

WHAT THEN SHOULD WE DO?

The following is excerpted from "The Birth Pangs of United Methodism as a Unique, Global, Orthodox Denomination," which is available on The Confessing Movement's website.

by Dr. William J. Abraham

Today the issue facing The United Methodist Church is dramatic indeed. What is at stake is the dominical teaching of the Church -- that is, Church teaching from our Lord Jesus Christ -- on marriage and sexual morality. The issue is doctrinal and moral. Doctrinal because it involves the Church's doctrine of creation. Moral because it is a matter of the Church's canonical (across the entire Bible) and ethical practice.

At this time in The United Methodist Church, evangelicals and traditionalists are right not to panic. Equally, they are right to resist merely pragmatic schemes of accommodation and negotiation with those who want to "update" our church's teaching on human sexuality. To be sure, if forced into denominational division, they should insist on an equitable division of assets and property. But long before that, they should explore any and every proposal that would genuinely preserve the treasures that God has given to the Methodist tradition in its varied forms over the last two centuries.

Evangelicals and traditionalists should not hand over the store to those who, with the best of intentions in the world, are departing from historic Christianity. They should stay the course as long as is needed to ensure the spiritual welfare of the sheep for whom Christ died and was raised from the dead. They should pray and fast. They should gather, as needed, in occasional conferences to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit -- as did the apostles of old and as did their ancestors in early Methodism. As Irenaeus (130-202, Church Father, Bishop of Lyons) once noted, where the Spirit is, there is the Church and the fullness of grace and truth; and within the Church, the power of the keys is no dead letter. They should humbly own their God-given authority to act. They should patiently wait until the time for action is ripe. And they should calmly face down the intimidation and hostility they now, and will, encounter.

In all this, they should seek to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. The deeper wisdom in the neighborhood is that the issue is not one of clever pragmatism but of truth and witness. Evangelicals and traditionalists stand, in fear and trembling, for the truth of the Gospel and for the faith of the Church universal -- militant on earth, triumphant in heaven.

This is the foundation that gives resolute backbone to their deliberations and actions in The United Methodist Church today.

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A LETTER TO SEVERAL BISHOPS: TEACH DOCTRINE, UPHOLD DISCIPLINE

The following letter was written during an afternoon plenary session of the 2016 General Conference, typed and copied and signed late that night, and distributed early the next morning (by an extraordinarily helpful DoubleTree by Hilton clerk, who slipped copies of the letter under the doors of the bishops).

Bishop Warner H. Brown, Jr.
President of the Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church
18 May 2016
Dear Bp. Brown:

Pentecost grace and peace to you and yours. For years, as the editor of Lifewatch, I have placed before you a newsletter of 4 to 10 pages each quarter. Today, you are spared -- only a single page here.

All agree: The United Methodist Church is in crisis, divided and confused by matters related to human sexuality. This letter is a call, a plea, for unity in our church. Such unity, I believe, depends on you and the Council of Bishops (COB) -- shepherding the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For years, the COB has ministered to the best of your ability to maintain our church's unity during a divisive time. Unfortunately, the operative theology of the Council (a theology of grace only), the moral-theological disagreements within the Council, society's sexual-political pressures on the church, and caucus challenges within the church have made most members of the Council, understandably, timid. This timidity has caused Council members to avoid doing things you are charged by The Book of Discipline to do: teach church doctrine, and uphold church discipline.

"However," you might object, "we cannot do that. There is not enough agreement among the bishops and on the Council." My reply: You are disagreeing with each other because you are

taking your personal opinions (often dignified with the word “conscience”) more seriously than you are taking The United Methodist Church’s doctrine and discipline. Your duty, as a Council, is to teach United Methodist doctrine and uphold United Methodist discipline -- in obedience to Christ. This teaching and this upholding require the “humility,” “truthfulness,” and “courage” mentioned in the recent Episcopal Address. They also require the Council to lead the church and not just listen.

As you well know, in The United Methodist Church, General Conference determines the church’s doctrine and discipline. When the Council ignores the decisions of General Conference, regarding doctrine and discipline, that is an act of disobedience that results in further denominational dysfunction and decline. When the Council acts on the decisions of General Conference, regarding doctrine and discipline, that is an act of trusting obedience to Jesus Christ. Upholding the church’s discipline might well begin with the Council upholding the General Conference’s Rules for the sake of order and productivity.

The unity that Christ gives to the church in this world will never be a perfect unity. Instead, it will be a covenantal, good-enough unity that yet challenges us United Methodists to live in love and truth -- while walking toward, and yearning for, Zion. With the whole church and General Conference, I pray for you.

