

A NOTE TO THE LIFEWATCH COMMUNITY

Since the specially called 2019 General Conference will take place soon—from February 23 until February 26—Lifewatch decided to release its March 1, 2019 newsletter a month early. That allows Lifewatch to propose its witness one more time, before the called General Conference convenes in St. Louis, to General Conference delegates, to other United Methodist laity and clergy, and to those beyond the United Methodist household.

In this early-released issue of Lifewatch, we try to provide information that is directly or indirectly pertinent to the issues that are before the 2019 General Conference. We hope, for example, that reading the 2019 Lifewatch Sermon by Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker prepares one to participate more fully in, or to observe more wisely, the upcoming General Conference.

For months, Lifewatch has attempted to persuade delegates to the 2019 General Conference to vote for the Traditional Plan, however it might be modified. That is no secret. But why has Lifewatch been so insistent, so single-minded? Because the Traditional Plan is the only plan currently on the denominational table that is consistent with the teaching of our Lord on marriage and sexuality. All the other plans, if adopted, would create protected spaces in The United Methodist Church for false teachings and false practices. That is, all the other plans, if approved, would make our Lord's teaching on marriage and sexuality optional or a matter of choice. Only the Traditional Plan helps The United Methodist Church to receive and maintain our Lord's teaching, and to live in ways that are consistent with that teaching.

Each day, live in the faith, hope, and love that only God can give. And continue to pray for The United Methodist Church, the 2019 General Conference delegates, and the bishops who will preside at the General Conference. Thank you. (PTS)

DOCUMENTATION: THE LIFEWATCH LETTER TO THE 2019 GENERAL CONFERENCE DELEGATES

January 4, 2019

Dear 2019 General Conference Delegate:

In the name of Jesus Christ—Son of God, born of Mary, and Lord and Savior of the world—greetings!

Thank you for being a delegate to the special, called 2019 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. With God's help, you can faithfully serve Christ and His Church.

In preparing for General Conference, remember that Holy Scripture and denominational doctrine direct The United Methodist Church to give primary attention and allegiance to Jesus Christ and His word.

*After Jesus' Transfiguration, God the Father speaks: "This is my Son...listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5, NRSV and

emphasis added, here and below)

*Commissioning the Church, Jesus declares: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20).

*Preparing His disciples for the time after His ascension, Jesus promises: "...he [the Spirit of truth] will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:14)

*At Cana of Galilee, Jesus' mother Mary orders the wedding servants: "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5)

*The United Methodist Church's doctrines also focus the church's attention on Jesus Christ (the Word of God). The Articles of Religion note that in the church "the pure Word of God is preached" (XIII). The Confession of Faith states that the church is "under the Lordship of Christ" and is "the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached" (V).

Again and again, Scripture and doctrine point The United Methodist Church to Jesus Christ and His teaching. So The United Methodist Church should give full, undivided attention to Jesus Christ as He teaches: "...*from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.*" (Mark 10:6-9) One man. One woman. One flesh. This is what Jesus taught about marriage and human sexuality, and it is what the Church universal has taught through the ages.

The United Methodist Church should teach, in the context of the Gospel of God's forgiveness, what Jesus and the universal Church have taught about marriage and sexuality. Why? Because Jesus Christ alone guides the Church. The Church does not make up its own teaching to replace the teaching of Christ.

For this one reason, Lifewatch urges you to vote for the Traditional Plan, however it might be modified, at the 2019 General Conference. Only the Traditional Plan affirms our Lord's teaching on marriage and sexuality. The One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan, though well intentioned, aim to make our Lord's teaching on marriage and sexuality optional in The United Methodist Church. *Therefore, the only way forward, for The United Methodist Church, is hearing and heeding Jesus Christ through the Traditional Plan.*

Be faithful to Christ and His Church for the sake of the world.

In Christ,
(The Rev.) Paul T. Stallsworth
President and Editor, Lifewatch

FAITHFUL TEACHING: BISHOP WILLIAM R. CANNON'S 1984 EPISCOPAL ADDRESS

The Journal of the 1984 General Conference states: *“The Episcopal Address [of 1984] has been written by Bishop William R. Cannon, who was selected by the Council of Bishops. It has been perfected for presentation at the 1984 session of the General Conference after considerable preparation, including discussion and debate at regular meetings of the Council of Bishops. Though not reflecting the view of every bishop at every point, in finished form this address has been approved by the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church”* (p. 186).

