

COUNT THE COST, THEN OFFER WITNESS

Dr. Robert P. George is the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University and a Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School. On May 13, he spoke at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC. His stirring address is entitled "Ashamed of the Gospel?," and you can watch it on YouTube.

Dr. George declared: "The days of socially acceptable Christianity are over...

"The question each of us today must face is this: *Am I ashamed of the Gospel?* And that question opens others: Am I prepared to pay the price that will be demanded if I refuse to be ashamed, if, in other words, I am prepared to give public witness to the massively politically incorrect truths of the Gospel, truths that the mandarins of an elite culture shaped by the dogmas of expressive individualism and me-generation liberalism do not wish to hear spoken? Or, put more simply, am I willing, or am I, in the end, unwilling, to take up my cross and follow Christ?

"Powerful forces and currents in our society press us to be *ashamed of the Gospel* -- ashamed of the good, ashamed of our faith's teachings on the sanctity of human life in all stages and conditions, ashamed of our faith's teachings on marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife. These forces insist that the Church's teachings are out of date, retrograde, insensitive, uncompassionate, illiberal, bigoted -- even hateful. These currents bring pressure on all of us...to yield to this insistence. They threaten us with consequences if we refuse to call what is good evil, and what is evil good. They command us to conform our thinking to their orthodoxy, or else say nothing at all....

"So for us there is no avoiding the question: *Am I ashamed of the Gospel?* Am I unwilling to stand with Christ by proclaiming His truths? Oh, things were easy on Palm Sunday. Standing with Jesus and His truths was the in thing to do. Everybody was shouting 'Hosanna.' But now it's Friday, and the days of acceptable Christianity are over. The days of comfortable Catholicism [or Christianity] are past. Jesus is before Pilate. The crowds are shouting 'crucify him.' The Lord is being led to Calvary. Jesus is being nailed to the cross.

"And where are we? Where are you and I? Are we afraid to be known as His disciples? *Are we ashamed of the Gospel?*....

"[D]o you stand for the sanctity of human life and the

dignity of marriage as the union of husband and wife? These teachings are not the whole Gospel -- Christianity requires much more than their affirmation. But they are integral to the Gospel -- they are not optional or dispensable. To be an authentic witness to the Gospel is to proclaim these truths among the rest. The Gospel is, as St. John Paul the Great said, a Gospel of Life. And it is a Gospel of Family Life, too. And it is these integral dimensions of the Gospel that powerful cultural forces and currents today demand that we deny or suppress....

"The idea of a 'judgment of history' is secularism's vain, meaningless, hopeless, and pathetic attempt to devise a substitute for what the great Abrahamic traditions of faith know is the final judgment of Almighty God. History is not God. *God is God.* History is not our judge. *God is our judge.*

"One day we will give an account of all we have done and failed to do. Let no one suppose that we will make this accounting to some impersonal sequence of events possessing no more power to judge than a golden calf or a carved and painted totem pole. It is before God -- the God of truth, the Lord of history -- that we will stand. And as we tremble in His presence, it will be no use for any of us to claim that we did everything in our power to put ourselves on 'the right side of history.'

"One thing alone will matter: Was I a faithful witness to the Gospel? Did I do everything in my power to place myself on the side of truth?...

"[T]he story does not end at Golgotha. Evil and death do not triumph. Yes, it is [now] Good Friday, but the One who became like us in all things but sin conquers death to redeem us from our transgressions and gives us a full share in eternal life -- the divine life of the most blessed Trinity. The cross cannot defeat Him. The sepulcher cannot hold Him. His heavenly Father will not abandon Him. The psalm that begins in despair...ends in hope and joy. Easter is coming. The crucified Christ will be raised from the dead. The chains of sin will be broken. 'Oh death, where is thy victory? Oh death, where is thy sting?...

"We would much rather be acceptable Christians, comfortable Catholics [or Christians]. But our trust in Him, our hope in His resurrection, our faith in the sovereignty of His heavenly Father can conquer fear. By the grace of Almighty God, Easter is indeed coming. *Do not be ashamed of the Gospel. Never be ashamed of the Gospel.*"

Thanks be to God for providing a witness to Gospel truth such as Dr. George. And be of good courage! (PTS) ♥

SHOULD U.S. DOLLARS PAY FOR ABORTIONS AROUND THE WORLD?

