### The Christian Methodist Newsletter

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### **New Hope United Methodist Church's Quest**

"What really got us looking was the letter by the bishops saying that homosexuality was not a barrier to membership in the UMC, and we began to ask questions and we got no answers," as Bernie Jones stated. "As a matter of fact, the DS (Al Shuler) put us off two or three times. Before he came to our church he stated that he was not going to answer any of those questions [that we had about areas of serious concern]. After he came I was even more convinced that there was a problem in the Methodist Church. What he did say that was a big help was that there are other conservative organizations out there like... Concerned Methodists.... So we contacted them."

I was asked to speak to a group of churches by some of the members of New Hope United Methodist Church (UMC) who had questions about what was happening in our denomination, especially as it related to how money was being spent, during the meeting held in the Perquimans County High School cafeteria close to Hertford, North Carolina. Of especial concern was the question of money being spent to support the normalization of homosexuality, abortion, and far-left political causes. There was a general feeling that money given by the laity was not being used wisely and was wasted.

During the course of the meeting information was made available to attendees, concerns were addressed, and then an open discussion was held. I had been told that the District Superintendent (DS) Albert Shuler was there; I was disappointed that he did not come up to the front and talk with me at any time at the meeting. Of especial concern were the "Hearts on Fire" conference that had been held recently at Lake Junaluska, the dismissal of The Rev. Ed Johnson (at South Hill UMC in Virginia) and his reinstatement by the United Methodist Judicial Council (Decision 1032), and the subsequent bishops' letter stating that homosexuality was not a bar to membership.

During the question-and-answer period one man stood up in back and started defending the effort for homosexual normalization in the United Methodist Church. Rev. David Beck, Hertford UMC's pastor, went on to say, "By admitting homosexuals into the church we could reverse our problem with declining membership." This raised a red flag with me because the only other time I heard that idea put forth was at the "Hearts on Fire" conference itself and it had been proposed by one of the speakers who was clearly supportive of the homosexual agenda. At times we encounter people who serve as a "spokesman" who appear to be stating an original thought but who are pushing an idea being promoted by those in the UM hierarchy. "Access to salvation should not be based on a person's sexuality," David Beck, was later quoted by the newspaper reporter as saying. "Methodists should be arguing about more important matters than the sexual orientation of potential members," he was quoted. But this is precisely the point; if one is to take the Bible seriously, it links a person's repentance of past sin to salvation offered by Jesus Christ.

Later Al Shuler was quoted as saying, "We have always been a church that practices inclusivity," Shuler said. "That is one of the things the church has always celebrated." Some could mistake the bishops' admissions policy for approval of homosexuality, he said. On the other hand, if local pastors can just change church doctrine whenever they want, based on an opposition to homosexuality, gluttony, adultery or any other supposed sin [Concern-homosexuality is a "supposed sin"?], "then we're really in trouble," Shuler said. "We don't necessarily support war, either," Shuler said. "But how many folks have we put out of the church because they're veterans?" This is woefully absurd and far off the point. Not to mention the fact that the United Methodist Church supports the "Just War" doctrine, John Wesley had very high standards for membership in the "Methodist Societies" and anyone who was lax in his spiritual walk would not be admitted. The church has always had standards and does now, requiring a vow to "repent of one's sins" and to "support the United Methodist Church" – two that those in a same-sex relationship cannot make with integrity. The church has never supported blanket "inclusivity" and would be devoid of standards if it did. If this were our church's policy would it accept into membership someone who practiced the "swinger" lifestyle? What about a member of the American Nazi Party? Or perhaps a member of the Ku Klux Klan? There are many cases of people with lifestyles incompatible with Christian doctrine and the polity of the United Methodist Church.

I am sorry that the reporter did not take an opportunity to verify the truth and correct these ideas - as others that he misreported.

After this meeting the New Hope UMC Administrative Council sent multiple communications to the DS and Bishop seeking information; according to their leadership, they never received substantive answers. Afterwards, they redirected apportionments, and their preacher was transferred. According to Bernie Jones, "The preacher [Alan Gibson, whose daughter was a senior in high school] didn't want to leave at first, then all of a sudden decided to go." They had been there

for 7 years and his daughter Hannah Gibson was a high school senior, so he would have wanted to stay. But the members of New Hope UMC wanted them to stay, and then she could finish out her senior year in school. Rev. Gibson did leave and Bob Tilley took his place.

### According to members of New Hope UMC:

During the first few months Rev. Tilley met with the Lay Leadership Committed and completed a slate of officers for the coming year; this was approved by the Administrative Council and finalized for the Charge Conference to be held later.