The following quotations from the 1984 Episcopal Address are extraordinarily faithful to United Methodist doctrine and discipline (not to mention the catholic Church's faith across the churches, around the world, and through the ages). For that reason, they are highly relevant to The United Methodist Church during these days of preparation and prayer before the special, called 2019 General Conference.

Under the heading “Our Inspiration from the Past,” Bp. Cannon quotes Rev. John Wesley: “As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one of the other.... They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely set them free.” (Wesley's “Letter to Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and Our Brethren in North America” from Abel Stevens' History of the Methodist Episcopal Church [Volume II, p. 183])

Bp. Cannon noted that, from its beginnings, the Methodist Episcopal Church's “doctrines, so it believed, came by divine revelation, not human discovery, so they were not subject to the changing opinions of succeeding general conferences.” (p. 168) Furthermore, according to Bp. Cannon, the church's purpose was clear: “The Methodist Episcopal Church, in its first Discipline, declared that God raised it up ‘to reform the continent and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.’ The twin foci of our denomination since its inception have been social involvement and evangelization, the reformation of society according to the ideals of the Kingdom of God, and the salvation of individual men and women through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (p. 168)

Under the heading of “Our Duty Is in the Present” and the subheading of “Personal Redemption and

Righteousness,” Bp. Cannon spoke strongly: “The church is not to be a mirror of the world but a reflection of heaven. Its ethics are the teachings of Jesus and not the mores of contemporary secular society. The basis of its message is the disclosure of God, not the opinions of people. It is the servant of God's word revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It does not countenance as a permissive life style what the Bible labels as sin, nor is it to subvert the heinousness of sin by excusing it as an illness or minor mistake. The Bible affirms, ‘the soul that sinneth, it shall die’ (Ezekiel 14:4).

“Though the church stands in judgment and condemns sin, it never ceases to love the sinner. Like its Lord, it is invariably compassionate, merciful, and forgiving. It cannot turn its back on any suppliant. Its doors are always open to sinners, and they are welcome into its fellowship. But this does not mean that it condones their sin and becomes a

champion of their style of living when it is contrary to its own. It does not provide them with a platform to advocate a form of behavior inconsistent with its gospel. It accepts a person just as the person is in order for Christ to make him or her into what he or she ought to become. It sees people not as they are but as they can be.

“It is futile to try to pass judgment on a person's sexual predisposition or the bent of his or her inner nature. It is God who made us, and not we ourselves. (Psalm 100:3b) In

whatever way our nature was formed before birth, that is not our responsibility, and God does not hold us accountable for what we cannot help. Only God knows the secrets of our heart and can read our inmost thoughts. But the church must insist on moral and spiritual discipline. The Bible teaches that God will not permit us to be tempted beyond [what] we are able to bear (I Corinthians 10:13). Only in the marriage of man and woman can the church countenance sexual expression. When persons remain in the unmarried state, the church expects from them, both male and female, a life of chastity, continence, and celibacy. After all, our divine Lord himself never married, yet his life was without sin.

“Likewise, the church expects from married couples faithfulness and devotion to each other as long as they both shall live and the establishment of a home which is a haven of blessedness and a place of peace. The procreation of children and their rearing in the nurture and admonition of the Lord are the glory of marriage. Though abortion may be essential in extreme circumstances, to say that the fetus in a woman's womb is her own property to do with as she pleases and to use abortion for immoral purposes is a barbaric act displaying the lowest form of degeneracy. Abortion must never be permitted to become the means for promiscuity and sexual indulgence.

“The church is not to be a mirror of the world but a reflection of heaven. Its ethics are the teachings of Jesus and not the mores of contemporary secular society. The basis of its message is the disclosure of God, not the opinions of people.”