First, a little background.

The Mexico City Policy is a "United States government policy that requires all non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that receive federal funding to refrain from performing or promoting abortion services as a method of family planning with non-U.S. government funds in other countries." Though the Mexico City Policy has been shelved since the beginning of the first term of the Obama Administration, "USAID [United States Agency for International Development] has followed the Helms Amendment ruling, banning use of US government funds to provide abortion as a method of family planning anywhere in the world." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mexico_City_Policy, accessed May 23, 2014)

A May 14, 2014 letter written and coordinated by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) and by the Center for Health and Gender Equality was sent to President Barack Obama. That letter is of particular interest to United Methodists because it was signed by The Reverend Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, the new General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) of The United Methodist Church.

In the May 14 letter, the signatories supported these statements to the President: "...we urge you to use your executive authority to end the longstanding misinterpretation of the Helms Amendment, which in current practice denies women and girls access to safe abortion services even in cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment..."

"While ultimately we seek elimination of this law, at a minimum the executive branch of the U.S. government should clarify existing law so that in the cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment, U.S. foreign assistance is allowed to support abortion access." (emphasis added)

THINK ABOUT IT

Let's consider this for a moment. Through their May 14 letter, RCRC and the GBCS and the United Methodist Women (UMW) (GBCS and UMW are affiliated with RCRC) are lobbying the U.S. government to pay for international abortions in the cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment; and they will lobby the U.S. government until it pays for international abortions in all situations.

This letter caused this pastor to return to The United Methodist Church's basic teaching on abortion, which is found at Paragraph 161J of The Social Principles (The Book of Discipline [2012], pp. 112-113). Our church's teaching on abortion states that, in some situations, the church is politically pro-choice: "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." Okay. (For Biblical, traditional, theological, and moral reasons, Lifewatch disagrees with that claim.) However, this teaching (and therefore The United Methodist

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

Church!) is silent about the government paying for abortions around the world. By signing this letter, a United Methodist official appears to be lobbying for more than what The United Methodist Church teaches. Therefore, by being associated with this letter, United Methodist institutions appear to be overreaching their authority granted by the church. (Lifewatch would gladly receive and publish GBCS's and UMW's reasons for association with the May 14 letter.)

As the Mexico City Policy and the Helms Amendment attempt to deny U.S. government dollars from paying for international abortions, the Hyde Amendment has attempted for decades to deny U.S. government dollars from paying for domestic abortions. The political rationale, of course, is that the federal government should not be using tax dollars from its citizens to do morally odious things (like pay for abortions), to which a majority of tax payers strongly object. That seems like a quite reasonable, political judgment.

But here, in this May 14 letter, RCRC (with United Methodist support) joins an effort to urge the President of the United States, by executive order, to have the government pay for abortions, in certain circumstances, around the world and that aspires to have the government to pay for abortions, no matter what the reason, around the world. Here, The United Methodist Church (and others) are lobbying the federal government to pay for abortions beyond American soil. That is, The United Methodist Church is lobbying to extend around the world America's pro-choice culture. Needless to say, that is not usually included in the missional portfolio of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Allow one more comment. The May 14 letter commends the President: "We applaud the unprecedented steps taken by your administration to establish a U.S. foreign policy that puts women and girls at its center." But as noted above, this letter lobbies the federal government to pay for abortions -- half of which, presumably, would eliminate unborn girls. Evidently, for some, being at the center of U.S. foreign policy can be dangerous business. (PTS) ♥

WITH REGARD TO ABORTION, WHAT (AT THE VERY LEAST) SHOULD BE EXPECTED FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

by Ms. Lynne Balzer

Abortion, in the United States, is a moral disaster. Since 1973, it has killed over fifty million (50,000,000) human beings. In response, a denomination might choose not to speak out against this greatest of human-rights violations. That would be most sad.

