

## THANK YOU

Lifewatch thanks you, at this very late date, for your generous response to our December 1, 2014 appeal for financial support. (Sorry for the belated thank you, but a publication glitch in the last issue of the newsletter [March 1, 2015] delayed this general word of thanks to you.) Once again, you are rising to the occasion. Once again, you are ensuring that Lifewatch witnesses to the Church's historic, ecumenical Gospel of Life -- which includes life, abortion, and human sexuality. Because of you, your ardent prayers and your sacrificial support, Lifewatch's witness continues. Once again, Lifewatch community, heartfelt thanks from your scribe. (PTS) ♥

## THAT SIGN ("I MARCH FOR SANDWICHES") AND A PERSONAL RESPONSE

At 1:30 on the morning of January 23, after a seven-hour drive from Washington, DC, I parked the family car behind our rented house in Whiteville, NC. January 22, Thursday, had been a very long day -- and a very good day.

As the president and editor of Lifewatch (or the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality) since 1987, I have attempted to witness to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church and beyond. On the morning of the annual March for Life in Washington, DC, I have been privileged to participate in the Lifewatch Service of Worship, which usually has been held at Simpson Memorial Chapel in The United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill. Then, after the March for Life, in the afternoon, Lifewatch leaders have gathered again at The United Methodist Building for the annual board meeting.

January 22, 2015 had been a very good day for this pastor, because during the Lifewatch events: Dr. Edgardo Colon-Emeric of Duke Divinity School had preached an excellent sermon, entitled "Life Is Luminous;" Rev. Paul Crikelair, of Stroudsburg, PA, had led a faithful Service of Holy Communion; and board members and friends had made many thoughtful comments during the annual meeting. Finally, after the long drive down Interstate 95 South, Marsha, my wife, and I were home.

Being both Wesleyan and compulsive (a deadly combination, that), I unpacked the car and the satchel, and then headed to the church to "rifle through the day's mail." Returning home at 3:00 a.m., I continued smoking my pipe and checked the usual websites. The First Things website, I discovered, was carrying a story on Mr. Bill Mefford.

Mr. Mefford is the Director of Civil and Human Rights at The United Methodist Church's General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), which is located in The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC. The First Things story noted that Mr. Mefford had created a sign -- that read "I march for sandwiches" -- and taken it to the streets, so some marchers for life could see it. Then he had tweeted a picture of the sign held in his hands, with marchers in the background, and a caption which read, "I was inspired by the March for Life to march for what I believe in! #WhyWeMarch." Mr. Mefford's goal in all of this, he later explained in a blog, was to generate some laughter. I was not terribly surprised by this incident, read for a few more minutes, and stumbled into bed for a few hours of sleep.

### The Fallout

Later I learned that the First Things article, propelled by social media, gathered over 67,000 views. A kind of tsunami of rejection of Mr. Mefford's attempted joke had occurred.

Late morning on January 23, I returned to the Pastor's Study of the Whiteville United Methodist Church. A note awaited me. "Call Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe," it said. The Reverend Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe is the new General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society. Dr. Henry-Crowe, it should be noted, had, the day before, attended the first part of the Lifewatch service and the Communion portion of the service. Her work had prevented her from hearing the day's thoughtful sermon.

By early afternoon, Dr. Henry-Crowe and I were conversing on the telephone. She graciously apologized for what Mr. Mefford had done. During her apology, she made clear that, when Mr. Mefford "march[ed] for sandwiches" during the March for Life, he was not doing so as an officially designated representative of the General Board of Church and Society and that his actions conflicted with "the culture of respect" that she was trying to foster at GBCS. I accepted her apology, and suggested that, on the basis of Matthew 18:15-20, I needed to speak with Mr. Mefford to express disapproval of his recent deed and invite his apology. She agreed.

Within minutes, I had reached Mr. Mefford by telephone. After identifying myself as the Lifewatch president and editor, who had recently been in The United Methodist Building (where Mr. Mefford works) to participate in the Lifewatch service and board meeting, I proposed to him that his sign, made public, involved conduct unbecoming a staff member of the General Board of Church and Society. He agreed quickly and apologized without qualification. I accepted his apology and offered him a brief word of thanks and encouragement.