After several more months Rev. Tilley sought new leadership for the church in a "non-public" way. According to Tommy Jones, Bob went to Frank Heath and told him that Tommy did not want his job as Chair of the Finance Committee any longer and he (Bob) needed someone to take his place. Later Frank told Tommy what had happened. Tommy told me, "I went up to Bob Tilley and asked him what he meant by going behind my back and telling Frank Heath that I didn't want my job? Then Bob said, 'What are you talking about?' Then he confessed and said, 'I'm sorry. I was forced to do it.' I told him, 'It would be a long time before I could trust you again.' I told him in a Christian way that I didn't appreciate what he was doing and that he was wrong." Later, when Frank had been told he would be nominated as chair of the Finance Committee, he said that he didn't want it [under those circumstances].

Bernie Jones: "He [Bob Tilley] went up to Mike McCleary and told him that they were going to replace some of the officers. Mike made a statement that 'it sounds like a coup to me' and the pastor pretty much agreed with him. Mike then said, 'Well, I don't want any part of it. I don't want to be used like that." Per Bernie's talk with the DS at the first Church Conference [on November 13<sup>th</sup>] he [the DS] had instructed Bob to get new officers for the church. "I kept asking him [Preacher Won] did he order Bob to replace the people on the Administrative Council, he responded each time but never answered. I then said, 'Preacher Won, did you or did you not tell our pastor to replace the people on the Administrative Council?' He paused a little and then he said, 'I did.'" Tommy then added, "Because he knew he wasn't going to get away with it." Bernie concluded, "We already knew he had done it; I wanted to hear him say it."

Per Bernie, on December 3<sup>rd</sup> the DS Won Namkoong went to their church and announced that there would be a church conference on the 17<sup>th</sup> and then told the people that if anyone didn't agree with what was happening in the Methodist Church they needed to get out. He said that "we will do three things at the next conference. We will vote on the pastor's salary. We will elect a new slate of officers. We will reinstate paying apportionments."

On December 17<sup>th</sup> New Hope UMC held their Christmas Cantata. That afternoon the DS held their Church Conference; he told the people who were not members of the congregation to leave. After some hesitation, I did so, questioning the legality of his move and wondering why he wanted to make it a "closed" meeting; what was there to hide? He then started the Church Conference by leading the folks in singing, "Blessed be the tie that binds." What followed was one of the most divisive things I had ever seen. Some of the attendees had not been seen in church in a long time; others were "twice a year" attendees. When questioned after the meeting as to why they had attended and voted the way they did they replied, "We were told that they were going to close the church."

It appeared that the agenda had been orchestrated with Bob Tilley introducing a new slate of officers that had not been put forth by the Lay Leadership Committee nor had been voted by the Administrative Council; the approved list was never presented. One of the people stood up and said, "This is a whole new list that I have not laid eyes on until now." The DS said, "It does not matter." A lady pointed out, "This is not the one we had decided on by the Lay Leadership Committee!" That point was ignored. Kyle Jones then pointed out to the DS that the previous list had been approved unanimously by the Administrative Council; the DS ignored that fact. The new list was voted. A later review of the list showed "TBA" ("To be announced") in many of the leadership positions - the person who had been in that position had been removed and they had not found anyone else to take that individual's place.

Later in the meeting the DS alluded to "terrorists" to which H. R. Jones said, "I don't appreciate being called a terrorist!" In his later remarks the DS emphasized the importance of the Finance Chairperson and that the Family, Youth, and children's ministries are minor things. One of the ladies verified that with him; he replied, "Yes, they are minor things."

When Rev. Won closed out the Church Conference, he led the folks in singing, "Blessed be the tie that binds" - just like at General Conference with Bishop Janice Riggle Huie after she had allowed the extremely divisive march by the pro-gay group seeking to get the church to overturn its stance on homosexuality. One of the men who was a non-member but a faithful attendee told the DS, "I have been going to this church for 20 years and I resent you making me leave!" Another person who was a member, said later that when Rev. Won told them "if you don't agree with what was going on in the United Methodist Church you need to leave" she resented it with, "He's not even an American citizen; who is he to tell me to leave my church?"

At 5:00 P.M. just a few minutes after the end of the Church Conference, the members held their Christmas play "The Reason" about the birth of Christ. Of the actors, all except one of the participants were members of the group who had just been "ousted" from their positions in the church. After what had just happened I wondered, "What type of Christians are these who could have their Christmas Cantata that morning, rise above the way they had been treated so shabbily, and carry on with their Christmas play as if nothing had happened? With all of the ugliness, orchestration, and manipulation that had been going on, and having just been kicked out of their positions - these people are truly amazing."