But for The United Methodist Church to support a radically pro-abortion lobby, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) -- through our General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and through the United Methodist Women (UMW), both of which are "coalition members" of RCRC -- is another matter. That is outrageous.

RCRC's position on abortion flies in the face of Paragraphs 161J and 161K of The Book of Discipline (2012). Although we are told that RCRC is not supported financially by GBCS and UMW, it has been generously funded by the

likes of the Ford, George Soros, and Playboy foundations and even atheistic organizations. As United Methodists, we should do everything we can to remove our church from RCRC.

Mr. Bill Clute in the South Carolina Annual Conference and I in the Oklahoma Annual Conference sent letters to the churches in our Annual Conferences, with petitions, asking their leadership to respect The Book of Discipline and to support severing all ties between United Methodist organizations and RCRC. This should not have been necessary, but unfortunately it is. Our leaders, even if they oppose RCRC, will not do so on their own.

What Mr. Clute and I have done now needs to be repeated in every other Annual Conference in the United States by people who are willing to step up to the plate. Understanding the absolute necessity of making this a priority in your life at this time, you will, I hope, make a commitment to gather the people and resources required by such a project. This is how we can make a real difference, not just in a couple of Annual Conferences, but throughout The United Methodist Church.

If you are interested in sending a letter, that would support freeing United Methodism from RCRC, to churches in your Annual Conference, just email me at Lynne-B@ChristiansforLife. I will send you a sample letter and a copy of the petition. If I receive two responses from the same Annual Conference, I will put the two respondents in touch with each other.

Thank you, in advance, for considering -- and taking up! -- this challenge.

Ms. Balzer lives in Spiro, OK. ♥

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE HOBBY LOBBY DECISION

On June 30, 2014, the United States Supreme Court released to the public its 5-4 decision on Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Inc. (and the associated Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. case). The Supreme Court decided for Hobby Lobby and, methinks it fair to claim, for religious liberty. For the sake of clarity, the following preliminary points, about the matter of Hobby Lobby, should be made.

First, the Affordable Care Act includes a Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate on birth-control coverage in health-insurance policies.

Second, HHS's birth-control mandate requires coverage of twenty (20) forms of birth control -- sixteen (16) of which are contraceptives and four (4) of which are abortifacients. To state the obvious, the sixteen (16) contraceptives prevent conception; and the four (4) abortifacients destroy what has resulted from conception (that is, a human being in the earliest stages of development).

Third, the Greens, who own Hobby Lobby, are evangelical Christians. For moral reasons, they objected to Obamacare. In particular, they objected to Obamacare's HHS mandate, which forced their company to provide health insurance that included four (4) abortifacient drugs and devices to which they objected. Hence, on religious-liberty grounds, they refused to offer abortifacient coverage in their health insurance for employees, and they took their case to court.

*“Jesus is Lord.
Not the federal government.”*

Fourth, the United States Supreme Court, on the basis of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, decided for Hobby Lobby.

And fifth, Hobby Lobby now does not have to pay for its employees to have free-of-charge access to four (4) abortifacient devices and drugs; and it now pays for its employees to have free-of-charge access to sixteen (16) contraceptives.

UNITED METHODISTS RESPOND

Soon after the Hobby Lobby decision was handed down, United Methodist News Service (UMNS) distributed Heather Hahn's article "Court: Contraception Mandate Violates Employers' Religious Freedom" (June 30, 2014) (This title would have been more accurate: "Court: Abortifacient Mandate Violates Employers' Religious Freedom.") The article contained comments from several United Methodist leaders.

Responding to the Hobby Lobby decision, Dr. William B. Lawrence, the Dean of Perkins School of Theology (Southern Methodist University), claimed: "In effect, this court decision allows persons with financial clout to control the personal decisions of those without financial clout." True. But that is just the way things work when an employer (one "with financial clout") employs an employee (one "without financial clout"). In an employment setting, the employer indeed has the power to make decisions that will directly affect the employee's personal life -- such as the employee's hourly mood, daily schedule, annual vacation, family finances, and so on. (At the same time, the employee has the power to decide whether or not to work for a particular employer.) In the case of Hobby Lobby, the employer is understood by Dr. Lawrence to "control the personal decisions" of employees; but the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby concern was about stopping the federal government from coercing an employer to pay for something that violated his religious conscience and rights. In American society, it is not good to have one person control another person. However, the court suggested, the threat of the federal government's control, of American citizens, is perhaps the greatest and gravest threat of all; and it must be judicially checked and balanced as much as possible.

