

GUEST COLUMN: SHE SAID GOOD-BYE

by Julie Woodley

I was never born.

Ten thousand days ago, ten thousand days later.

My Mommy wanted to keep me; she was excited to see the bump of her tummy grow as I grew. Daddy said I couldn't be born, too much trouble; he had goals, dreams. He was studying to be a lawyer—I didn't fit.

We got in the car; Daddy was quiet; all he said was, "if you want to stay in this relationship, you must get rid of this problem."

Mommy, crying, rode the 90 miles to Minneapolis; she couldn't stop; she was queasy from my growing; we stopped, and she threw up; "maybe he will take me home, let me keep the baby," she hoped; she prayed, "please turn around!"

The air was turning spring; it smelled good, refreshing. Mommy noticed the flowers budding—a sign of hope, new life? "Maybe, maybe, someone will help," she pleaded inside; Mommy had no family, too many years of horror with her father; she ran away at 18—never to turn back.

Now—nowhere to turn, nobody to help her, no one to be there with a new baby around.

She stares at her new pink maternity top; it's pretty; she longs to grow a new baby and fill it up. The car ride is quiet, eyes cast down as she cries, and then she gives up and is quiet; she trembles.

She remembers her last abortion—only three years ago; she tried to dismiss the thoughts, but they hit her hard today. She remembers the pain involved, the sucking noises, the smells, the regrets after.

They park; she is screaming inside (so am I!). He pulls her in, reminding her of a better day tomorrow. He pays the \$250 cash; they give her a number. A room full of quiet women—afraid.

*"She remembers her last abortion—
only three years ago; she tried to
dismiss the thoughts, but they hit her
hard today."*

The day is long, yet too quick for me as I say good-bye; as I leave into the arms of Jesus, I plead with her, "don't cry." I'm with Jesus—full of joy and loving my Mommy. "Please Mommy dearest, don't

give up the fight; keep fighting for babies like me; there are millions up here, yes, my sister too. We know you miss us more than you can ever express—we long for you too, but we will be together soon."

Twenty-five years ago, Mommy is still sad—thinking of what I would have been, looked like—she longs to hold me, love life with me! My name is Elizabeth.

Ten thousand days later, ten thousand days ago.

Julie Woodley is founder/director of Restoring the Heart Ministry. She is currently producing a video series for the healing of abortion as well as writing a book on the trauma of abortion. If you would like to share your story confidentially in Julie's book, please log onto www.rthm.cc and download the questionnaire under Into My Arms.♥

ON THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AND RCRC: A BRIEF TO THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

The Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church met on October 25-28 in Cincinnati, OH. Docket VIII concerned a "Review of Bishop's Decision of Law in the Minnesota Annual Conference Concerning Whether the Annual Conference Can Belong to the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." With the faithful assistance of others, your scribe submitted a brief to the Judicial Council on Docket VIII. For your information, major sections of the submitted brief appear below.

—Editor

Circumstances Surrounding the Decision

The 2006 Session of the Minnesota Annual Conference met from May 30 until June 2 in St. Cloud, MN. Bishop Sally Dyck, the resident bishop of the Minnesota Area, presided. Reverend Walter Lockhart submitted to the conference "Action Item #533--Join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." In Action Item #533, Rev. Lockhart identified himself as a "former member of the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." Action Item #533's intended "action" was that "[t]he Minnesota Annual Conference will officially join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." Its intended "outcome" was that "Minnesota United Methodists will be officially represented at this interfaith group." By a majority vote, the Minnesota Annual Conference adopted Action Item #533.

On June 2, prior to adjournment, Reverend Peter Milloy requested the bishop's decision of law on Action Item #533. His question read: "Was the adoption of Action Item #533 in accordance with The Book of Discipline if the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice supports a position on abortion that is different from that found in our Social Principles?"

On June 26, Bp. Sally Dyck responded to Rev. Milloy's motion and sent her ruling on Action Item #533 to the members of the 2006 Session of the Minnesota Annual Conference. Her ruling claimed that "RCRC does not conflict with the Social Principles and, in fact, the organization at its best can help us fulfill the Social Principles in terms of working toward the prevention of 'unwanted

pregnancies' of all kinds." Furthermore, Bp. Dyck's ruling contained this decisive summary statement: "My ruling is that the Minnesota Annual Conference may officially join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)."