Also, for the record, both Dr. Henry-Crowe and Mr. Mefford wrote and posted apologies online.

### Lessons Possibly Learned

What is to be learned from this incident?

First, if good humor was its reason for being, that sign was unnecessary. The annual March for Life in Washington, DC -- to the surprise of non-participants -- is an abundantly joyful event full of good cheer. Many, if not most, of the marchers are young and brimming with energy. Their friendships are deep, and their conversations are lively. The March for Life did not need this sign to humor any marchers. They were already in excellent spirits, thank you very much.

Second, in that sign's message, "I march for sandwiches," what was meant for humor could very easily be interpreted in a mocking way. To understand how, simply imagine Mr. Mefford's "I march for sandwiches" next to the embodied message suggested by the marchers, "I march for unborn children." With his sign, Mr. Mefford seems to be equating his commitment to sandwiches with the many marchers' commitment to the unborn. More problematically, he seems to make sandwiches equivalent to the unborn. But these are obviously not equations that can stand. Mr. Mefford's sign, it should be admitted, can trivialize the marchers and the unborn.

On that day in Washington, DC, Mr. Mefford marched for sandwiches, while over 500,000 marched for the protection of unborn children and against their destruction by abortion. A Director of Civil and Human Rights should have known not to parallel or compare, in any way, sandwiches and unborn children. Indeed, a Director of Civil and Human Rights, based on the many "pro-life" sentiments of *The Book of Discipline's* Paragraph 161J, would have many reasons for marching with the hundreds of thousands that day. Who knows? Perhaps next year Mr. Mefford will.

Third, "I march for sandwiches" can also be understood as the result of a common strategy, among "pro-choice" and "pro-abortion" folks, for maintaining the status quo on abortion. Their strategy is this: distract the public's attention from the unborn (who cannot speak for themselves), so fewer people remember the unborn; then the abortion *status quo* can continue without interruption.

Fourth, that sign, methinks, is the result of a church board or agency that lacks diversity. Yes, the General

Board of Church and Society, I am sure, passes all the gender and racial diversity tests. But the most important kind of diversity is the diversity of ideas. When there is no (or a limited) diversity of ideas, a form of groupthink sets in. That is, everybody around the table sees the world in roughly the same way. So everybody thinks the same. Everybody has the same theology. Everybody has the same moral commitments. Everybody has the same cultural interests. Everybody has the same politics. And nobody, in committee meetings or in personal conversations, stands up to deliver a minority report -- e.g., on the many "pro-life" claims and mandates of Paragraph 161J on Abortion in *The Social Principles*. So, in the midst of an apparent "pro-choice" groupthink at the General Board of Church and Society, making a sign like "I march for sandwiches" becomes thinkable and doable. Again, why? Because nobody at GBCS sensitized its staff to the many "pro-life" moral commitments stated in Paragraph 161J.

Years ago, Ms. Pauline Kael, a film critic for *The New Yorker*, wrote, "I live in a rather special world. I only know one person who voted for Nixon. Where they are I don't know. They're outside my ken. But sometimes when I'm in a theater I can feel them." All of us, including the General Board of Church and Society, have to guard against living "in a rather special world." Diversity, a generous diversity of serious ideas, helps all of us, including Church and Society staff, avoid living "in a rather special world."

### From That Sign To Reform?

For nearly thirty (30) years, I have worked to move The United Methodist Church's teaching on life and abortion toward what the Church through the ages has taught and practiced. During most of those years, as noted above, Lifewatch has held its worship service and board meeting in The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC. Most of the time, staff from the General Board of Church and Society have been cordial, and building staff have been most helpful. But not always. At times, on those January 22nd's in Washington, DC (and at General Conferences in the various cities), GBCS staff have made clear to the little band of Lifewatch folks who was really in charge -- and that was the GBCS staff. This has been going on for decades.