After the Hobby Lobby decision, Ms. Harriett Jane Olson, who leads the United Methodist Women, said: "United Methodist Women has long affirmed the right of all women to have access to affordable birth control (including emergency contraception) and comprehensive family planning in consultation with her doctor. We also feel that no health care plan is complete or just without this access.... For this reason alone, the Hobby Lobby case is troubling." Ms. Olson speaks about "access to affordable birth control...and comprehensive family planning," presumably including both contraceptives and abortifacients. The Hobby Lobby decision does not eliminate such access; what it ends is free, abortifacient devices and drugs for Hobby Lobby employees, that are paid for by the owners of Hobby Lobby. Such devices and drugs, if desired by employees, can still be purchased in the medical marketplace. (Which, for decades, was the case for all forms of birth control. Where did contemporary Americans get the

idea that all forms of birth control should be provided, free of charge, by health-insurance plans?)

Ms. Katey Zeh is the Project Director of Healthy Families, Healthy Planet at the General Board of Church and Society. A self-described "family planning advocate," she asserted the following on March 25 at the front of the United States Supreme Court building in Washington, DC: "I stand in solidarity with millions of women in this country whose access to contraception is at stake today." To be fair, Ms. Zeh's comments were made months before the Hobby Lobby decision was handed down. However, this decision was not about "access to contraception;" it was about religious liberty: an employer being forced against his conscience, by the federal government, to pay for free abortifacients for his employees. Hobby Lobby would still pay for contraceptive coverage.

In her protest speech, Ms. Zeh continued: "We must stand against the tyranny of those in power who seek to place their personal ideology above the well-being of women and their families. As a Christian, I reject this use of my faith as a weapon when the core message of Christianity is the commandment to love and care for one another." Tyranny. It is good that Ms. Zeh brought up tyranny. Our nation's founders were determined to establish an "American experiment in ordered liberty" that protects its citizens from tyranny. And the tyranny most to be feared was that of the government, the federal government. That is why the Bill of Rights was written and adopted, and why religious freedom is listed, in the Bill of Rights, as the first freedom. Again, why? To protect American citizens from governmental tyranny. In its Hobby Lobby decision, the United States Supreme Court refused to allow the federal government to bring its considerable power to force an employer to pay for things that violate the employer's religious conscience and freedom. That is truly stopping tyranny dead in its tracks. Female Hobby Lobby employees, who insist on having and using abortifacients, will no longer be given them by their employer; they will have to purchase them at market prices.

Finally, if "the core message of Christianity is the commandment to love and care for one another," as Ms. Zeh writes, it seems she might have a little more understanding for the Greens, who are trying to "love and care for," by protecting, human beings at the very beginning of their lives. Instead, Ms. Zeh accuses her opponents of "tyranny," having a "personal ideology," and using "faith as a weapon." ("Protect the Common Good: Hobby Lobby Case Goes beyond Contraception" by Katey Zeh, March 26, 2014) Better to show a little respect and charity for them.

Thanks be to God that the United States Supreme Court decided for religious liberty and against overreach by the federal government. This decision recognizes that Christians, at our best, can be disciples in public -- including the workplace. Jesus is Lord. Not the federal government. And not an expanding secularism that has trouble recognizing simple moral claims and distinctions - - such as the difference between contraceptives and abortifacients. (PTS) ♥

"A PLEA FOR UNITY IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH"

The following article -- "A Plea for Unity in The United Methodist Church" -- was published in the pre-conference materials for the 2014 Session of the North Carolina Annual Conference last June. On June 12, its witness was approved by the conference by an estimated 95% of those present. (PTS)

United Methodists -- brothers and sisters in Christ, clergy and laity -- we plead with you to "[make] every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3, NRSV) in The United Methodist Church.

