

GENERAL CONFERENCE 2012 ON ABORTION

Thanks to the efforts of many, Lifewatch was able to participate more fully in the 2012 General Conference than any prior General Conference. The witness for life at the General Conference was good, strong, and steady.

The results of the witness were, as they always are, mixed. The 2012 General Conference adopted a new paragraph on abortion for the Social Principles. That new paragraph, as you can see below, contains some improvements and some digressions. On the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), the General Conference's legislative subcommittee on life issues and its full Church and Society B Legislative Committee voted to withdraw United Methodist agencies (General Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division) from RCRC. However, the General Conference ended before the RCRC matter could be discussed and decided by the entire body. For the Lifewatch community, that was an unfortunate, anti-climatic way for the conference to conclude.

Never before has there been so much interest, by so many in the Lifewatch community, in General Conference. You stepped up. You were active. You made telephone calls. You wrote emails and letters. You volunteered. You showed up at General Conference. You witnessed to the Gospel of Life in many different ways. Again, you served the Christian truth about life, in a loving way, as never before.

So, here we are, on the other side of General Conference 2012. Lifewatch's mission remains: witness to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church. That is exactly what this ministry will continue to do—day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. We trust that the Lord of Life has called us to this task, and He will continue to provide for its fulfillment.

Again, thank you for your support, encouragement, and prayers for Lifewatch.

—Lifewatch Board

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GENERAL CONFERENCE 2012: SCATTERED THOUGHTS ON THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

Best One-Liner: “What’s a little pantheism among us friends?” Bishop William H. Willimon’s tongue-in-cheek comment was in response to the opening worship service’s “Call of the Holy: Consecration of the Space for Our Worshipful Work.”

Big Picture: General Conference 2012 was dominated by matters related to denominational restructuring and human sexuality. After days of deliberation, and after the dust had settled, our denomination’s structure and teaching on sexuality were left, for the most part, intact.

Biggest Winner: General Board of Church and Society. Most of its many petitions and resolutions passed. And its structure survived, though with fewer directors.

Exposed: There seems to be no place for truth in The United Methodist Church. Pragmatism, or whatever works is what we will do, is winning the day. Young people are not agreeing with Biblical-Traditional teaching about human sexuality; well, fine, then change that teaching to accommodate the preferences of the youth. Emotivism—do not say or do anything that will hurt me!—is also pushing truth to the margins of United Methodist life. With pragmatism and emotivism so prevalent, one attempting to serve the truth must be full of love *and courage*.

Fear-Driven Moment: Rev. Adam Hamilton concluded his presentation, for denominational restructuring, with a video featuring a United Methodist touring her church which was closing.

Good Stuff: The family-reunion dimension of General Conference was enjoyed by all. Could this be the most expensive family reunion in the world?

High Points: Sacrament and Word. Receiving Holy Communion, the real presence of Jesus Christ, was a glorious blessing. Also, Bp. Willimon’s sermon at Tampa’s Hyde Park United Methodist Church, on Sunday morning, beautifully proclaimed the Good Shepherd who gathers and tends even us wandering United Methodists.

Holy Conversation Highlight: Gil Rendle spoke excellently on the pressing need for civil discourse in the church and for the church to teach honestly on human sexuality. Bishops, did you hear him?

Hopeful Moments: The petition, which would have withdrawn the General Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), passed its legislative subcommittee (12-11) and committee (42-32).

Hopeless Moment: On the last night of the conference, the delegates were understandably exhausted and frustrated. The clock ran out, and the withdraw-from-RCRC petition had not been allowed to be brought up for a vote.

Most Politically Savvy: Many of those who are theologically and morally progressive have mighty fine political skills. Some are so skilled in parliamentary procedure that they must have been born in the midst of a meeting where Robert's Rules of Order was in play.

Path of Least Resistance: The United Methodist Church would rather discuss shrinking our boards and agencies—or placing them in a different organizational chart—than reforming them. And they need to be reformed. For example, the General Board of Church and Society needs to divest itself of partisan politics.