Then, out of nowhere, a GBCS staffer marched with that hand-made "I march for sandwiches" sign. Then he tweeted out a captioned picture of that sign. Then came a tsunami of rejection of that sign's content. Then came the embarrassment at the General Board of Church and Society. It reminds me of young Mary singing, "he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly..." (Luke 1:51-52, NRSV) Admittedly, nobody has been scattered, and nobody has been brought down. But there might be a new humility at the General Board of Church and Society. (And God knows, all United Methodist institutions could stand to be more humble more often.) Why? Because of that sign.

That sign was made. That sign was carried. That sign found its way into the social media. That sign created a massive blow back. Apologies from Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe and Mr. Bill Mefford -- personal apologies by telephone, and

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

formal apologies posted on websites -- have been made. And apologies have been accepted. That is as it should be. That is good. That is Christian.

But the real, continuing problem is abortion -- actually, over 1,200,000 abortions per year in the United States -- and the silence of The United Methodist Church about abortion. That sign will be forgotten. Unfortunately, countless unborn children lost to abortion will continue to be forgotten. But now The United Methodist Church is given an opportunity to overcome its forgetfulness of the unborn. By that sign. (Paul T. Stallsworth)

*An edited version of this article first appeared as a Web Exclusive, on February 11, 2015, at <http://www.firstthings.com>, which was later posted at <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/5782/that-sign>.♥*

## **THE GOSPEL OF TRUE INCLUSION**

by Rev. Stuart Tucker

Genesis 32:22-31

### **Naming and Slavery**

A few minutes ago the choir sang a spiritual: "Hush! Somebody Callin' My Name." We often sing spirituals here, songs that came out of the experience of Black slaves. They offer a rich insight into the ways God calls each of us by name. A few Sundays ago the choir sang another spiritual: "I Know I Been Changed." Perhaps you remember it, but in case you do not I asked the choir to sing the chorus one time just to refresh our memories: "I know I been changed. The angels in a heaven done changed my name." Many of our hymns speak of being changed: "I once was lost but now am found." "He touched me and made me whole." "Love lifted me." But it was the second part of that line that caught my attention: "The angels in a heaven done changed my name." I have not heard that same idea anywhere else in sacred music -- though it may be, and I am just not aware. So this unusual expression drew me in.

The idea of names and of naming is so important in the Bible; it appears almost a thousand times. It begins in the first chapter of Genesis, where no work of creation is complete until it is named. A person, place, or thing's essence is revealed in its name. So when we read of someone's name being changed, it signifies a new essence, a new character, and a changed relationship with God. When Simon confessed his belief that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus changed Simon's name to "Peter," which means "rock," and said, "On this rock I will build my Church." I think it is most likely that our anthem was inspired by the story that was our Old Testament lesson this morning -- of Jacob wrestling with the angel. The name "Jacob" means "supplanter," a reference to his upstaging his brother Esau.

His new name "Israel," means "strives with God." Jacob/Israel was no longer to be defined by his contentious relationship with his older brother, but by his relationship with God.

A sacred song is a product of the Scriptures, and it is also the product of the author's experience and that of his or her community. "I Know I Been Changed" is a spiritual. It

was the product of Black people living in slavery. Spirituals often have a between-the-lines message of resistance. One song we all know is "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord." The repeated phrase, "my Lord," was a covert way of slaves saying to their owners, "Jesus is my Lord, not you." In the verse, "Were you there when the sun refused to shine," the sun is treated as if it had a mind of its own, as if it could look down and see things were so wrong it could go on strike. This was something slaves were not allowed to do, no matter how unjustly they were treated. So they sang spirituals with coded messages of resistance.

The possibly coded message in "The angels in a heaven done changed my name" is this: slave owners had ultimate power over their slaves. They could even, on a whim, change their names. Those of us of a certain age will remember the television miniseries "Roots." The author, Alex Haley, traced his ancestry all the way back to Africa. The series begins with Haley's ancestor Kunta Kinte being kidnapped, stuffed into a slave ship, and brought to Virginia where he was sold to a plantation owner. The owner hires a "slave breaker." His first act is to communicate to Kunta that his new name is Toby. Kunta resists, but the slave breaker savagely beats him until he gives in. That is how you enslave someone. You assert your power to name him, to define who and what he is.