Since 1998, we have been two participants in The Unity Dialogue of the North Carolina Conference. For over fifteen years, this dialogue has theologically discussed and debated matters related to the Church and homosexuality. As elders in our denomination, we have profound disagreements about these matters. One of us is committed to maintaining current church teaching and practice. One of us is committed to revising current church teaching and practice. Even so, with others on The Unity Dialogue, we have remained in dialogue, and in communion with The United Methodist Church. We are two members in the Body of Christ, differently gifted by God for different functions, yet both indelibly marked with the same sign of the cross on our brow. We are convinced that "the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you.'" (I Corinthians 12:21) This Body needs all its members.

Yet The United Methodist Church is now threatened by formal schism over matters related to homosexuality. Clergy are presiding at same-sex ceremonies; complaints are being filed; various responses to those complaints (including church trials and the avoidance of church trials) are occurring; and such responses are spreading a spirit of division and distrust. We United Methodists have forced ourselves into what seems to be an untenable, and even irreconcilable, situation because we have seen ourselves not as siblings in the faith but seemingly as quarreling marriage partners, frustrated, incompatible, and betrayed. Presuming this model of dysfunctional or unfaithful marriage has led us to the brink of exhausted options. Increasingly, real pain is experienced by those who are committed to revising The Book of Discipline and by those who are committed to defending the Discipline. As patience wears thinner by the day, the threat of visible schism grows.

We oppose formal schism in The United Methodist Church. More positively stated, we are committed to the unity of The United Methodist Church. The basis of our primary commitment to unity is Jesus Christ. Into Jesus Christ we, with all members of the Church, were baptized. The same Jesus Christ, before He suffered and died for the sins of the world, prayed for the unity of His Church: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one....The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one...." (John 17:11,22) Furthermore, we, with all members of our church, have

vowed in The Baptismal Covenant to "be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church, and do all in [our] power to strengthen its ministries." (Vow V)

For the sake of Jesus Christ, St. Paul begged Christians to live out unifying loyalty in the Church. "[L]ead a life worthy of your calling...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 5:1-6) In addition, for the sake of Jesus Christ and in the service of unity, John Wesley urged Methodists to practice discernment: "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

Focusing on Jesus Christ, we remember (literally, remember); we are renewed in the truth that the Church is the Body of Christ. As the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Church. The Church is Christ's, not ours. We United Methodists are not powerful owners and decision-making managers of our own church; instead, we are humble servants, called to serve at the bidding of the Lord of the Church. We, mere members of the Body, have neither the authority nor the right to divide what Christ has built in The United Methodist Church.

Therefore, dedicated to the unity of the Church because of Jesus Christ, we believe that the way forward for The United Methodist Church includes meeting the following challenges:

(1) All United Methodists must "lead a life worthy of the calling," "[speak] the truth in love," and "grow up...into Christ." (Ephesians 4) This mature discipleship most certainly includes: listening in love for the truth God may speak through each other, repenting of our sins, and practicing a penitent spirit.

(2) All United Methodists must acknowledge and abide by the church order contained in The Book of Discipline, which implies:

(a) Those United Methodists who defend current church teaching and practice on human sexuality must acknowledge (along with all in the church) that this church teaching and practice will be vigorously tested at General Conferences, and in other venues, in the foreseeable future. For them, "loyal[ty] to Christ through The United Methodist Church" involves proposing and defending, lovingly and persuasively, current church teaching and practice, and if changes are made, abiding by the Discipline as debate continues.

(b) Those United Methodists who challenge current church teaching and practice on human sexuality must acknowledge and abide by (along with all in the church) the prescribed means through which The Book of Discipline is emended and amended. For them, "loyal[ty] to Christ through The United Methodist Church" involves proposing, lovingly and persuasively, change in current church teaching and practice. When actions of conscientious objection are employed, disciplinary consequences are to be expected and accepted.