Took the Most Hits: Council of Bishops. The Council will not have a set-aside bishop, and the Council's CTA/IOT plan for restructuring the denomination was defeated. After all those meetings, all those studies, all that press coverage, all that money spent, the Council's proposals lost. This just might return the Council and the bishops to doing what they should be doing: teach the Church's faith.

What We Do Better: The United Methodist Church does "Amazing Grace" much better than we do "The Church's One Foundation."

Where United Methodism Seems Headed: Perhaps The United Methodist Church is becoming a Church of Choice. We want to choose our moral teaching and our liturgy, whatever fits our tastes. Nothing seems to be given. Is this what "re-thinking church" is all about? Is this where United Methodists want to go? (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

THE NEW PARAGRAPH ON ABORTION IN THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE (2012)

*When the 2012 Book of Discipline is published, it will contain the following statement on abortion (or something very similar to it). What follows is the 2012 General Conference edit of the 2008 Book of Discipline paragraph on abortion (Par. 161J). As you will see, the 2012 paragraph added words (indicated in **bold**) to the 2008 paragraph. (Editor)*

"J) *Abortion*—The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will be born. Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion.

But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child.

We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal

option of abortion under proper medical procedures **by certified medical providers**. We support parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection **or eugenics (see Resolution 3185)**.

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. **This procedure shall only be performed by certified medical providers**. Before providing their services, abortion providers should be required to offer women the option of anesthesia.

We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may cause them to consider abortion. **We entrust God to provide guidance, wisdom, and discernment to those facing an unintended pregnancy.**

The Church shall offer ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth.

We mourn and are committed to promoting the diminishment of high abortion rates. The Church shall encourage ministries to reduce unintended pregnancies such as comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education, advocacy in regard to contraception, and support of initiatives that enhance the quality of life for all women and girls around the globe.

Young adult women disproportionately face situations in which they feel that they have no choice due to financial, educational, relational, or other circumstances beyond their control. The Church and its local congregations and campus ministries should be in the forefront of supporting existing ministries and developing new ministries that help such women in their communities. They should also support those crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers that compassionately help women explore all options related to unplanned pregnancy. We particularly encourage the Church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption. (See Paragraph 161L.) We affirm and encourage the Church to assist the ministry of crisis pregnancy centers and pregnancy resource centers that compassionately help women find feasible alternatives to abortion.

Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, family, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel." (This is from Calendar Item 225. It was adopted by a vote of 889-20.)

LETTER FROM LIFEWATCH

The following letter was mailed by Lifewatch to all the delegates of the 2012 General Conference. (Editor)

March 9, 2012

Dear 2012 General Conference Delegate:

May our Lord bless you with Lenten discipline and Easter glory.

Following Jesus' command to care for "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40), the Church through the ages has generally done everything it could to protect the unborn child and mother from abortion. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church has preached, taught, counseled, and mercifully ministered—all to protect the unborn child from death and the mother from harm.

To advance this 2,000-year-old ministry for life within The United Methodist Church, Lifewatch was established.

Unfortunately, since 1972, The United Methodist Church has supported abortion rights. Over the last 40 years, exactly those rights have created a flood of abortion. More than 50,000,000 abortions have been performed in the United States alone. American society and government are now exporting abortion and the abortion mindset around the world. This is happening with our church's stamp of approval.

With your help, General Conference 2012 can change that. You can vote to end The United Methodist Church's support for abortion rights. First, please vote to remove "... we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures" from the Social Principles of The Book of Discipline (Paragraph 161J). This sentence is used by church leaders to justify their activism for abortion rights and to portray The United Methodist Church as an unqualified advocate for abortion rights. Second, please vote to withdraw United Methodist institutions from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, an abortion-rights organization...

With your help, this General Conference can finally free The United Methodist Church of its support for abortion rights. With your help, our church can become more faithful in protecting "the least of these." With your help, our church can take a significant step forward in serving the Lord of Life.

Thank you for your personal sacrifices, your service of The United Methodist Church, and your faith in Jesus Christ. And be faithful in all things.