In accordance with the Discipline (Paragraph 51 and Paragraph 2609.6), Bp. Dyck's ruling was also forwarded to the Judicial Council for review, and it will be considered, as Docket VIII, by the Judicial Council during its October 25-28, 2006 meeting in Cincinnati...

Relevant Arguments

Bp. Dyck's ruling reframes Rev. Milloy's question: "The question asks if the Minnesota Annual Conference can join the Minnesota RCRC if RCRC has a different position on abortion from that found in the Social Principles." Therefore, the main argument at hand is whether or not RCRC has a position on abortion that is different from the Social Principles' position on abortion.

This brief contends that RCRC's position on abortion is indeed substantially different from the Social Principles' position on abortion. Of course there is an obvious difference in the exact wording of

the RCRC position and of the Social Principles' position; that is to be expected and is unimportant. There is a more subtle difference of ethos and emphases found in the abortion positions of RCRC and the Social Principles; but that could be argued

"This brief contends that RCRC's position on abortion is indeed substantially different from the Social Principles' position on abortion."

indefinitely. Most significantly, on the matter of partial-birth abortion, RCRC and the Social Principles differ so starkly that RCRC's position on abortion must be said to differ from the Social Principles' position on abortion.

Since so much of what follows involves partial-birth abortion, the realities of this particular abortion procedure should be recalled: "Sometimes called D and X, for dilation and extraction, it entails partly extracting an intact fetus from a woman's uterus and killing it by collapsing and removing the brain from the skull so that the fetus can pass through the birth canal." (Julia Preston, "Appeals Court Voids Ban on 'Partial Birth' Abortions," New York Times, July 9, 2005) Hence, partial-birth abortion is not just a meaningless phrase that surfaces in contemporary, public debates; it is a phrase that refers to an abortion procedure that is gruesome in its practice.

In what follows, the Social Principles' position on partial-birth abortion will be chronologically related to the relevant Judicial Council decisions on RCAR/RCRC and partial-birth abortion. Then RCRC's position on partial-birth abortion will be sketched through time.

The leading argument before the Judicial Council in October 2006—whether or not RCRC has a position on abortion that is different from that of the Social Principles—is not a new argument. As Bp. Dyck noted..., this argument has been before the Judicial Council twice—in Decision No. 635 in October 1990 and Decision No. 683 in October 1992. In both of those decisions, in 1990 and in 1992, the Judicial Council ruled that RCAR/RCRC and the Social Principles had positions on abortion that were consistent. Furthermore, Decision No. 821 in April 1998 established that a resolution opposed to partial-birth abortion, which had been passed by an annual conference, was inconsistent with the paragraph on abortion found in the 1996 Discipline's Social Principles (Paragraph 65J).

However, all three of the aforementioned Judicial Council decisions—Decision No. 635, Decision No. 683, and Decision No. 821—were written before General Conference established clear opposition to partial-birth abortion. That occurred at the 2000 General Conference, which added this significant sentence to the Social Principles' paragraph on abortion: "We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life." The addition of this sentence by the 2000 General Conference, which responded to Decision No. 821 (1998), marked a milestone in the development of the United Methodist position on abortion. For the first time in its Social Principles, the church declared opposition to a particular abortion procedure and called for an end to its use, except in rare circumstances. That is, the "call for the end of this practice" suggested more than moral opposition to a particular abortion procedure; it implied a call for legislative action against partial-birth abortion. Since 2000, this stated, strong opposition to partial-birth abortion and stated, strong call for an end to its use (in a majority of situations) have remained unchanged in the Social Principles' position on abortion.

Now consider the work of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights/Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice on partial-birth abortion. Its position on abortion includes a paragraph on late-term abortion, which includes partial-birth abortion: "Regarding the matter of late-term abortion, the Coalition believes that this issue should be left up to the individual member groups. In a policy position taken March 5, 1982, the Board of Directors stated that late-term abortion should not be a focus of the

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Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies
Perkins School of Theology/SMU

and the

THE ANNUAL LIFEWATCH BOARD MEETING (3:00 p.m.)

both on January 22, 2007 (Monday)

at The United Methodist Building
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Coalition. The Board further stated that supporting choice and striving for religious freedom are the foci of the Coalition."

However, in apparent contradiction with its stated policy on late-term abortion, RCRC sent a letter dated April 29, 1996 to the members of the United States House of Representatives to urge them to vote against a partial-birth-abortion ban (HR 1833). Furthermore, on September 17, 1998 RCRC wrote a similar letter to members of the United States Senate to urge them to sustain the presidential veto of a legislative ban of partial-birth-abortion. Again, these RCRC actions were undertaken to defend and maintain the practice of partial-birth abortion.