We believe that adherence to these challenges demonstrates "loyal[ty] to Jesus Christ through The United Methodist Church." While such mutual adherence to these

challenges will not immediately solve the crisis in our church, it may allow resolution to emerge in God's time. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that "justice too long delayed is justice denied" ("Letter from a Birmingham Jail"); and yet, the meaning and requirements of justice emerge only over time -- not as quickly as preferred by all.

By the grace of God, with the guidance of God, and under the judgment of God, let us United Methodists meet this test as one church -- and remain one church -- even as we work through strong disagreements, and discern Christian truth, about human sexuality. Let us not settle for a middle ground of hurried compromise, nor wind up on a divided ground with self-righteous churches. Rather, let us together find the higher ground offered by Jesus Christ, who in The Baptismal Covenant makes us one. Again, the Church is Christ's, not ours.

Rev. Laurie Hays Coffman
Croasdaile Village, Chaplain
Durham, NC

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth
Whiteville UMC, Pastor
Whiteville, NC

Easter Season
May 1, 2014

"The Plea for Unity" was introduced to the Annual Conference by Rev. Coffman and Rev. Stallsworth. For your information, Rev. Stallsworth's introductory remarks follow.

1. A marriage experiences difficulties. Talk of divorce begins and increases. One night, the two agree, "We will never again use the word divorce." Indeed, they never again use that word. The marriage endures and strengthens. Why? Because covenant took divorce off the table.

By recalling us United Methodists to Christ, His Church, and The Baptismal Covenant, "The Plea for Unity in The United Methodist Church" tries to take schism (or separation) off our denominational table.

2. Here is the story of "The Pea for Unity."

Lent 2014. Tensions in our denomination were rising. Talk of schism was increasing. Another Unity Dialogue was about to take place in Garner, NC. This pastor was compelled to stand for the unity of our denomination based on Jesus Christ and His Church. But how? When? Where? With whom? A potential project came to mind: Draft a statement for denominational unity with Rev. Laurie Hays Coffman. Laurie and I had co-chaired The Unity Dialogue for years. So I called Laurie and invited her into this project. She agreed to consider. Later she called and accepted. We knew we might begin to write a statement, hit a snag, and have to abandon the project.

"The Plea for Unity" went through six drafts. The first was emailed on March 26; the last was completed by telephone on May 1. On May 2, the final version was submitted to the Conference Office. Finally, Rev. Carol Goehring and Bishop Hope helped place "The Plea for Unity" on the conference agenda.

3. One more comment.

"The Plea for Unity" challenges everyone in our church. Everyone! "The Plea" challenges all of us to be truly Christian with one another. "The Plea" challenges all of us to uphold the church order contained in The Discipline. If you are committed to our church's teaching on human sexuality,

"The Plea" challenges you to teach it where you are. If you dissent from our church's teaching, "The Plea" challenges you to advocate within "the prescribed means through which The Book of Discipline is emended and amended." Finally, "The Plea" would not have us ignore breaches of the Discipline.

Thank you for reading and considering "The Plea for Unity." ♥

RESPONSE TO "INTEGRITY AND UNITY"

At the end of July, "Integrity and Unity" was released (which can easily be Googled). This fine statement, by evangelical and traditional United Methodists, calls the bishops and the Council of Bishops to uphold faithfully The Book of Discipline.

Your editor endorsed "Integrity and Unity" and left a version of the following "endorsement message" on the endorsement website.

"I endorse 'Integrity and Unity' because it is a needed call to accountability to the bishops, and to the Council of Bishops, of The United Methodist Church. As the co-author of 'A Plea for Unity in The United Methodist Church' (with Rev. Laurie Hays Coffman), I find 'Integrity and Unity' consistent with 'A Plea for Unity.' The tone, clarity, and timing of 'Integrity and Unity' are constructive to our United Methodist life together.