In Christ,

(The Rev.) Paul T. Stallsworth

Pastor and Lifewatch President ♥

SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS 2012: United Methodist Leaders Oppose Our Church's Affiliation with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice"

This document was mailed with the above letter, by Lifewatch, before the 2012 General Conference to all of its delegates. (Editor)

Bishop Arthur F. Kulah

Resident Bishop (Interim)/Nigeria Episcopal Area/Taraba State, Nigeria

It is time for us, as a church, to voice the truth about the question of abortion. Since life begins at conception, abortion is akin to murder, as it is the act of taking human life. Abortion is a direct defiance of the sanctity of human life. We should not use abortion as another form of contraception. Allowing our agencies in The United Methodist Church to participate in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) contradicts our interpretation of Scripture and tradition.

As a church, we must strictly advocate for the rights of millions of innocent babies that are killed, just because their parents think they have a right to cause injury to them. Supporting RCRC is a crime against humanity, since RCRC's work is inhumane and destructive. Remember the Scripture says: "Thou shall not kill." No organized civil society permits one human to intentionally harm (or kill) another human without punishment—and abortion is no different. Let our United Methodist Church not be an accomplice in the crime of abortion. I enjoin you, delegates, to vote against partnering with RCRC.

Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker

Resident Bishop/Florida Episcopal Area/Lakeland, FL

At every General Conference, the delegates vote on whether to continue to permit agencies of The United Methodist Church (UMC) to affiliate with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Until now, the General Conference has given its approval for such affiliation.

It is difficult to understand why this approval has been granted when one compares the statement of the UMC on abortion in its Social Principles (Paragraph 161J, The Book of Discipline [2008]) with the agenda of the RCRC (www.rcrc.org). The statement of the UMC is a thoughtful articulation of a position that expresses the theological premise that "[t]he beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence." It recognizes the responsibility of persons to make decisions about abortion "only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel," and it also affirms "the sanctity of unborn human life" and "the unborn child." Thus it recognizes that a decision about abortion must consider both the life of the mother and the unborn human being. It is not an absolutist position because it takes into account situations in which "the life and well-being of the mother" may be at stake. However, the agenda of the RCRC is one of advocating for the "choice" of abortion without the theological premise, and without acknowledgement of the right to life of both the mother and the unborn, contained in the statement of our church. When the General Conference grants permission for agencies of our church to affiliate with the RCRC, it is being inconsistent with its own teaching about abortion, and it compromises our church's witness.

One wonders why the majority of delegates have not yet withdrawn permission for agencies of the church to

affiliate with RCRC. One reason may be that many of the delegates have not become knowledgeable about the agenda of RCRC. Another reason is probably their support for the legality of abortion under certain conditions, such as endangerment of the life of the mother, and their belief that this support justifies our agencies' continued affiliation with RCRC. The delegates should consider how the church, without any affiliation with RCRC, would still be able to advocate for its own position. By withdrawing permission for agencies to affiliate with RCRC, the church would be free to advocate its position, and it would be able also to avoid compromising its witness by being identified with the agenda of RCRC.

Christians in America have grown in our understanding of the complexities of abortion since the Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton decisions of the United States Supreme Court in 1973. We have acquired greater scientific understanding of the beginning of human life and of what happens when a fetus is aborted. We have come to be suspicious of the radical individualism of an ideology of "choice" in our deeper theological understanding of our responsibility to practice solidarity with the most vulnerable and to make ethical decisions that consider the needs of others—including the unborn—as well as our own needs. In the UMC, we have reflected this growth in our understanding of the issues concerning abortion by gradually strengthening our statement on abortion in the Social Principles. Nevertheless, we have not yet withdrawn our permission for affiliation with an organization that continues to advocate an agenda that does not acknowledge the scientific and theological complexities that United Methodists have come to acknowledge.