In the new slate of officers Mark Rossnagel, who was nominated chair of the PPR, resigned and told them to take his name off the list. Frank Heath, who appeared on the list, asked to be removed from the Finance Committee. Patty Rossnagel later resigned as chair of Education and Creative Ministries. The Treasurer Donna Harris resigned at a later board meeting; she had been Treasurer for several years. Bernie noted that, "When she resigned she read a letter telling them why she resigned; she really laid it on them. She read it in tears. We found out later on that the only reason that she was not replaced is because they couldn't find anybody to take her job."

In a December 26, 2006 letter to Bishop Gwinn, both Tommy Jones and Bernie Jones, who were Chair of the Finance Committee and a Member of the Administrative Council (respectively) of New Hope UMC wrote to Bishop Gwinn, "We want you, our bishop, to achieve a just resolution to this situation." Apparently, none was.

#### A message sent by Kyle Jones to the DS Won Namkoong is incisive:

"In a denomination that has hemorrhaged members like the United Methodist Church has...and no end to this free fall in sight (69,141 U.S. members lost in 2003 and 71,518 in 2004) I believe the [Church] is suffering because of it's turn away from Biblical principles. When a [Church] loses members like the United Methodist Church has, they have to clamp down on and solidify their sources of revenue, and that is why we are seeing more churches bullied by the conference when they attempt to express their discontent with the direction of their apportionment funds. In addition, they abuse the pastoral appointment process, and now often use it as a form of control, to stifle debate and quiet dissension; I know of many such examples.

I believe you are a Godly man, Preacher Won, and I believe that Bishop Gwinn is, as well. However, with the conference in such a crucial stage, it appears to me that the employees of the United Methodist Conference would rather squash the spread of truth than see eyes opened to it. As you may have noticed, I am slated to, upon approval at Church Conference, be one of our church's delegates to Annual Conference next year. I wanted this position because I decided a while ago that I would like to attempt to be a delegate at General Conference 2008, and as you know, I must be one of my church's lay delegates to do so. My desire as a delegate is not to further a political agenda or a particular ideology. My intentions and my prayer for the United Methodist [Church] is that it would return to Christ-centered teachings and biblically-sound policies, and that the Lord would be able to use the United Methodist Church to make disciples of Christ while always upholding what is true and just.

I believe that in terms of the life of my church, we find ourselves now at a crossroads. Because of the position in which we have placed ourselves and, consequently, the position that you are in, you are now tasked with doing one of two things: hindering our stand for truth, or assisting it. I want this to be very clear: there is no middle ground, for either of us. You must either do one of those things, or do the other....

New Hope United Methodist Church has taken a stand for truth, and I intend to go along as far as it takes us. I do this because when I die, and I stand in judgment before the Lord, out of all the sinful things that I have done so far, and have yet to do, one thing that I want to be able to tell Him is that I stood for truth. I want to be able to say that because of the Lord working through me and others, the [Church] was restored to what John Wesley intended it to be. If we fail in this attempt... at the very least, I will stand in judgment and be able to say "I did my best." I have long thought of the things that I would have to answer for when I die. Of these things will be how good of a steward I was with what the Lord gave me...."

And, of course, with the sitting leadership of the church ousted from their positions, Kyle will not be going to the North Carolina Annual Conference as a delegate and has little chance of being elected as a delegate to the 2008 General Conference in Ft. Worth, Texas.

The Bishops called for dialogue at the 2004 General Conference – where is the dialogue here? Why weren't the questions answered of the New Hope United Methodist leadership answered? Where was the compassion for the good people of this church?

The publicity slogan for the United Methodist Church is "Open hearts, Open minds, Open doors," – where is that evidenced in the treatment given to the leadership of this church? Is there any truth to the words in that slogan – or is it a case of just empty rhetoric?

- Allen O. Morris

### **Notes:**

1. "Gay membership divides Methodists" by Chris Whipple, *The Daily Advance*, February 12, 2006. 2. Ibid.

- 3. Meetings with members of New Hope UMC; their personal statements.
- 4 Letter from Kyle Jones to Rev. Won Namkoong.