After General Conference 2000 established the Social Principles' strong opposition partial-birth abortion, RCRC continued to lobby against federal legislation that would ban that abortion procedure. The RCRC Board of Directors declared in a June 4, 2003 statement: "The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice denounces the ongoing campaign to further restrict the right of women to make reproductive decisions that is being waged under the guise of the 'partial-birth abortion ban' bill of 2003 (S. 3 and H.R. 760). As a people of faith, we urge the President and Congress to recognize this insidious campaign and reject it." Furthermore, RCRC's National Report (Issue 41, June 6, 2003) contains an article entitled "RCRC Urges Bush to Reject 'Partial-Birth Abortion Ban' Bill." The article concludes: "The Board of Directors of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice issued a statement denouncing the 'deceptive and corrupt' campaign 'to further restrict the right of women to make reproductive decisions that is being waged under the guise of the 'partial-birth abortion ban' bill...and urging President Bush to refuse to sign the bill on the grounds that it is unconstitutional and endangers the health of women." Through this article the RCRC appears to have reversed, at least in part, its own aforementioned 1982 policy on late-term abortion.

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Many other RCRC statements, press releases, and articles that argue in favor of the practice of partial-birth abortion can be found with titles such as: “Reintroducing So-Called ‘Partial-Birth Abortion Ban’ Bill Defies Reason,” “Unconstitutional ‘Partial-Birth Abortion Ban,’” “Unconstitutional ‘Partial-Birth Abortion Ban’ Bill Politically Motivated,” “RCRC Vows to Continue to Expose Deceptive Campaign about Abortion Procedures, Applauds Lawsuits to Stop the Ban,” and “It’s Unconstitutional.” Most recently, Reverend Carlton W. Veazey, President and CEO of RCRC, wrote “RCRC Responds to Absurd Accusations by Extremist ‘Renewal Groups.’” His article contains this admission: “Regarding so-called ‘partial-birth abortion,’ our Board has opposed this legislation [which would ban such abortion] because...”

One remaining issue must be addressed, because it was addressed in Bp.

Dyck’s ruling. If the Social Principles and RCRC have such different positions on abortion, how could the 2004 General Conference have voted to adopt what became “114. Support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice”?

First, it should be remembered that the debate on this matter was severely limited by time constraints on the last day of the conference. In the only allowed brief speech supportive of the RCRC resolution besides that of the committee spokeswoman, Ms. Beth Capen claimed, in part: “Unless there has been a change, it is my understanding that the coalition [RCRC] does not do or advocate for anything which is inconsistent with that which we as United Methodists—since we are a significant contributor—have in our Social Principles. It is also my understanding that because of that, after our last General Conference [in 2000], the coalition conformed to their advocacy to that which we had passed. And I do want to clear up this misinformation...” No evidence was provided to support these claims. (As a matter of fact, even after the 2000 General Conference strongly opposed partial-birth abortion, RCRC continued its advocacy and lobbying in defense of the practice of partial-birth abortion. Evidence is provided above.)

Therefore, lacking sufficient time for deliberation and lacking accurate information, it is not surprising that the 2004 General Conference voted to support the resolution which became #114 in The Book of Resolutions. Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker, of the Florida Area, commented on this 2004 General Conference action: “At the 2004 General Conference, the church endorsed our [United Methodist]

agencies’ continued participation in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice without much of a debate about how participation in this coalition compromises our public witness against abortion.” (“Do No Harm!,” Lifewatch, 03/01/05, p. 3)...

Conclusion

The 2000 General Conference first wrote into the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church strong opposition to partial-birth abortion. From 2000 until the present, this explicit, strong opposition to partial-birth abortion has remained intact in the church’s Social Principles. Before 2000, during 2000, and after 2000, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, while maintaining no stated policy on late-term abortion, lobbied the federal government to keep partial-birth abortion legal.

Therefore, since 2000, the Social Principles have

strongly opposed partial-birth abortion and its use; in contrast, before and after 2000, RCRC has consistently defended the continued practice of partial-birth abortion. Since the Social Principles and RCRC dramatically differ on the matter of partial-birth abortion, it

“Since 2000, the Social Principles have strongly opposed partial-birth abortion and its use; in contrast, before and after 2000, RCRC has consistently defended the continued practice of partial-birth abortion.”

is compellingly clear that the Social Principles’ position on abortion is different from RCRC’s position on abortion.