But this is not the ultimate power. An unjust social order may allow persons to be defined as property. But there is a greater power. When slaves sang, "the angels in a heaven done changed my name," it was a covert way of saying to their owners, "You only think you can name me and define who and what I am. But you have been overruled. I know I've been changed. The angels in a heaven done changed my name. I do not belong to you. I belong to God."

### **Name Calling**

None of us will ever know the experience of living in a society whose sole purpose is to uphold the right of someone else to own us. But oppressive and hurtful names and labels still exist, and we know their power. Many of us were called names by our classmates when we were growing up. Some of us grew up in abusive homes in which words left deeper scars than physical violence. The greatest damage comes when a child gets to the point that she believes and accepts the ugly names she is called. To those bearing the invisible scars of abuse, we must offer the same truth seen by those who bore the visible scars of slavery: the world may apply all kinds of labels to us, but God has named each of us His beloved children; this is our true name.

The names we apply to people or groups of people can wound and exclude. Names can also bind us together. Lovers call each other pet names. Family members address one another with terms of endearment. In church, when we baptize, we name one another brother and sister in Christ.

### **Naming and the Unborn Child**

Names can bind us in ways we could not expect. A few years after Karen and I got married, we decided the time was right for us to have a family. It took several years and many visits to a fertility specialist. But finally Karen's pregnancy test came back positive. We went from being aspiring parents to expectant parents. It was not long before we gave

our expected one a name: Grub. Let me clarify that this was a temporary name, a *nom de utero* as it were. Giving our expected one a name was an expression of the bond we already felt. But our happy time did not last. A few weeks later Karen miscarried. We were both grief stricken, especially Karen. To deal with her grief, she began writing. Eventually this took the form of a brief service of worship to be used following a pregnancy loss. Eventually that service was included in the current United Methodist Book of Worship. The response was surprising. Women who had similar experiences began reaching out to Karen. She had given voice to feelings they had borne in silence, some of them for many years.

At the time all this happened, over thirty years ago, Karen and I were both pro-choice. This experience began a period of reflection which lasted many years. Certain passages of Scripture spoke to me in new ways. In the second chapter of Luke, a pregnant Mary visits her relative Elizabeth, who is six months pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth tells Mary that, at the sound of Mary's voice, her baby leapt for joy in her womb. So the ministries of both Jesus and John began before they were born. The prophet Jeremiah claimed that God had called him to be a prophet before his birth. And the Psalmist who wrote Psalm 139 asked, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?... For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mothers' womb.... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret.... Your eyes beheld my unformed substance." The point of the psalm is that there is no place we can go, and there is no point to our existence, when we are outside God's love and care.

The purpose of Jesus' earthly ministry was to show that no one was outside God's love and care. The gospel story shows Jesus reaching out to one outcast, marginalized person after another; and assuring them that God loved them. He spoke to the poor, to the handicapped, to lepers, to women. He visited and ate with sinners. He received little children. Each of these were radical acts of inclusion which threatened to overturn the established order.

During the period of the writing of the New Testament, the Church continued Jesus' radical ethic of inclusion by struggling to incorporate Gentiles among the faithful. From the earliest period, the Christian founders operated out of a moral vision in which all who were created in God's image and likeness belonged to him. They rejected the wanton destruction of any human life, whether through war, gladiatorial spectacles, infanticide, or the killing of the unborn.

It is difficult to speak in church of our attitude toward the unborn, because it is such a divisive issue in our society. Believers are drawn into using the vocabulary of the outside culture, pro-choice versus pro-life; and it leaves us at loggerheads. I want to set the issue before you in the Church's vocabulary, in terms of a radical ethic of inclusion. Can we include the unborn? If one of our teens was to face pregnancy out of

wedlock, what would we do? Call her names? Or would we keep the vows we, as a congregation, made to her when she was baptized to surround her with a community of love and forgiveness?

### **Inclusion in Church Life**

I confess I feel self-conscious talking to you about being inclusive. When it comes to what it means to be a radically inclusive church, you have been my teachers. You see, when I originally came here, one of the first things I noticed was that you had doormats that said, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors," and I thought: this is an inclusive church, or at least they aspire to be. Not long after that, Debbie began worshipping here. Some of you may recall how Debbie's mother used to bring her in a wheelchair from Avery Nursing Home just down the street. It was not long before some trustees came during the week and chopped off the end of two of our pews just to make room for Debbie and for anyone else who might come in a wheelchair. I have known some congregations where changing anything in the sanctuary would be cause for civil war. You changed your worship space to make room for strangers. That is radical inclusion.