The church should be careful in lending its name and moral authority to other organizations whose agendas do not coincide with its own witness, even if in some respects those organizations may advocate for some causes with which the church agrees. Unless it is careful, the church allows itself to be used for agendas contrary to its witness. Many of us believe that this is what has happened by the General Conference permitting agencies to affiliate with the RCRC. Withdrawing this permission would enable the church to establish the integrity of its own witness and free the church to speak for itself in the name of the triune God

Dr. Michael J. Gorman

The Ecumenical Institute of Theology/Baltimore, MD

As Ann Loar Brooks and I demonstrated in our book Holy Abortion? A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the RCRC is a one-sided organization whose positions on abortion and related issues actually contradict the official positions of The United Methodist Church. Affiliation in this organization is therefore inappropriate for boards and agencies of our

Please remember to pray and fast for the ministry of Lifewatch on the first Tuesday of every month.

church, and it is time to hold ourselves accountable to our own convictions. Withdrawing from RCRC will not mean the end of discussion and debate about abortion, but the repositioning of our conversation in its proper context: the conversation can then be guided by our own Social Principles, and not by those of an organization whose views have already been rejected by The United Methodist Church. To leave RCRC, therefore, would not be a decision to abandon our commitments but a decision to practice them.

The Reverend Dr. Jerry P. Kulah

Monrovia District/Liberia Annual Conference/Monrovia, Liberia

Consistent with the teachings of Scripture (Gen. 1:26; Job 1:21; Ps. 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5) and our Book of Discipline (2008, Paragraph 161J), I believe in the sanctity of unborn human life, and the unborn's right to live and fulfill divine destiny as God has planned (Rom 8:29-30), because life starts at the moment of conception. I also honor the sacredness and well being of mothers of innocent unborn babies, but reject unrestricted abortions. I therefore call on the General Conference to end our church endorsement of the work of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, because RCRC promotes and supports unrestricted abortions.

The Reverend Dr. Leicester R. Longden

University of Dubuque Theological Seminary/Dubuque, IA

The book Holy Abortion? A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice makes a theological critique of RCRC that is stunning and conscience-awakening. United Methodists must reconsider their institutional relationship to this organization, or stand convicted of either hypocrisy or indifference toward an ethical perspective that twists basic Christian teachings to echo a culture of abortion. The United Methodist Church's teaching on abortion does not justify our formal relationships with RCRC's stated goals and convictions

Mrs. Marget H. Sikes

General Conference Delegate (2000, 2004, and 2008)

Vice Chair, Church and Society 2 Legislative Committee (2008)

Director, General Board of Church and Society (2000-2008)/Tunnel Hill, GA

The United Methodist statement on abortion is fair, balanced, and compassionate. RCRC's website indicates its resistance to any restrictions on abortion—including parental notification of minors, waiting periods, informed consent, and partial-birth abortion bans. In 2008, I was surprised to see RCRC lobbying General Conference delegates to retain United Methodist agency affiliation. Having the UMC "at the table" gives RCRC credibility that it should not have. The UMC's teaching against partial-birth abortion is 12 years old, but RCRC has made no movement toward any restrictions. As hard stewardship choices must be made, discontinuing affiliation with an organization that advocates against United Methodist teaching is a good start.

“As a church, we must strictly advocate for the rights of millions of innocent babies that are killed, just because their parents think they have a right to cause injury to them.”

— *Bishop Arthur F. Kulah*

The Reverend Dr. R. Kendall Soulen
Wesley Theological Seminary/Washington, DC

The Book of Discipline’s statement on the subject of abortion recognizes legitimate concerns on both sides of this perennial and painful debate. Our church needs language, practices, and policies that are consistent with our complex intuitions on this subject. Unfortunately, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is an obstacle to this effort, because it recognizes only one legitimate side in this debate. Continued affiliation with RCRC is inconsistent with United Methodist principles and a hindrance to the work of cultivating common ground.

(Affiliations are provided for identification purposes only. Lifewatch, March 2012) ♥

HYPOCRISY IS A START

By writing and posting “Abortion: Do As I Say, Not As I Do” (www.huffingtonpost.com, posted on 11/21/11), Bethany Blankley has provided a prophetic word that is helpful to the cause of protecting unborn children and their mothers from abortion. As the article’s title suggests, the author is disturbed by the hypocrisy of Christians who speak the truth about life and abortion, but who then do not sufficiently act on the truth they have spoken. Ms. Blankley is concerned about “cheap grace,” the reality in Christians’ lives that Dietrich Bonhoeffer lamented.

Three responses are in order.