The majority of this brief has examined how the issue of partial-birth abortion has exposed the difference between the Social Principles’ position on abortion and RCRC’s position on abortion. There is another way to discern the difference between the Social Principles’ and RCRC’s position on abortion.

According to Resolution #114, “the Coalition’s [that is, RCRC’s] efforts help counter attempts to enact restrictive legislation that would impose specific religious views about abortion and reproductive health on persons of all faiths...” (The Book of Resolutions, p. 322) Therefore, RCRC is fully dedicated to preserving legal choice regarding abortion. Hence, RCRC supports any and all pieces of legislation that protect or advance choice on abortion, and RCRC opposes any and all pieces of legislation that even hint at calling such choice into question. That is, RCRC is uncompromisingly committed to choice on abortion, for all reasons and without restrictions.

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church are also dedicated to choice—in those “tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion.” (The Book of Discipline [2004], Paragraph 161J) However, the church is much more committed to people making good choices, regarding abortion,

than to merely ensuring the legality of choices. That is why the Social Principles speak about: “the sanctity of unborn human life,” the “reluctance to approve abortion,” the inability to “affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control,” the rejection of abortion “as a means of gender selection,” opposition to “the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion)” and the “call for the end of this practice...,” an “inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may warrant abortion,” “[committing] our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries...,” “the option of adoption,” and “thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved...”

Again, according to the Social Principles, The United Methodist Church teaches support for choices on abortion that are good for the mother and for the unborn human life she carries. On the other hand, RCRC mainly lobbies to maintain choice on abortion—even the choice of partial-birth abortion, as well as abortion related to birth control and gender selection. This highlights the general difference that exists between the Social Principles’ position on abortion (mainly about moral choices) and RCRC’s position on abortion (mainly about choice).

6. Recommended Action

Because the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice have been shown above to have different positions on abortion, this brief recommends that the Judicial Council reverse the decision of law by Bp. Dyck, who “ruled that the Minnesota Annual Conference can officially join the Minnesota Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.”

To allow the Minnesota Annual Conference to belong to the Minnesota RCRC, whose position on abortion differs from what the Social Principles advance on abortion, is against The Book of Discipline. Paragraph 627.4 reads: “Program [of the conference board of church and society] shall be developed that provides education and action on issues confronting the Church consistent with the Social Principles and the policies adopted by the General Conference.” Therefore, to allow the Minnesota Annual Conference to belong to the Minnesota RCRC, whose position on abortion (especially on partial-birth abortion) differs from what the Social Principles advance on abortion, violates Paragraph 627.4 of the Discipline...♥

WHERE DO UNITED METHODISTS LOOK FOR AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING?

It is a good question. And it is a question that is likely to nag United Methodists (and many other Christians) for some time to come.

Pastor Frank C. Senn, of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Evanston, IL, answers this question for Lutherans in his article “A Magisterium for Lutherans,” which appears in Lutheran Forum (Summer 2006). Much of what this Lutheran writes about Lutheranism is immediately applicable to United Methodism today.

Pr. Senn begins by outlining the role that teaching authority played in the ministries of Jesus and Paul, and in the history of the Church from its apostolic

origins until the Lutheran Reformation. While many United Methodists would simply claim that the Bible is our teaching authority, Pr. Senn offers this challenge from history: “At [Luther’s] trial in Worms, when he again appealed to Scripture, [John] Eck said that every heretic appealed to Scripture: ‘Would

you put your judgment above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than them all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith, instituted by Christ the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance...’”

“Amid these questions Luther found the courage to say, ‘Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God.’ (Roland Bainton, Here I Stand, 1950, p. 185)

“But Eck was right; anyone can appeal to Scripture. Scripture requires interpretation.” (p. 53, emphasis added)

Where has this tendency of Luther on teaching authority led the Church of today? While Pr. Senn replies by pointing to the Lutheran community, his rousing words are descriptive of much of United Methodism: “In this present situation, teaching authority is like the Susquehanna River—wide and shallow; it is shared by synod and churchwide assemblies, conferences of bishops or presidents, seminary faculties, and boards and divisions and task

“[T]he church is much more committed to people making good choices, regarding abortion, than to merely ensuring the legality of choices.”