Several years ago you renovated the kitchen. Now to be honest, there was nothing wrong with the old kitchen -- if all we wanted was to feed our own faces. But if we were going to have the Bread of Life ministry and invite hungry people in our community to supper, then the kitchen had to be up to code. So however many tens of thousands of dollars we spent on the kitchen was not for ourselves, but for strangers. This, again, was radical inclusiveness.

And now we are in the midst of the Campaign for Carter, raising 2.6 million dollars. To spend on ourselves? No. We are spending it on strangers. So when someone comes here for the first time, no matter what door they come in, they will see the sanctuary and be naturally drawn to where we worship. You and I do not need that. We already know where the sanctuary is. Almost none of us here now need handicapped ramps or bathrooms. Odds are we will never need them. But strangers will. Only a couple of our current families could use a bathroom with a changing table. The rest of us will never need it. But someday strangers will. And like those in this historic congregation who have gone before us, we are planting something now that will still be bringing in a rich harvest long after we are gone.

### **Including the Unborn**

It takes a radical moral vision of inclusiveness to make this kind of sacrifice. And that is always the case. The struggle to end slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, equality for women -- for Christians, these struggles were all about acknowledging that we are all God's children, we belong to Him, and we all are part of the kingdom. The defense of unborn life is a natural continuation of that same struggle to include everyone, especially ones who are the weakest and most helpless, those whom Jesus called "the least of these." Our society and our courts may have named them as mere appendages to be discarded at will. But Scripture, tradition, experience,

and reason name them as my neighbor, and as my brother and sister.

And as for that tiny life Karen and I rejoiced over for so short a time, small and brief as it was, I must believe that small one was, and is, included in God's love and care. And yes, maybe, maybe the angels in heaven changed her name. *Rev. Tucker is the Pastor of Visitation and Senior Ministries at Carter Memorial United Methodist Church in Needham, Massachusetts. He preached this sermon for the church he serves.* ♥

## "CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME FROM NAZARETH?"

By Rev. Russell Nanney

When told about Jesus, Nathaniel asked Philip, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46) We may frown upon Nathaniel for his initial disbelief, but it was actually a fair question. Nazareth was the equivalent of a one-stoplight town. It was the most unlikely of all places for a King. What if someone told you that a future American president would come from Spivey's Corner, NC ("the hollerin' capital of the world")? Exactly.

My church has a ministry that reaches out to children and youth with the greatest physical and spiritual needs. The majority of them walk to church from the southern side of town, which mainly consists of lower income families. One of our youth is a black teenage girl with a mental disability. Like most families in her neighborhood, there's no father at home, and her mother can't work. While this girl may have the mental capacity of a second grader, she also has the purest soul I've ever encountered. Sometimes, my eyes fill with water when she hugs me. I feel like Jesus is embracing me.

At Christmas, Santa came to our church to spread his good will. This girl was so enamored with him. She asked him about feeding his reindeer and how he traveled so quickly. In that moment, I stood in awe of her. I couldn't believe that she had a child of her own.

One day, a man in her household violated her in an unthinkable way. The result of this despicable sin was a baby boy. For me at least, this situation represents the epitome of brokenness. Evil truly has no mercy. Upon hearing about a situation like this, we may ask ourselves, Can anything good come from this? This child was born into a world and into a family that are so ill-equipped to care for him. Can anything good come from this?

This baby boy, who attends church with his mother, has become the mascot of our ministry. We joke and say that he's a "ladies' man," because all the girls want to hold him. He recently took some of his first steps in our church, and we all applauded him. I don't know where his feet will lead him in the future, but right now, I can tell you that this child's very presence brings joy into the lives of many. It's a joy that comes from the most broken of circumstances. It has shown me once again that God's Spirit is most alive in our brokenness.