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### Allen,

It seems impossible to make people aware of all the details concerning this situation...the generational family ties with the church, the Spirit-filled services, not typical of a UMC, just destroyed without even a care as to the eternal damage done to the church and the community. It is one thing to have a different opinion and a different approach to issues, but the complete disregard for the spiritual consequences of their actions is unacceptable to me. I am fully convinced that there is no limit to what the UMC heirarchy will do to silence members who take a stand for truth so that lay people will not become aware of the truth, and to keep the flow of their money uninterrupted.

And if anyone thinks I may be exaggerating, just give it a try.

In Christ,

Bernie

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# Allen, This is the statement our Administrative Counsel gave to the DS prior to our last meeting, which he attended.... God Bless. Bernie Jones

"In light of information we have gathered over the last several months concerning homosexuality and other important issues facing the UMC, as of February 2006, the administrative Council of New Hope UMC has voted to redirect our apportionment dollars into ministries **not** designated by the United Methodist [i.e., North Carolina Annual] Conference. Stated below are some of the problems we have discovered within the UMC, *(documentation attached)*. [In the original letter. Also, where the phrases were emphasized in bold letters, this was in the original sent to us. AOM]

1. <u>Homosexuality</u>. There are Bishops and organizations funded by the UMC **local Church apportionments** that have supported the cause of homosexual practice **by their actions**. The "homosexual timeline" contained in the book *Homosexuality and the United Methodist Church* shows a long track record of support for this advocacy by bishops, UM clergy, and other groups funded by apportionment dollars. It should be noted that the UM General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) introduced petitions to the various General Conferences requesting the UMC Book of Discipline be changed to **condone** homosexual practice. This reflects the thinking of those in power at the GBCS as to this area.

The latest events in this area have been 1) the "Hearts on Fire" conference at Lake Junaluska, 2) the meeting of the Council of Bishops at the same place, seemingly in support of what happened there, 3) Bishop Charlene Kammerer's efforts to remove Rev. Ed Johnson, who had (rightfully) not permitted a **practicing** homosexual into his church, and 4) the letter by the bishops in effect trying to overrule the Judicial Council in its ruling.

This last (the bishops' letter) was a very serious thing and showed the depth of the problems that are present in the Council of Bishops. First of all, it quoted from the UMC Book of Discipline, but did **not** include the passage that states that "homosexuality is **incompatible** with Christian teaching" – a serious omission. It is like the Council of Bishops are wanting to present one side of the issue – a side supporting it - and not the other side. Second, it failed to recognize that the practice of homosexuality is a sin. Third, it seems to condone homosexuality by saying that it is **no** barrier to membership in the United Methodist Church; this is against our entire Wesleyan heritage which has always set standards for church membership. Is this to say that there are no standards for joining the United Methodist Church? Also, it would mean that someone joining the UMC would have to lie since the person would have to say that he "repented of his sin" without really having done so. Finally, it seems to be a power grab by the Council of Bishops setting itself above the Judicial Council and the UMC Book of Discipline.

The UMC Book of Discipline states in paragraph 138 "inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons who **meet the requirements of the UMC Book of Discipline** in the membership and leadership of the Church at any level and in every place.", and paragraph 161 G states that "The UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.". And furthermore the Holy Bible refers to homosexuality in Romans 1:26 as a "shameful desire". (One of many references to the sin of homosexuality) (documentation attached) [In the original letter]

2. <u>Abortion</u>. The UMC has had a history of support of this since passage of the Roe versus Wade decision. This support has been through personnel **on** staff with some of the general boards who **worked to make that decision happen** and who used the "good name" of the UMC in that effort.

Some of the UMC apportionments have supported, either directly or indirectly, people and organizations such as Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and other pro-abortion groups. The UMC Book of Discipline states in paragraph 161 j "We **cannot** affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection." (documentation attached) [In the original letter]

- **3.** <u>Politics.</u> UMC lobby groups like the General Board of Church and Society funded by apportionments, lobby against the thinking of many mainstream UMC members and for left wing political causes. Such as: reproductive rights (which is abortion), gun control, opposition to the war with Iraq and initiatives to overturn the UMC's position opposing the practice of homosexuality. This is money wasted that has nothing to do with what should be the spiritual actions of our church. (*Documentation attached*) [In the original letter]
- **4.** <u>Stewardship.</u> Quite simply, we do not believe that the money we send is being used wisely. We believe that so much is wasted on causes that have nothing to do with real Christian work. A very small amount of the money designated for "missions" is actually used for evangelistic missions, and the amount of missionaries being sent out is decreasing as the amount of money received by the UMC through apportionments, for missions, increases. In the 1920s we had over 2500 foreign missionaries, now as of 2003 we had 367. It is hard to accept that more money is used to support the headquarters of the General Board of Global Ministries in New York City than the **whole foreign missionary force**. Also, our denomination has been declining for over 30 years. Obviously, we are not doing the "right things" the things that good leadership would have us doing so that we could grow as a church. This is not consistent with sound stewardship principles as stated in the UMC Book of Discipline paragraph 629.5.d. (documentation attached) [In the original letter]