forces in the ‘churchwide expression.’ Pastors carve out more authority in their congregations by running an office than by exercising an office. Pastors are provided with an office in the church building, not a study. In the ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America] pastors are no longer ‘pastors;’ they are ‘rostered leaders.’ They do not attend ministerium meetings but professional leadership conferences. When authority belongs to everybody, it belongs to nobody, and nobody is minding the doctrinal store. That’s why we have exercises in reductionism, which boils down Christian truth to a few basic principles; politically-correct ideologies in search of exegetical or theological factoids to back up their agendas; syncretism, which mixes New Age spiritualism or aboriginal beliefs and practices with Christian rituals; and privatization, which trumps the fullness of Christian revelation with personal experience.” (p. 56; see Carl E. Braaten’s Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism, 1998, pp. 82-97)

Pr. Senn continues: “A bishop whom I very much respect asked me: what do you do when the theological faculties disagree and the bishops cannot make up their collective minds? I answered: appeal to Rome. There was nervous laughter in the room, but I was serious.” (p. 56, emphasis added)

Senn goes on to indicate his seriousness: “...then came Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council with its Constitutions on the Church, on Divine Revelation, on the Sacred Liturgy, and on the Church in the Modern World, along with other decrees and declarations, and the papal encyclicals that flowed from the pens of John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and that may now come from Benedict XVI, who made possible by his personal intervention the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification. [By the way, the World Methodist Council recently signed onto the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.] What do you do when the Bishop of Rome is preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and teaching the faith once delivered to the saints and you lack confidence in the preaching and teaching that is going on in your own ecclesial community?

“You may just get up and go to Rome. A number of our prominent pastors and teachers have done that. But while this may be the satisfying conclusion of a personal pilgrimage, it does not do much for Christian unity...

“I suggest that we simply start paying attention to papal teaching. We need not pay attention to papal pronouncements that concern the internal life of the Roman Catholic Church. But where the pope addresses issues of the Christian faith and moral life, we should study his teachings as diligently as those who are jurisdictionally under his authority—maybe even more diligently. Our

Lutheran church leaders should invite reflection on and response to papal encyclicals. Pastors should help their congregations work through the pope’s letters. Now that the papacy has been placed in the service of Christian unity by John Paul II—an offer that Benedict XVI will undoubtedly honor—we should turn to the Roman magisterium as conceivably the best safeguard against the increasing dissolution of our own Lutheran tradition.” (pp. 56-57, emphasis added)

For years, Lifewatch has looked to John Paul II and now Benedict XVI for faithful teaching of the Gospel of Life. Pr. Senn does a brilliant job of explaining why. (PTS)♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

September 5, 2006

To the Editor:

I appreciated Bishop Whitaker’s comments in your 09/01/06 issue. He mentions that “Christian tradition can change” (p. 6). I continue to wonder about The United Methodist Church’s inconsistency regarding the changing tradition about divorce and remarriage, on the one hand, and the unchanging tradition about homosexuality, on the other. Why is the former now acceptable and the latter not acceptable?

As we know, Jesus spoke repeatedly in opposition to divorce and remarriage. He said nothing about homosexuality. Yet The United Methodist Church and other Christian groups have come to accept divorce and remarriage, even though still steadfastly opposing homosexuality.

Could the reason be that a sufficient number of Christians decided they wanted to divorce and remarry, so that the tradition changed? Examine successive volumes of The Book of Discipline to see how, quadrennium by quadrennium, the language about divorce changed. In 2006, the percentage of divorced Christians (including evangelicals, who are so vocal in opposition to homosexuality) is identical to that of divorced persons in society at large.

I speak as someone who has lived through the pain of divorce. I would never choose it, and I would never recommend it. But it seems to me that a denomination which has come

“I continue to wonder about The United Methodist Church’s inconsistency regarding the changing tradition about divorce and remarriage ... and the unchanging tradition about homosexuality ...”

to accept a changing tradition regarding divorce and remarriage, largely or entirely because enough of its adherents decided it was permissible for them, has no Scriptural or logical grounds to stand on when disapproving of homosexuality. If we accept a changing Christian Tradition regarding divorce and

remarriage, it seems to me that we cannot place committed homosexual relationship outside the bounds of Christian teaching either.

Sincerely,

(The Rev.) Jeanne Devine/Trinity United Methodist Church/6800 Wurzbach Road/San Antonio, TX 78240/revjeanne@tumcsa.org

To Rev. Devine:

Many thanks for your extraordinarily thoughtful letter of September 5. By sustaining you and your ministry through the pain of divorce, God's grace has indeed been sufficient for you.