Whether it is divorce, grief, depression, shaky health, or unemployment, sometimes we find ourselves asking, Can anything good come from this? Let me answer this question with another question: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

*Rev. Nanney is the pastor of First United Methodist Church in Mt. Olive, NC. His article first appeared as the Day 7/ February 25 contribution to the North Carolina Conference's 2015 Lenten Reflections, which involved personal storytelling around matters related to race. On the conference website, it is located at <https://nccumc.org/news/reflections/lent-2015/>.* ♥

## THE CASE OF BISHOP TALBERT

*The Unity Dialogue (on the Church and homosexuality) of the North Carolina Conference continued on March 10 at The United Methodist Building in Garner, NC. Your editor was asked to present, and comment on, the "UM Coalition Statement on the Talbert Resolution," which was released on January 23, 2015. For your information, the statement and my comments on it follow. (Paul T. Stallsworth)*

### "UM Coalition Statement on the Talbert Resolution"

"As leaders of the Renewal and Reform Coalition in The United Methodist Church, we believe that the so-called 'just resolution' of complaints filed against Bishop Melvin Talbert for performing a same-sex union service and undermining the ministry of another pastor is inadequate, unfitting, and improper. It fails the church. This settlement mocks the notion of a 'just resolution' of Talbert's intentional act of defiance because it fails to acknowledge that a serious breach of the covenant occurred and it contains no specific commitment to avoid future transgressions...

"The fact that there were no consequences for violating The Book of Discipline nor any expressed regret for doing so invites future violations by Talbert and other clergy who disagree with the church's biblical and compassionate provisions on marriage and sexuality. This settlement is one more in a series of 'just resolutions' that have ignored the violation of official United Methodist policy as determined by 11 General Conferences over the past 40 years. It has become apparent that certain parts of the church and certain bishops have determined not to uphold and enforce the spirit, as well as the letter, of the United Methodist Discipline that they vowed to maintain at their ordination and consecration, and which all bishops reaffirmed as recently as last November's Council of Bishops meeting.

"As leaders of the Renewal and Reform Coalition, we call upon annual conferences to elect delegates to the 2016 General Conference who will restore accountability and integrity to our United Methodist covenant of baptism, membership, and ordination. We further call upon General Conference to pass legislation that will create a consistent global accountability for bishops and defined penalties for performing same-sex unions or marriages. We call upon all bishops to uphold and enforce the provisions of the Discipline with integrity, even when they disagree with those provisions. We also call upon the Council of Bishops

to lead The United Methodist Church by teaching our church's doctrine and by upholding our church's discipline -- not by seeking a public posture of neutrality.

"Finally, we call upon those who disagree with our church's doctrine and discipline to exercise their dissent within the parameters of obedience to our church covenant. Actions of defiance and willful disobedience tear apart the unity of Christ's church, erode trust throughout the denomination, and severely undermine the church's mission to make disciples for the transformation of the world."

### Comments on the Statement

1. For 20 long years, our denomination has fixated on "leadership." Bp. Talbert was one of our leaders who led us to fixate on this topic. And fixate we have. From this fixation, we have learned (among other things) that leaders, who lead, make a tremendous difference in the communities they serve.

Unfortunately, in this case, a leader -- a retired bishop, no less -- led against church doctrine and discipline. Ignoring warnings from the Council of Bishops and other bishops, undermining the ministry of a new bishop, committing a chargeable offense on the issue of the day, and doing all this "while the world was watching," Bishop Talbert inflicted great harm on the church. If a leading officer of the church breaks ranks, how can those he leads be expected to remain faithful?

I repeat: Bishop Talbert's leadership harmed the whole church -- not just his personal relationships with the Council of Bishops and other bishops. With the coalition, I believe this great harm warrants a clear, decisive, deterring, disciplinary response from the church. Unfortunately, the Just Resolution Agreement does not even rise to the level of a timid reply. Because of its timidity and its favoring of Bishop Talbert, this Just Resolution Agreement harmed the church yet again.