“The perennial purpose of the church is to lead people to Jesus, so that he can remake their lives like his very own.” (pp. 177-8)

Bishop R. Cannon’s words—which were spoken at the 1984 General Conference for the Council of Bishops—ring loudly as Christian truth, especially as the 2019 General Conference approaches. (PTS) ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• Your prayers, your emails and letters and calls, and your financial gifts really do maintain and extend Lifewatch’s witness for the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church and beyond. You can give a gift to Lifewatch in three ways. First, you can write a check to “Lifewatch” and sent it to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. And third, if you are over the age of 70-1/2, you may give a gift from your IRA as a tax-free distribution. (This means a gift [up to \$100,000...!] can be transferred from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and can count toward your minimum required distribution without being considered as taxable income.) If you are considering an IRA gift, please first communicate with Mrs. Evans in the Lifewatch office. Mrs. Evans and I are deeply grateful for your support of all kinds. (PTS)

• Many, many thanks for your December and January gifts that support the ministry of Lifewatch. We are so very thankful for your encouragement and your assistance. Only with you and your generosity does the witness of Lifewatch to The United Methodist Church (and beyond) continue. Again, our heartfelt thanks to you.

• Laura Echevarria recalls some history that the Church should never forget: “It wasn’t long after Hitler launched a propaganda war on people with disabilities that he authorized the T4 or ‘mercy death’ program. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, from 1939 to the end of the war, approximately 275,000 disabled individuals were killed in the program—a stepping stone to the destruction of millions of Jews in the Holocaust.

“Once we determine that there are some lives less worthy than others, it’s only a matter of time until someone determines that those with disabilities—physical or mental—are somehow ‘less than.’” (“Who Decides Who Is Worthy of Life?,” The Human Life Review, Summer 2018)

• Friends have a tremendous impact on all of us. Especially Christian friends. Over the years two friends of this pastor have consistently encouraged him, in dealing with the challenges of ministry and life, to understand such challenges and respond to them theologically. In other words, they have insisted: theology always comes first. In recent decades, in United Methodist life, that seems like a minority position. Even so, Mr. Bryan Prill and The Reverend Dr. Robert T. Osborn helped this pastor to maintain a theology-first approach to ministry and life.

Bryan Prill was a nearly lifelong friend: a high-school buddy, a fraternity brother at Kansas State University, a connection to the counterculture of the 1960s, a brother in the Jesus Movement of the 1970s, and a collaborator for years in late-night conversations about big ideas. As we aged, those conversations took place mainly during working hours and largely over the telephone. In many of them, he cheered on Lifewatch, which he regularly read for years. Always, without fail, even in discussing the life and ministry of a congregation, Prill raised theological matters first of all.

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Special 2019 General Conference issue:
* A word from Bp. Timothy W. Whitaker
* Remembering Bp. William Cannon's
address to the 1984 General Conference
on human sexuality

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

References to Jesus and St. Paul, Augustine and Barth, peppered his comments. Bryan Prill crossed the Jordan last fall. We miss him. May God's perpetual light shine on him.

Dr. Robert Osborn, now retired, taught in the Department of Religion at Duke University. One of his courses, "The Theology of Karl Barth," was a graduate seminar that was open to undergraduate and divinity-school students. Participation in that class led this pastor to a change of heart, mind, life, and vocation. Why? Because like Karl Barth, Dr. Osborn always raised theological questions—about every matter—first of all. A political problem arose. In addressing it, Dr. Osborn first examined its theological undercurrents. A personal problem was mentioned. Dr. Osborn first went to the theological well. A denominational issue was noted. Dr. Osborn responded with theological claims leading the way. This professor's exemplary theological persistence tended to rub off on his students. So that, today, Lifewatch firmly holds to the notion that "the way forward" for The United Methodist Church is through serious attention to theology—specifically to the Church's doctrine and discipline, grounded in Scripture and Tradition.

LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Lifewatch Editor
902 Pinckney Street, Whiteville, NC 28472
910.642.3376 / paulstallsworth@nccumc.org

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Thanks be to God for such friends in the faith!

● Tom Wolfe, the one and only, an eccentric American novelist and essayist, died on May 14. The next day The New York Times remembered his life and work in an extraordinarily long, informative obituary. Included in the obituary was the following. Asked to describe his dandy daily attire in a word, Wolfe replied "neo-pretentious." (Come on. That was meant to be funny....) At his "New Journalism" best—in such works as Bonfire of the Vanities and Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers—Tom Wolfe often punctured the pretensions of the cultural elite. My only regret is that Tom Wolfe never made it a point to attend and observe a meeting of denominational elites, and then write about what he had seen and heard. That would have been special. He certainly would have punctured more than a few of their pretensions. Well, it is too late for that now. May Tom Wolfe now rest from his literary labors and in God's peace.

● *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* "Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail." ♥

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