The issue you raise—how can The United Methodist Church change its teaching on divorce and remarriage, and yet not change its teaching on homosexuality?—must be faced by United Methodists.

It seems that, over the last 35 years, United Methodism, on divorce and remarriage, has simply accommodated itself to the prevailing moral and legal norms (or normlessness) of American society. Likewise, it could be said that United Methodism's official teaching on life and abortion has been directed by what society believed on the matter—that is, pro-choice in the 1970s and early 1980s, but trending in a more pro-life direction since then. These instances of denominational accommodation to society should warn The United Methodist Church against further accommodations, including on the matter of homosexuality.

More positively stated, instances of

denominational accommodation to society should encourage United Methodism, both in its teaching and practice, to accommodate itself to the Church's faith, which is grounded in the Bible, transmitted by the Church catholic, presented with the best of reason, and lived out in ways that cause its carriers to flourish.

The challenge of your last paragraph is about consistency. Your letter suggests that the church be consistent in departing from traditional teaching: first in the matter of divorce and remarriage, then in the matter of "committed homosexual relationship." However, The United Methodist Church would be most wise to teach truthfully—that is, Scripturally and traditionally—on homosexuality. But truthful teaching by our church should also be extended to divorce and remarriage, life and abortion, and beyond. (PTS)♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• "We have another totally awesome episode for you today. Totally awesome, if you are cool, that is." I am not sure you could say that about this issue of Lifewatch, but this statement makes this pastor chuckle every time he hears it on The Laura Ingraham Show, a talk-radio program.

• Your church's Missions Committee and Administrative Council might be finalizing their 2007 budgets. If they are, you might suggest that Lifewatch be added to the list of ministries that your congregation supports. If you will do this and if your church agrees with your suggestion, your

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congregation will mightily support Lifewatch’s witness to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church and beyond. At the same time, know that your individual contributions are essential to the continuing ministry of Lifewatch. We are deeply grateful for all that you do to support our humble witness to the Gospel of Life. Allow one more comment, please. You may support Lifewatch by using PayPal on our homepage at www.lifewatch.org.

- According to the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) website, Susan Burgess is commissioned by the GBGM deaconess program to work in a Northern California affiliate of Planned Parenthood. Therefore, it could be said that a United Methodist missionary is now working for the largest abortion provider in the United States. (“United Methodist ‘Missionary’ Is Planned Parenthood Staffer,” www.ird-renew.org, 09/13/06) This shows, once again, that the official United Methodist position on abortion—Paragraph 161J in The Book of Discipline (2004)—is too elastic, too flexible, too ambiguous. If our position permits a United Methodist missionary to work in an organization of Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc., it needs to change.

- The 2006 International United Methodist Clergywomen’s Consultation took place in Chicago during mid-August. During the days of the Consultation, participants were encouraged to support and sign the “bloody knuckle petition.” According to Ms. Linda Green of UMNS, “[t]he petition came in response to a sermon by Bishop Judith Craig (retired) who spoke of the continued knocking of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people on the closed doors of the church. Signatories agreed to help open UM doors that deny people with those orientations full membership rights, full marriage equality, full ordination rights, and full access to denominational funding.” (Newscope, September 1, 2006) The Book of Discipline (Paragraph 806.9) states that “no board,

agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” It would be interesting to discover how the consultation was funded and if the Discipline was heeded.

- “On Oct. 2, on Katie Couric’s ‘CBS Evening News,’ in the segment called ‘Free Speech,’ the father of a boy killed at Columbine shared his views on the deeper causes of the recent shootings in Amish country. Brian Rohrbough said violence entered our schools when we threw God out of them. ‘This country is in a moral freefall. For over two generations the public school system has taught in a moral vacuum.... We teach there are no moral absolutes, no right or wrong, and I assure you the murder of innocent children is always wrong, including abortion. Abortion has diminished the value of children.’ This was not exactly the usual mush.” (Peggy Noonan, “The Sounds of Silencing,” Wall Street Journal, 10/13/06) It must be said again and again: The United Methodist Church, with the Church catholic, now has a pressing opportunity to offer the Gospel of Life to the world.♥

Our Mission:

Out of obedience to Jesus Christ, the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS) “will work to create in church and society esteem for human life at its most vulnerable, specifically for the unborn child and for the woman who contemplates abortion.” Therefore, TUMAS’s first goal is “to win the hearts and minds of United Methodists, to engage in abortion-prevention through theological, pastoral, and social emphases that support human life.”