his pulpit at South Hill in Fall 2005. But in Spring 2006, Bishop Kammerer moved him to another congregation. Rev. Johnson's successor at South Hill accepted the homosexual man into membership this month, presumably with the full support of Bishop Kammerer.

UMAction Executive Director Mark Tooley released the following statement:

“This complex story is not about homosexuality per se, but about the meaning of church membership. Liberal bishops and caucus groups insist that church membership is an automatic right. But traditionalists have a more nuanced understanding, believing that church members should seriously strive to live up to their membership vows.

“In October 2005, the United Methodist Church's Judicial Council [decision #1032] overruled Bishop Kammerer, declaring that local pastors have discretion about who is ready for church membership. The church court did not directly address the issue of church membership and homosexual practice. United Methodism officially declares that homosexual practice, like other sex outside of marriage, is ‘incompatible with Christian teaching.’ The denomination does not ordain active homosexuals and expects celibacy of unmarried clergy. But the denomination has no specific law about homosexual practice and church membership. Bishop Kammerer has advocated that all persons who apply for church membership must be automatically enrolled. Rev. Johnson held to a more traditional Methodist view that church members must be ready to live within church teachings. While pastor at South Hill, Rev. Johnson had welcomed the homosexual man, who sang in the church choir. But Rev. Johnson thought more counseling was needed before church membership was appropriate.

“Despite pressures and punishments from his bishop, Rev. Johnson strove to uphold the traditional Wesleyan understanding that church membership is a special vocation, not an automatic right. The traditional understanding, with its focus on conversion, helped Methodism become America's largest church in the 19th century. The ‘inclusivist’ understanding has fueled United Methodism’s loss of 3 million members over the last 40 years in the U.S. So who is genuinely more inclusive?”

- As reported by Ms. Loralei Coyle, The Institute on Religion and Democracy, Washington, DC; March 30, 2007.

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Dear Allen,

Well, it turns out that Dr. Barry Burkholder, the present pastor at South Hill United Methodist Church, turned the tables on us and admitted ____ [the name in the original e-mail has been deleted] into membership on Sunday, March 11th. As you know [he] is the homosexual that will not repent of his sins and that Pastor Ed Johnson, who won his case before the Judicial Council, was counseling...

He [i.e., Burkholder] gave no notice of this. It usually comes in the bulletin but he kept it secret until the last moment. Since then we have had a church in turmoil....

In His Majesty’s Service,
Doug Child

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From the Transforming Congregations’ website:

If you care about what’s happening in our culture and the Church around the issues of sexuality -- and if you want to do something about it -- and if you think that it's more important to reach out in love than to simply make statements ... then you've come to the right place.

Because we want to help you make a difference -- in your own life, in your local congregation and in your world.

Churches are facing some of the most difficult questions of our times, and the world is watching to see how they will answer. Will Christians be a winsome and convincing witness for purity in a sexually permissive society? And what will we do with the sexually confused, broken and sinful in our midst?

For far too many churches the answer is rejection and exclusion. Harsh and condemnatory words are heard from the pulpit, church leadership projects a “holier than thou” attitude, and folk quickly get the message that their particular sins are outside the realm of God’s grace.

Or churches settle for silence and denial. That doesn’t affect us here, whatever that might be. Sexual addiction ... pornography ... homosexuality ... infidelity ... promiscuity. Maybe if we don’t talk about it, it will just go away.

Given those choices, is it any wonder that many kind-hearted people opt for uncritical acceptance? At least there’s a smidgen of compassion in that response.

But Scripture tells us that there is another choice, a more hopeful, holy and loving choice -- and that choice is transformation. God’s grace is so amazing that even the most deeply rooted sexual sin can be overcome. And even the most painful sexual brokenness can be healed.

As you explore our website, we hope you and your church will begin to live out that truth in love.

- <http://www.transformingcong.org/>

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**The Bishops’ Letter - “homosexuality is not a bar to membership”
in the United Methodist Church**

Commentary: When people join the United Methodist Church, they vow to “Renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin.” (page 137, par. 217.1, *Book of Discipline*). In addition, the *Book of Discipline* has the statement, “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching”. (page 197, par. 304.3)

How, then, can one say that “homosexuality is not a bar to membership”? Is it possible to support this position with integrity from any standpoint of logical reasoning? It would appear not.

- Allen O. Morris

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Spiritually speaking:

“If you truly love your fellow man, you must warn him of the danger of losing eternal life. Tell everyone you can reach the glorious story of Jesus, that they may be saved in time. The world is full of people who need salvation. It is our job to find them and deliver the message. - Corrie ten Boom in the book *Each New Day*, p. 6, 1977.

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Suggestion: When pastors and others serve communion, they should use “Handi-wipes” or a sanitizing cloth to clean their hands. They are not always careful of what they touch, and are handling bread that goes into the mouths of the laypeople.

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Become better informed! Read - *At the Crossroad*

For those contributing a gift of \$25 or more to our ministry, we will send a copy of *At the Crossroad*. This book contains 268 pages of data not found in most other sources dealing with our Methodist heritage, finances, polity issues, abortion, political activism, and homosexual practice in our United Methodist Church. Please mail your gifts to:

**Concerned Methodists
P. O. Box 2864
Fayetteville, NC 28302-2864**