"I propose two (2) stipulations to my endorsement. First, my endorsement of 'Integrity and Unity' does not suggest endorsement of all the commentary (e.g., FAQ) and comments that appear on the website that features 'Integrity and Unity.' Second, I firmly believe that the guiding basis of our life together in The United Methodist Church is The Baptismal Covenant. That covenant, as far as I am concerned, is in place and authoritative (for this United Methodist and all others) no matter what is going on in the church's life -- even if others are breaking covenant, even if pastors and bishops are breaking covenant. Because some break The Baptismal Covenant does not give this pastor, or any other United Methodist, permission to do the same. In other words, my obedience to Christ, through The Baptismal Covenant, is not dependent on the covenantal obedience of others. That is, my obedience is unconditional.

"In 'A Plea for Unity,' Rev. Coffman and I contend (with the nearly unanimous support of the 2014 North Carolina Annual Conference) that the Church is Christ's, not ours. Therefore, we can, and should, behave accordingly -- and that involves lovingly holding each other, even bishops and the Council of Bishops, accountable to the covenants we have made." ♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

June 15, 2014 [email]

Rev. Stallsworth:

I read the most recent issue of Lifewatch (June 2014) with great interest and hope, as always. I reflected on how in England, it was the "radical" Methodists who changed the world by starting a revolution to end slavery. John Wesley's last letter was to William Wilberforce [a convert under Wesley's ministry and a member of Parliament], encouraging him to continue the fight. I think Wesley, could he today, would likewise encourage the Church to continue the fight to end abortion with these very

same words. May we persevere as those great saints who have gone before us, never giving up until the battle is won, and all human beings are valued and protected from their earliest beginnings until their natural death.

Sincerely,

Nicole Cooley

Project Director, Center for Bio-Ethical Reform
Churchville, VA

P.S. Here is Wesley's final letter to Wilberforce.

February 14, 1791

Dear Sir,

Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum [Athanasius arrayed against the world], I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a "law" in all our colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this?

*That he who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of, dear sir,
Your affectionate servant,
John Wesley*

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Lifewatch receives no support from denominational sources. Therefore, we are especially thankful to you for remembering Lifewatch in your prayers and with your gifts. 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. For your faithful and generous responses, Lifewatch is deeply grateful.

- Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony/A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong (Abingdon) was written by Dr. Stanley Hauerwas and Dr. William H. Willimon, both of Duke Divinity School. (Full disclosure: Dr. Hauerwas and Dr. Willimon serve on the Lifewatch Advisory Board.) When it originally appeared in 1989, Resident Aliens provoked quite a stir -- particularly in The United Methodist Church and its congregations. Abingdon is now offering an "Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition" of the book.

Back in 1989, this United Methodist pastor was mightily encouraged, and provoked, by Resident Aliens. Recently, reading the latest edition of the book, this pastor was encouraged and provoked all over again.

Through Resident Aliens and throughout their ministries, Dr. Hauerwas and Dr. Willimon push Christians to be the Church. The Church that they envision is a colony, a city, a community that is political. That is, the Church, in their view,

has its own culture, and that culture is thick and political. Simply stated, according to these co-authors, the Church has its own way of seeing the world and living in the world. The Church, they might say, has political durability. So it has structures -- liturgy, doctrine, morality, government (at congregational, regional, and denominational levels), music, ways to understand and interpret the Bible, and so on. Whereas too many pastors and laity understand the Church as the voluntary association in which you never want to hurt another's feelings (because they will promptly leave), Dr. Hauerwas and Dr. Willimon depict a Church to which Christ calls us, in which Christ transforms us, from which Christ sends us to offer witness and service in the world.

Upon returning to Resident Aliens, I am somewhat surprised that this book and the conversation (if not school of thought) it generated did not better prepare The United Methodist Church of today to respond to the durable, formidable challenges posed by those who wish to revise traditional Christian teaching on human sexuality and push United Methodism (at all levels) to accept homosexual practice as non-sinful behavior. If the Church truly has its own peculiar and particular life, and its own peculiar and particular way of understanding and doing things, then the Church should not be afraid to offend or scandalize those who see and do things differently.

This pastor would have thought that Resident Aliens would have informed and formed more of those who are, more or less, evangelical and orthodox to stand up for the Church's faith on matters related to human sexuality. Unfortunately, that has not happened. Far too many of our denomination's bishops are hesitant, if not unwilling, to teach the Church's faith (about human sexuality or anything else). Why? Far too many of our denomination's bishops did not get (or take to heart) this Hauerwas-Willimon memo (titled Resident Aliens) about the challenge of being the Church in American society today.