The closer we look at the hierarchy of the UMC, the more convinced we are that our leadership needs to model good stewardship in the administration of the polity, if they want us to be good stewards of our money, time and gifts. We cannot in good conscience be a part of funding the UMC until we see the polity and *Discipline of our Church* administrated with integrity and accountability. Such blatant disregard of our polity and Discipline, and the Holy Bible, as cited in this letter and other documentation attached, makes it clear that we really don't have a "covenant community" or a "connectional church...."

### **Worth Remembering**

### The Purpose of Life

In the interview by Paul Bradshaw with Rick Warren, Rick said:

People ask me, "What is the purpose of life? And I respond: In a nutshell, life is preparation for eternity. We were made to last forever, and God wants us to be with Him in Heaven. One day my heart is going to stop, and that will be the end of my body--but not the end of me. I may live 60 to 100 years on earth, but I am going to spend trillions of years in eternity.

This is the warm-up act - the dress rehearsal. God wants us to practice on earth what we will do forever in eternity. We were made by God and for God, and until you figure that out, life isn't going to make sense. Life is a series of problems: Either you are in one now, you're just coming out of one, or you're getting ready to go into another one. The reason for this is that God is more interested in your character than your comfort. God is more interested in making your life holy than He is in making your life happy. We can be reasonably happy here on earth, but that's not the goal of life. The goal is to grow in character, in Christ likeness.

This past year has been the greatest year of my life but also the toughest, with my wife, Kay, getting cancer. I used to think that life was hills and valleys - you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don't believe that anymore. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for. You can focus on your purposes, or you can focus on your problems. If you focus on your problems, you're going into self-centeredness, "which is my problem, my issues, my pain." But one of the easiest ways to get rid of pain is to get your focus off yourself and onto God and others.

We discovered quickly that in spite of the prayers of hundreds of thousands of people, God was not going to heal Kay or make it easy for her. It has been very difficult for her, and yet God has strengthened her character, given her a ministry of helping other people, given her a testimony, drawn her closer to Him and to people.

You have to learn to deal with both the good and the bad of life. Actually, sometimes learning to deal with the good is harder. For instance, this past year, all of a sudden, when the book sold 15 million copies, it made me instantly very wealthy. It also brought a lot of notoriety that I had never had to deal with before. I don't think God gives you money or notoriety for your own ego or for you to live a life of ease.

So I began to ask God what He wanted me to do with this money, notoriety and influence. He gave me two different passages that helped me decide what to do, II Corinthians 9 and Psalm 72 First, in spite of all the money coming in, we would not change our lifestyle one bit. We made no major purchases. Second, about midway through last year, I stopped taking a salary from the church. Third, we set up foundations to fund an initiative we call The Peace Plan to plant churches, equip leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick, and educate the next generation. Fourth, I added up all that the church had paid me in the 24 years since I started the church, and I gave it all back. It was liberating to be able to serve God for free.

We need to ask ourselves: Am I going to live for possessions? Popularity? Am I going to be driven by pressures? Guilt? Bitterness? Materialism? Or am I going to be driven by God's purposes (for my life)?

When I get up in the morning, I sit on the side of my bed and say, "God, if I don't get anything else done today, I want to know You more and love You better ... God didn't put me on earth just to fulfill a to-do list. He's more interested in what I am than what I do. That's why we're called human beings, not human doings.

- Received from Capt. W.E. Saunders

### **Thought for the Month**

Happy moments, PRAISE GOD. Difficult moments, SEEK GOD. Quiet moments, WORSHIP GOD Painful moments, TRUST GOD. Every moment, THANK GOD.

### **Spiritually Speaking**

"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."

- Phil 2:14-16

## Kids' Stuff

A little boy opened the big family bible. He was fascinated as he fingered through the old pages. Suddenly, some-thing fell out of the Bible. He picked up the object and looked at it. What he saw was an old leaf that had been pressed in between the pages. "Mama, look what I found", the boy called out."

What have you got there, dear?"

With astonishment in the young boy's voice, he answered, "I think it's Adam's underwear!"