In Christ,

(The Rev.) Paul T. Stallworth

Cc: Bishop Paul L. Leeland, Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, and Bishop William H. Willimon ♥

THE VOWS THE BISHOPS HAVE TAKEN

Perhaps as never before, the bishops of The United Methodist Church are now attempting to lead the church. It is wise, at this time, for the bishops to recall (and for the larger church to remember or to learn) the vows they have made. Therefore, the bishops’ baptismal vows, ordination vows, and consecration vows are listed below.

THE BAPTISMAL VOWS

[from “Baptismal Covenant I” in The United Methodist Hymnal (1989), pp. 34 and 38]

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? [I do.]

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? [I do.]

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races? [I do.]

According to the grace given to you, will you remain [a] faithful [member] of Christ’s holy Church and serve as Christ’s [representative] in the world? [I do.]

As [a member] of Christ’s universal Church, will you be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church, and do all in your power to strengthen its ministries? [I will.]

As [a member] of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness? [I will.]

THE ORDINATION VOWS

[from “The Order for the Ordination of Elders,” The United Methodist Book of Worship (1992), pp. 675-676]

...Remember that you are called to serve rather than to be served, to proclaim the faith of the Church and no other, to look after the concerns of Christ above all. So that we may know that you believe yourselves to be called by God and that you profess the Christian faith, we ask you: Do you trust that you are called by God to the life and work of an elder? [I do so trust.]

Do you believe in the Triune God, and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? [I do so believe and confess.]

Are you persuaded that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain all things necessary for salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ, and are the unique and authoritative standard for the Church’s faith and life? [I am so persuaded, by God’s grace.]

Will you be faithful in prayer, in the reading and study of the Holy

Scriptures, and with the help of the Holy Spirit continually rekindle the gift of God that is in you? [I will, with the help of God.]

Will you be a steadfast disciple of Christ, so that your life may be fashioned by the gospel, and provide a faithful example for all God’s people? [I will, with the help of God.]

In covenant with other elders, will you be loyal to The United Methodist Church, accepting its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline, defending it against all doctrines contrary to God’s Holy Word, and accepting the authority of those who are appointed to supervise your ministry? [I will, with the help of God.]

May God, who have given you the will to do these things, give you grace to perform them that the work begun in you may be brought to perfection. Amen. [emphases added]

THE CONSECRATION VOWS

[from “The Order for the Consecration of Bishops, The United Methodist Book of Worship (1992), pp. 703-4]

...You have been ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament; you are now called, as [a bishop] of the Church, to reaffirm the vows made at your ordination as [an elder], and to represent Christ’s servanthood in a special ministry of oversight.

You are called to guard the faith, to seek unity, and to exercise the discipline of the whole Church; and to supervise and support the Church’s life, work, and mission throughout the world.

As [a servant] of the whole Church, you are called to preach and teach the truth of the gospel to all God’s people; to lead the people in worship, in the celebration of the Sacraments,

“When the Council [of Bishops] ignores the decisions of General Conference, regarding doctrine and discipline, that is an act of disobedience that results in further denominational dysfunction and decline.”

and in their mission of witness and service in the world, and so participate in the gospel command to make disciples of all nations.

As [a bishop] and [a pastor], you are to lead and guide all persons entrusted to your oversight...

Your joy will be to follow Jesus the Christ who came not be served but to serve.

Will you accept the call to this ministry as [a bishop] and fulfill this trust in obedience to Christ? [I will, by the grace of God.]

Will you guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church against all that is contrary to God's Word? [I will, for the love of God.]

As [a bishop] and [a pastor], will you, in cooperation with diaconal ministers, deacons, and elders, encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries, pray for them without ceasing, proclaim and interpret to them the gospel of Christ, and celebrate with them the Sacraments of our redemption? [I will, in the name of Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.]

Will you share with others bishops in the supervision of the whole Church; support the elders and take counsel with them; guide and strengthen the diaconal ministers and deacons and all others who minister in the Church; and ordain, consecrate, and send others to minister in Christ's name? [All this I will do, by the grace given me.]

May the God who has given you the will to do these things give you grace to perform them, that the work begun in you may be brought to perfection. Amen. [emphases added]

It is most interesting, to this pastor, that The United Methodist Church assumes that doctrine, discipline, and unity go together. That is, the church takes for granted that doctrine, discipline, and unity are not set in opposition to each other; they are never understood to be in competition with each other. In other words, one is not sacrificed for the sake of the others. Doctrine and discipline are not trimmed so that unity can flourish. Nor is unity sacrificed on the altar of doctrine and discipline. When all these dimensions of common life are taken seriously by the church, the church will benefit the most.