Though the hour is late, it is not too late. Get a copy of Resident Aliens, read it, and be renewed in Christ's call to follow Him and to be Christ's Body (the Church) in the world.

- In June, the United States Supreme Court ruled, in a unanimous decision, that the Massachusetts' law -- which established a 35-foot-protester-free zone around abortion clinics in the state -- violated the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. While the zone had been legally established to diminish the impact of protesters near abortion clinics, it also distanced "sidewalk counselors" from those entering such clinics. According to the Supreme Court's reasoning, this limited the free speech of the counselors, many of whom through kindness and information attempt to offer abortion alternatives to abortion-prone women.

- Planned Parenthood's Clergy Advocacy Board (thanks be to God there are currently no United Methodists on the board) recently posed a "pastoral letter to patients." It is an attempt to reassure those contemplating an abortion, and those who have had an abortion, that "it is all good." "As religious leaders from a number of religious traditions, we're here to support you in your decision." Whatever that decision might be.

In the second paragraph of the letter, this sentence appears: "The beliefs of each person are deserving of respect, and each person deserves care and compassion."

I have a long-standing disagreement, with a brother in Christ and in the ordained ministry, about these matters. He believes that every idea, expressed by every person, deserves respect. I disagree. (And he does not seem to respect my disagreement.) I believe that every person, created in the image and likeness of God, demands my respect -- even love. However, ideas need to be weighed and tested, approved or disapproved, supported or opposed. Again, through it all, all persons must be respected -- even those who assert ideas that are false, misleading, or vulgar. But to respect all ideas leads us into what Pope Benedict XVI called "the dictatorship of

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relativism." And that is a regime which we should resist with all our might.

Another comment. The Planned Parenthood letter notes: "No one should be allowed to force their faith teachings on anyone else." I agree. But we should be willing to propose the truth of the Church's faith to others. John Paul the Great spoke convincingly about proposing the truth, not imposing the truth.

A last comment. The letter states: "God loves you and is with you no matter what you decide. You can find strength, understanding, and comfort in that love." God's love and presence are real. But sometimes God's love and presence lead us to feel guilt for our sin and to repent; and then divine love frees, forgives, and transforms us. In other words, God is not a compliant friend, who does whatever we ask and who blesses whatever we do.

- "The CDC's -- CDC stands for Centers for Disease Control -- latest Abortion Surveillance report (Nov. 28, 2013) found that between 2007 and 2010, nearly 36% of all abortions in the U.S. were performed on black children, even though blacks make up only 12.8% of the population. Another 21% of abortions were performed on Hispanics, and an additional 7% on other minority races. A total of 64% of all abortions were on minority groups.

"As further evidence of the targeting of minorities by the abortion industry, 79% of Planned Parenthood abortion mills are in black and other minority neighborhoods." ("50th Civil Rights Anniversary Heralds Hope Amid Chaos," Priests for Life newsletter, July-August 2014, p. 3)

- Get ready. Around this time of the year, near an election, many conference offices throughout American Methodism

send out notices warning clergy and churches to stay far, far away from political matters. (The hypocrisy, here, is quite bold. While the Council of Bishops, individual bishops, and the General Board of Church and Society routinely unburden themselves on political matters, others of us are encouraged to be silent on such matters.) These notices have their intended affect: they tend to push village pastors and their congregations to avoid things political. (Lawyers, in the conference offices, must somehow be involved.)

Father Frank Pavone, the National Director of Priests for Life, helps us to think about this: "We believe it's time to stop censoring ourselves by the risk-averse mentality, often fostered by legal advisors....[In the churches, w]e need to conduct non-partisan activities in a way that common sense judges as non-partisan: no candidate or party is endorsed, and the activity is open to all..." ("Churches, Tax Exemption, and Politics: Part Three," Priests for Life newsletter, pp. 1 and 2)

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

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