First, let’s be frank: Mother Teresa is the exception, not the rule. That is, most Christians fall short of God’s will much, if not most, of the time. That is why every Christian Service of Worship should contain a prying Prayer of Confession followed by a welcome Word of Pardon. For most of us, personal transformation, from the ways of the world to the ways of the Word, is slow and painstaking—but possible by grace. In faithfulness, the Church holds the standard high; her clergy and laity aspire, with God’s help, to reach the standard; and confession and forgiveness and a new start are offered to all who fall short. Also, it must be admitted that the hypocrisy of falling short of the standard is morally preferable to the nihilism of doing away with the standard.

Second, Ms. Blankley is overlooking the vital ministries for life that continue, year after year, against great odds and at great cost. Sustaining these ministries, many Christians are living out, though imperfectly, the Gospel of Life. Community pregnancy centers, congregational life ministries, countless other organizations, and individual outreach quietly and lovingly serve those tempted, and harmed, by abortion. The impact of these efforts is slowly changing American society into a society more respectful of life.

And third, as Ms. Blankley contends, Christians could certainly do more, much more, to protect the unborn, and their mothers, from abortion. Amen. We Christians should learn to sacrifice more profoundly for the sake of “the least of these” (Matthew 25). It is good for Christians to hear this truth, and to be stung by this truth, every so often. God pushes the People of God through this kind of prophetic word, which Bethany Blankley has courageously written.

Please allow a concluding note. Christians’ involvement in pro-life witness and work will always be a messy affair. Some will speak in a theologically informed way. Some will not. Some will minister in a faithful way. Some will not. Some will strive for unity in the work. Some will not. Some will be of generous spirit in the task. Some will not. Some will be loving. Some will not. Will there be hypocrisy among the activists of this movement? Certainly. Plenty of it. That is why Christians must always struggle against self-righteousness and self-interest; and serve first, last, and always the Lord of Life, along with other sinners saved by grace. Through this common effort, the Gospel of Life will continue to be offered by the churches, and the pro-life movement will advance in the society. (Paul T. Stallworth) ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Because of your faithful support, Lifewatch can continue to witness to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church and beyond.

A gift to Lifewatch can be given in these three ways: (1) send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338; (2) donate online on our homepage at www.lifewatch.org; and (3) give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office.

Our heartfelt thanks to you for your gifts and your prayers.

- This is a blurb for a very good book. Perhaps you will find the comment—and, more importantly, the book—to be of interest.

“Rev. Karen Booth’s Forgetting How to Blush: United Methodism’s Compromise with the Sexual Revolution (Bristol, 2012) has what could be not only the best book title, but also the most compelling content, of the year. In her book, Rev. Booth contends

that United Methodism “compromise[d]” with the Sexual Revolution. In another word, United Methodism accommodated its faith, practice, and life to the Sexual Revolution. An anatomy of The United Methodist Church’s accommodation to so-called elite culture, Rev. Booth’s book tells the sad and sordid story of how, decade after decade, one clergyman at a time, one church committee after another, one conference vote followed by others, led the larger church into the seductions of the Sexual Revolution—starting with Kinsey and company and continuing through to today’s movement to legitimate homosexual behavior. It is little wonder that United Methodism is now left with limited moral resources to teach and demonstrate the Bible’s and the Church’s truth about human sexuality. However, under God’s good providence, Rev. Booth’s informative, intelligent book just might begin to undo the compromise that is unfolding.”

● Here is a Philadelphia update: “Two abortion clinic workers pleaded guilty on Thursday [10/27/11] to third-degree murder at a Philadelphia [abortion] clinic where seven babies were allegedly killed with scissors and a patient died from an overdose of painkillers. One worker, Andrea Moton, 34, admitted her involvement in the death of a baby. The other, Sherry West, 52, pleaded guilty in the February 2009 death of a patient, Karnamaya Mongar. Neither worker was properly trained for the tasks they did at the clinic run by Dr. Kermit Gosnell, the authorities said. Dr. Gosnell and nine employees, including his wife, were charged after a grand jury report detailed macabre conditions at the West Philadelphia clinic. Dr. Gosnell, the only doctor, and other staff members are accused of performing illegal late-term abortions and killing babies born alive by severing their spinal cords with scissors. Ms. Moton assisted with procedures and cut the spinal cords of aborted babies, the grand jury report said. Ms. West also pleaded guilty to drug delivery causing death. Ms. West’s lawyer said she might have administered some of the Demerol that killed Ms. Mongar. (Associated Press, The New York Times, October 27, 2011)

The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), with which a couple of United Methodist agencies are affiliated, lobbies to keep abortion “safe and legal.” But we have yet to read that RCRC has condemned the horrific goings-on at this Philadelphia abortion clinic.