2. The Just Resolution Agreement, and those who drafted it, assume that The United Methodist Church has no current doctrine and discipline regarding human sexuality -- or if it does, that doctrine and that discipline are neutralized and rendered ineffective by the blowing winds of popular culture, civil jurisprudence, and episcopal preference. When Bishop Stanovsky and her supervisory team turned away from doctrine and discipline, they were left to practice conflict resolution and calculate in a utilitarian way what would be the least harmful solution. Again, episcopal purpose moved from upholding the church's doctrine and discipline to minimizing conflict in the church. Damage control might have led to a resolution for the immediate parties, the three bishops, involved. But it also heightened distrust, and deepened divisions, throughout the larger denomination. Therefore, the Just Resolution Agreement failed to meet the goals that it stated for itself.

3. Today, there is only one motivation for standing up for Christian teaching on human sexuality: the conviction that such teaching is true. At the leadership levels of The United Methodist Church, there are few laity and fewer clergy who understand this teaching (as stated by the Discipline) to be true. Understood as not quite true, this teaching is not taught; it becomes negligible or negotiable.

However, some of us believe United Methodist teaching about human sexuality is true. I believe we are called, by God, to stand up for this teaching in the covenant-based conferences of the church. We are called to propose it, to defend it, and to live it -- all the while relying upon God's forgiveness and guidance.

4. According to The Book of Discipline, the Council of Bishops is responsible for leading The United Methodist Church. If the Council leads by lovingly offering the church's doctrine and discipline on human sexuality -- if the Council does what it is supposed to do -- the church (with God's help) will survive the present storm. If the Council does not lovingly offer this doctrine and discipline -- if the Council does not do what it is supposed to do -- the church will descend into greater distrust and division. I believe it is up to the Council of Bishops. ♥

### NO POLITICAL APATHY

The following challenge is from Dr. Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977), a Roman Catholic professor of philosophy who for decades fought against Hitler in the realm of ideas. It is from his essay "The Danger of Quietism," which appears in My Battle against Hitler: Faith, Truth, and Defiance in the Shadow of the Third Reich (Image, 2014, pp. 282-283).

"Apathy toward the political sphere on the part of Catholics easily leads...to apathy toward National Socialism as a whole. Many say, 'Why should we always simply attack and criticize? Let us depart from the political sphere; let us search out and convert those who have gone astray. Let us, who stand aloof from politics, spread the spirit of love and reconciliation.'

"This is, at bottom, a cowardly flight from the battle to which God is calling us. It is our obligation as soldiers of Christ to wage war against the Antichrist and to rip the mask from his face. The 'apolitical' disposition cultivated by certain Catholics, which induces others to refrain from exposing and relentlessly fighting against National Socialism, is an evil sophism. What is at stake in the position one adopts toward National Socialism as a whole... is nothing less than the question: Are you for Christ, or against Him?

"Here too, Christ's words hold true: 'He who is not with me is against me' (Mt. 12:30). The soldier of Christ is obligated to fight against sin and error. His battle against the Antichrist is prompted by his love for Christ and for the salvation of souls; he fights this battle for the salvation of those who have gone astray. His attitude is one of true love. But those who flee from the inevitable battle and treat irenically those who have gone astray, obfuscating their error and playing down their revolt against God are, fundamentally, victims of egoism and complacency."

Is Dr. Dietrich von Hildebrand's strong challenge relevant to United Methodists, in the United States, with regard to abortion and human sexuality? This pastor believes it is. In truth and with love, we can and should witness to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church and within American society. (PTS) ♥

## LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

3-16-15

Cindy --

Sadly, my brother passed away on January 8, 2015, leaving me as the last member of our family. He also left a share of the inheritance to me, and I wanted to share his generosity with Lifewatch.

May God bless you and Paul as you tirelessly work to bring The United Methodist Church into the camp of defenders of life. My prayers are with you always. I treasure the years God allowed me to serve Him in this ministry, and I am most grateful to Him and my brother for the opportunity to make this offering. I hope it helps.

Love in Christ,  
Mrs. Ruth Brown  
Dothan, AL

*Mrs. Ruth Brown faithfully served as the Director of Lifewatch from 1991 until 2004. She was an excellent servant leader of this ministry. ♥*

## YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• Lifewatch receives no support from The United Methodist Church. Therefore, we are especially thankful to you for remembering Lifewatch with your prayers and your gifts. As often noted, a gift can be given in two ways. First, you can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. And second, you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. Know that Lifewatch is deeply grateful for your gifts.