In the services of ordination and consecration, elders and bishops are challenged -- indeed, charged! -- to stand up and defend and guard the church's doctrine, discipline, and unity -- especially, one assumes, when the church's doctrine is under assault, discipline is fraying, and unity is being threatened. Most of us elders and bishops, at the time of our ordination and consecration, when we took these vows, had no clue about what we were getting into. (Similar to marriage.) Now we do. So, as we vowed: God help us to do what we promised to do. (PTS)♥

THINKING ABOUT THE LETTER OF WITHDRAWAL FROM RCRC

Apparently, on June 9, 2016 -- at 11:00 p.m., not earlier -- a letter co-signed by Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, the General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), and Ms. Harriett Jane Olson, the General Secretary and CEO of the United Methodist Women (UMW), was "posted or updated" on the UMW website ([http://www.UNITEDMETHODISTWOMEN.ORG/news/letter-to-the-religious-](http://www.UNITEDMETHODISTWOMEN.ORG/news/letter-to-the-religious-coalition-for-reproductive-choice)

[coalition-for-reproductive-choice](http://www.UNITEDMETHODISTWOMEN.ORG/news/letter-to-the-religious-coalition-for-reproductive-choice), accessed on 06/14/16). The main purpose of the letter was revealed at the end of its second paragraph: "By way of this letter we [that is, GBCS and UMW] are officially communicating our withdrawal" from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).

Given 2016 General Conference's vote to withdraw GBCS and UMW from RCRC, the fitting and proper response of Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson was to write this letter to RCRC. They did what General Conference mandated they do.

Several comments, from the Lifewatch perspective about this letter, are in order.

First, on the UMW website, the letter is posted with this title: "An Open Letter to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." Its salutation reads: "To the members and leaders of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice." To this pastor, it seems interesting that this letter, which speaks so favorably of RCRC, is sent as an "open letter" to the RCRC community.

Perhaps it would have made more sense to send a brief, personal letter to RCRC to ask RCRC officials to delete "General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church" and "United Methodist Women" from RCRC's "Coalition Members"/"Member Organizations" on RCRC's website. In addition to that, letters to the GBCS community and the UMW community could have been sent to explain GBCS's and UMW's departure from RCRC, as instructed by General Conference 2016. Instead, Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson seem to focus all their attention, concern, and energy on maintaining the best possible relationship with RCRC and its community -- in the midst of GBCS and UMW withdrawing from RCRC. In the middle of this institutional divorce of GBCS/UMW and RCRC, Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson desire that it be amicable.

Second, in their third paragraph, Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson offer this quotation: our church will provide "nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth." They claim "the Conference [during the same session that they voted against our continuing membership in this coalition...] added [this] language to the Discipline..." That is not true. The language that was quoted by Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson was not added to The Book of Discipline by the 2016 General Conference. It has been in The Book of Discipline's Social Principles paragraph on abortion since 1996. Why was this false claim made?

Third, in their letter's fourth paragraph, Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson note that RCRC has been described, by some, "as a political lobbying group." They explain that "[o]f course, where legal rights and access [presumably, to abortion] are threatened, the Coalition has helped us as members reach out to advocate for women and their doctors." This sounds political; this sounds like lobbying; and this sounds like a group at work -- at least to this pastor. So, using different words, they are conceding that RCRC is, in truth, "a political lobbying group."

Fourth, at the end of the same paragraph, the co-signers of the letter remind their readers that, in 1992, the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church (in Decision 683) found that the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR, RCRC's earlier name) "[did] not contravene our United Methodist Book of Discipline." In fact, the Judicial Council's digest of that case reads: "Support of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights

is consistent with Par. 71(g) of the 1988 Discipline.” (<http://www.umc.org/decisions/41576>, accessed on 06/23/16) In response to the Henry-Crowe-Olson claim, one must note that United Methodist teaching on abortion -- which is located in The Book of Discipline -- is in 2016 much, much more protective of the unborn child and mother from abortion than it was in 1988. That is, United Methodist teaching on abortion has evolved to become much more pro-life over the years. Indeed, United Methodist teaching on abortion evolved to the extent that it began to conflict with RCRC’s agenda.