● The Reverend Dr. Stephen Rankin is the chaplain of Southern Methodist University in Dallas. His article in the United Methodist Reporter (12/02/11), “Why Dialogue Is Useless without Critical Thought,” contains some thoughtful observations and challenges. He writes: “For all of our talk about tolerance (which I support wholeheartedly), I see precious little of it on college campuses. It’s more like we’ve declared a truce. We don’t, in fact, tolerate each other; we just co-exist in the same general space. We may call this arrangement ‘tolerance,’ but it is a sham tolerance. We tacitly make a deal not to talk to each other about controversial things. Instead, we divide into self-selected groups and talk only to those who already agree with us.”

According to Dr. Rankin, real dialogue requires critical thinking. Another way to put it is to claim that authentic dialogue demands truth telling and love from its participants.

To be sure, the Lifewatch community—which is dedicated to witnessing to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church—desires tolerance. But the tolerance that we seek includes dialogue. And the dialogue to which we are dedicated, in turn, demands critical thinking, or truth and love. Without truth and love, tolerance and dialogue degenerate into cowardly denials and nice sentiments.

● Jerry Sandusky, a former assistant football coach at Penn State, is accused of sexually abusing many boys over many years. It brought great sadness to learn that Mr. Sandusky is “a long-standing member” of a United Methodist congregation. Early on, asked by the press to comment on the situation, his pastor wrote this email: “I am not able to participate in the conversation. We have developed an action plan for caring for all the persons involved, and that plan is under way.” (Frank Fitzpatrick, www.philly.com, 11/20/2011) Furthermore, in his November 20, 2011 sermon, the pastor said: “What have we to say to those who inquire of the faith, and of our life, except that God loves us all? And that steadfast love never ceases. It is a mercy that knows no end.” (quoted by Jackie Campbell in “Faith Guides Congregation in Penn State Crisis” [UMNS], United Methodist Reporter, 12/30/11)

This scandalous story reminds all of us of the importance of the Church speaking the truth in love about all moral matters, including those related to human sexuality. Without a doubt, in a society living out the results of the Sexual Revolution, that is a difficult task. But it is a task that is mandated—by God and by the Gospel. And it is a task that includes not only sharing pastoral care based on the love and forgiveness of God to all people, but also acknowledging that the Church respects the State as the State’s criminal-justice system strives to sort out the legal case and to arrive at a semblance of justice for the accused and the victims.

May God have mercy. May the congregation and its pastor serve the Gospel. And may the State of Pennsylvania seek justice.

● Every so often, during the last several years, this pastor has enjoyed showing interesting and instructive DVDs during the weekly Sunday Evening Study. There is nothing like winding down a Sabbath day by watching, with brothers and sisters in Christ, an informative, inspiring documentary or movie. The Christian conversation that follows such a viewing is usually most engaging.

Last November “The Human Experience” was shown at St. Peter’s United Methodist Church in Morehead City, NC. Available on a DVD from www.grassrootsfilms.com, this beautiful documentary follows the journey of young men as they live among homeless people in New York City, orphaned children in Peru, chronically ill people in an African leper colony, and suffering Africans afflicted with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS. It is a wonderful story of the gift

of human life, even when that gift is lived out in the midst of very challenging circumstances.

The film is cast in universal terms, in human-experiential terms. Though there is only one reference to the Christian faith—actually, to the Crucifixion of our Lord—the documentary is deeply understandable as a Christian account of the dignity of the human person. It also makes clear that the dignity of the person is closely related to the dignity of the family. The rather thoughtful comments of various social scientists, philosophers, and religious leaders add considerable depth to the narrative.

“The Human Experience” brings a fresh appreciation of, and thankfulness for, the gift of life. Your evening study or church-school class would enjoy it and learn from it.