• "A baby is God's opinion that life should go on." This joyful truth is from the American poet Carl Sandburg (1878-1967).

• The 2015 National Workshop for Christian Unity was held on April 20-23 in Charlotte, NC. If all went as planned, Mr. James E. Winkler led a seminar, on Wednesday evening of the workshop, entitled "The Miracle of Dialogue: Come, Let Us Reach an Understanding. Can We Reason Together?" Mr. Winkler, you will remember, was the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church from 2000 until 2013. He is now the General Secretary/President of the National Council of Churches. Personally speaking, this pastor has always found Mr. Winkler to be friendly, cordial, and engaging. However, when it came to matters related to The United Methodist Church, life, and abortion, he consistently maintained a pro-choice interpretation of Paragraph 161J of the Social Principles (The Book of Discipline), which contains basic United Methodist teaching on abortion. And he was not much interested in conducting "civil, moral discourse" about his interpretation. Perhaps, in his new position at the National Council of Church, he has changed and realized the pressing importance of civil, moral discourse in the churches and in society today. Such discourse makes room for -- no, it demands -- speaking the truth in love.

• A Change of Heart: A Personal and Theological Memoir (IVP, 2014) by Thomas C. Oden and Richard John Neuhaus: A Life in the Public Square (Image, 2015) by Randy Boyagoda are good books about great men that should be of intense interest to the Lifewatch community.

Dr. Oden is, of course, a member of the Lifewatch Advisory Board. His Change of Heart tells the story of his blessed (if conventional) life in an Oklahoma family, his entry into the leftist cultural currents of beyond-the-local-church Methodism, his years of higher education at the University of Oklahoma and Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University and Yale University, his

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Lifewatch is published by the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.



**Lifewatch**  
Taskforce of  
United Methodists on  
Abortion and Sexuality

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- \* The case of Bishop Talbert
- \* "I march for sandwiches"
- \* The gospel of true inclusion

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teaching and writing at Perkins/SMU and Phillips Theological Seminary and Drew University, his transformation from a theologian of elite cultural Christianity to a theologian for the Church, his countless theological projects, and his commitment to African Christianity.

Because of a colleague at Drew -- Will Herberg, a former socialist Russian Jew -- Thomas C. Oden was forced into an honest self-examination. Herberg challenged Oden: "You will remain theologically uneducated until you study carefully Athanasius, Augustine and Aquinas.... If you are ever going to become a credible theologian instead of a know-it-all pundit, you had best restart your life on firmer ground. You are not a theologian except in name only, even if you are paid to be one." (pp. 136 and 137) After this encounter, Oden indeed changed -- in heart and faith, mind and vocation. Oden's telling of the story, and the stories, of his life is thoughtful, engaging, and informative.

Richard John Neuhaus (1936-2009) was a former Lutheran pastor and a Catholic priest. From 1984 until 1990, this pastor had the privilege of working with Rev. Neuhaus. Richard John Neuhaus: A Life in the Public Square recalls the story of Neuhaus' life and ministry in a most thoughtful way.

Like Oden, Neuhaus also experienced a change of heart and mind. Neuhaus' transformation happened when his anti-Vietnam War friends were not interested in the

human-rights abuses that the victorious North Vietnamese communists perpetrated against the South Vietnamese after the departure of the American military from Vietnam. Also, when left-of-center activists were swept up in the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement for abortion rights, Neuhaus' change of heart and mind was reinforced.

Rev. Neuhaus was always a pastor/priest and theologian first of all. Theological content and commitment guided his comments and commentary on the continuing crises, tragedies, deceptions, follies, mysteries, and miracles of this world. He was also a probing analyst of American Christianity, culture, politics, and economics. In his writing, speaking, and conversing, never, ever was he silent about the things that matter; and never, ever was he ponderous or boring. He was always a servant of Christ and His Church, always a servant of Truth and the many associated truths.

Summer months are a perfect time to read such excellent books as these.

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

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