Fifth, the letter’s fifth paragraph speaks about the “ecumenical” nature of RCRC. Since there are non-Christian groups that belong to RCRC, the letter writers probably meant to refer to RCRC’s interreligious character. They write on: “We have been enriched by the diverse theological perspectives around the table and this has deepened our own work.” Some theological diversity was probably demonstrated at RCRC meetings. Even so, the defining commitment of the groups at the RCRC table was their commitment to work for ready access to abortion for all women. That political and moral commitment probably narrowed the theological diversity more than a little. The two authors also noted “[w]e did not come to the table [of RCRC] to convert each other.” In the debate over United Methodist agencies belonging to RCRC, United Methodists were repeatedly told by folks supporting United Methodist memberships in RCRC that United Methodists needed to stay at the table so that we Methodists could influence [moderate?] RCRC. Such influence, if it had been successful, would have involved at least minor conversions; no?

Sixth, in their letter’s last sentence, Dr. Henry-Crowe and Ms. Olson offer RCRC best wishes: “With many other members of the community of faith, we encourage the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice to continue its important work so that women have safe, legal and affordable access to the care they need [which would, most certainly, include abortion].” With that, The United Methodist Church’s General Board of Church and Society and our United Methodist Women are out of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice -- even if the agency names remain, as of June 23, on the RCRC website.

Calling RCRC. Is anyone in the office? If so, please contact IT. It is time to delete the United Methodist agencies from your website. Thank you.

[Since June 23, the agency names have been removed from RCRC’s website.] (PTS)♥

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

On July 8, your editor delivered the following speech, at the National Pro-Life Religious Council workshop, during the 2016 National Right to Life Convention in Herndon, VA.

1. I am a United Methodist pastor. Some in The United Methodist Church (and other churches) believe the Gospel of Christ should be “reimagined” by various special-interest groups. So they hand over the Gospel of Christ to interest (and identity) groups. Then the theologians in these groups deconstruct and reconstruct the Gospel of Christ into various theologies -- Black Theology, Feminist Theology,

Latino Theology, Liberation Theology, Queer Theology, and so on. While genuinely attempting to lift people, these special-interest theologies, I believe, actually narrow and disempower the Gospel of Christ.

2. Today I will confess that the Gospel of Life is more than a special-interest theology, even more than a Pro-Life Theology. In other words, the Gospel of Life is more than a motivational and operational theology for Christians in the Pro-Life Movement. As far as I am concerned, the Gospel of Life does not grow out of the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel of Life is the Gospel of Christ. They are the same Gospel.

3. How can I claim that the Gospel of Christ is the Gospel of Life? Evidence. My evidence is found in the Church’s Apostles’ Creed. Consider with me how the Gospel of Christ, outlined by The Apostles’ Creed, repeatedly refers to life.

4. I invite you to stand and declare, with me, The Apostles’ Creed...

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

“And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

You may be seated.

5. Now, please think with me about The Apostles’ Creed line by line. Notice how the claims of this creed refer, again and again, to the Good News of God’s life and God’s gifts of life.

*God the Father Almighty: God reveals as “Father.” This Father lives, loves one Son, and enjoys missional life with His Son in the power of their Holy Spirit.

*maker of heaven and earth: God the Father, in His almightiness, creates and cares for all that is, including all that lives, including all people.

*Jesus Christ: With the title of “Christ” (or Messiah), the people and history of Israel are invoked. In Israel’s main event, the Exodus, God delivers His people from Egyptian slavery, first by delivering Moses from infant death. After the Exodus, the same Moses receives from God The Ten Commandments, which protect human lives by prohibiting murder.

*who was conceived by the Holy Spirit: God’s Spirit makes possible, or creates, the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ within Mary.

*born of the Virgin Mary: Maternally carried in the usual way, baby Jesus is born of Mary.

*between being born and having suffered: The ministry of Jesus Christ is all about life: raising the dead, healing the sick, freeing the enslaved, forgiving the guilty, and opposing evil and its death-dealing.

*suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: Jesus Christ accepts upon Himself all that opposes

life. This horror destroys Him.

*the third day he rose from the dead: Rising from a tomb, Jesus Christ conquers death and its allies. Indeed, the risen Jesus Christ achieves cosmic victory over death and for life.

*sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: Mysteriously, Jesus Christ rules for His Father over all -- including His defeated, but still destructive, enemies. Jesus Christ reigns as the Lord of life.

*from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: At the end of history, Jesus Christ will return, totally redeem all of creation, and absolutely eliminate the forces of death.

*Until then, the Holy Spirit accomplishes much which protects, advances, and increases life in this world.