● Abby Johnson is the author of unPlanned: The Dramatic True Story of a Former Planned Parenthood Leader’s Eye-Opening Journey across the Life Line (SaltRiver, 2011). As the book’s title indicates, Ms. Johnson tells how she journeyed from being a Planned Parenthood executive to being an advocate for unborn children and their mothers.

In November of 2011, a fundraising letter from the Susan B. Anthony List was delivered to this pastor’s study. It was “from the desk of Abby Johnson,” and it begins: “I sat there and watched a little boy get murdered.

“Almost two years later, it still sickens me to think about it.

“When I close my eyes, I can see him trying to escape...and I can see him shriek in pain when it happens.

“Like I said, it *sickens* me. As it should.

“But I need to talk about it, because by telling people about what happened, I can help save lives. I can help make sure more little boys and girls aren’t killed the same way.

“That’s why I am writing you this letter today and why I humbly ask for just two minutes of your time right now.

“You see, the baby boy who was killed...he was murdered in an abortion at a Planned Parenthood location in Texas.

“And I just sat there and watched, because it was my job. It was my job, as clinic director of the College Station [TX] Planned Parenthood.

“But when I watched the ultrasound monitor and saw that 13-week old child fighting for his life...squirming and struggling to get away from the abortionist’s suction tube, something happened to me.

“Jesus Christ had been working on my heart for some time before that, and I had begun to question my work and my employer.

“But seeing that boy get killed pushed me over the edge. I knew I had just witnessed the murder of an innocent human being, created in God’s image. And I could no longer stomach the idea of being responsible for it.

“**I quit my job at Planned Parenthood and began to speak out as a new, proud, pro-life activist...**” (emphases in the original)

Thanks be to God for his transforming grace in the life and work of Abby Johnson!

● Last fall Pope Benedict XVI visited Germany. On September 23, 2011, while speaking on Christian unity, he proclaimed: “The seriousness of our faith in God is shown by the way we live His word. In our own day, it is shown in a very practical way by our commitment...to man. We live at a time of uncertainty about what it means to be human. Ethics are being replaced by a calculation of consequences. In the face of this, we as Christians must defend the inviolable dignity of human beings from conception to

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death—from issues of prenatal diagnosis to the question of euthanasia... Faith in God must take concrete form in a common defense of man. To this defense of man belong not only these fundamental criteria of what it means to be human, but above all and very specifically, love, as Jesus taught us in the account of the Final Judgment: God will judge us on how we respond to our neighbor, to the least of his brethren. Readiness to help, amid the needs of the present time and beyond our immediate circle, is an essential task of the Christian.”

- “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (The United Methodist Hymn, No. 519), with lyrics by words by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938), is sung every year at the main Martin Luther King, Jr. event in Morehead City, NC. The hymn contains these extraordinarily stirring lines: “we have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered” (st. 2) and “lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee” (st. 3). It seems to this village pastor that these lines apply to the Civil Right Movement of yesterday and to the Pro-Life Movement of this day.
- “Sex and the Church” is a regular column on the “Faith in Action” website, which offers “news and views from the United Methodist Board of Church and Society.” “Three Voices Discuss Pornography” is a very helpful interview with a man once criminally involved with porn, his wife, and his counselor. This article speaks the unspeakable—that is, it discusses an evil that is quite pervasive but often ignored. Read it.
- This is interesting and fun. The “Coolest Video of the March for Life so far...” shows some of the January 23, 2012 march and interviews with some

marchers. At 1:47 and 3:29, it also shows the Lifewatch banner in the sea of signs and people. To see for yourself, google the title.

- ”180” is another video that you might find of interest. You can view it at www.180MOVIE.com. The video’s on-the-spot, on-the-street interviews are at times in-your-face, but always provocative. We dare you to watch it.
- Also, you might check out the video “Dignity of Human Life” at www.focusonthefamily.com. Suitable for a church-school class, study group, or worship service, this video explains what it means to be “pro-life” in Christian terms. It is quite good.
- Wisdom from a local Chinese restaurant: “He who throws mud loses ground.” Well, yes. In a couple of ways.
- *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* “Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.” ♥

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