*the holy catholic Church: The Spirit sustains the Church through the ages to proclaim, practice, and promote the life-giving Gospel and oppose the defeated forces of death.

*the communion of saints: The Spirit helps the living Church Triumphant encourage the living Church Militant, as we struggle to be faithful to God and the Gospel.

*the forgiveness of sins: Sins and guilt harm, limit, and/or end life. The Spirit brings forgiveness based on Christ crucified and risen, and lives are reborn and renewed.

*the resurrection of the body: At history's end, Jesus Christ's victory over death will be extended to all.

*the life everlasting: Life from God, and with God, never ends.

6. So, the Gospel of Christ is indeed the Gospel of Life. And the Gospel of Life is about the living Triune God super-generously giving many gifts of life. With God's help, we can recognize and receive God's gifts of life. (PTS)♥

DOCTOR, PLEASE LOVE

The following letter was written by Courtney Baker of Sanford, FL. While lacking reference to the Lord of life, this letter assumes the Gospel of Life and the reality of providence. Unfortunately, her doctor seemed to assume a world without God, a world without providence, a world with powerful human beings exerting control over weaker human beings for the alleged good of all. Appearing on a Facebook page, this letter and its impact were picked up by ABC News. (PTS)

[May 2016]

Dear Doctor:

A friend recently told me of when her prenatal specialist would see her child during her sonograms, he would comment, "He's perfect." Once her son was born with Down syndrome, she visited that same doctor. He looked at her little boy and said, "I told you. He's perfect."

Her story tore me apart. While I was so grateful for my friend's experience, it filled me with such sorrow because of what I should have had. I wish you would have been that doctor.

I came to you during the most difficult time in my life. I was terrified, anxious, and in complete despair. I didn't know the truth yet about my baby, and that's what I desperately needed from you. But instead of support and encouragement, you suggested we terminate our child. I told you her name, and you asked us again if we understood how low our quality of life would be with a child with Down syndrome. You suggested we reconsider our decision to continue the pregnancy.

From that first visit, we dreaded our appointments. The most difficult time in my life was made nearly unbearable because you never told me the truth. My child was perfect.

I'm not angry. I'm not bitter. I'm really just sad. I'm sad the tiny beating hearts you see every day don't fill you with a perpetual awe. I'm sad the intricate details and the miracle of those sweet little fingers and toes, lungs, and eyes and ears don't always give you pause. I'm sad you were so very wrong to say a baby with Down syndrome would decrease our quality of life. And I'm heartbroken you might have said that to a mommy even today. But I'm mostly sad you'll never have the privilege of knowing my daughter, Emersyn.

Because, you see, Emersyn has not only added to our quality of life, she's touched the hearts of thousands. She's given us a purpose and a joy that is impossible to express. She's given us bigger smiles, more laughter, and sweeter kisses than we've ever known. She's opened our eyes to true beauty and pure love.

So my prayer is that no other mommy will have to go through what I did. My prayer is that you, too, will now see true beauty and pure love with every sonogram.

And my prayer is when you see that next baby with Down syndrome lovingly tucked in her mother's womb, you will look at that mommy and see me[,] then tell her the truth: "Your child is perfect." (<http://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/mom-baby-syndrome-mail-letter-doctor-suggested-abortion/story?id=39666410>, accessed on 06/12/16)♥

HUMAN SEXUALITY AND CHRISTIAN TRUTH

The Unity Dialogue of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist, which is a continuing dialogue on matters related to the Church and homosexuality, met at conference headquarters in Garner, NC on January 13, 2016. During the dialogue, your editor offered the following remarks.

1. Thank you for being a part of today's unfolding -- or perhaps eternal? -- Unity Dialogue on The United Methodist Church and homosexuality.
2. To begin, please think about this: today we will not be reviewing two (2) options that General Conference 2016 might consider.

The first option, which General Conference will consider and we will ignore, is for the separation -- amicable or not -- of The United Methodist Church. At least two petitions for separation have been submitted. Both of these separation petitions would divide The United Methodist Church in the United States, and both of them would invite non-US United Methodist churches to join the new denominations or become autonomous. Today, we are not discussing the separation option.

The second option, that General Conference might attempt and we will not, is the option to ignore completely the tensions over human sexuality in The United Methodist Church. Call it the ostrich option.

So this Unity Dialogue has removed these two options -- the separation option and the ostrich option -- from today's table. That needs to be acknowledged.

3. Consistent with the witness of the Bible and the tradition of the Church catholic, The United Methodist Church's current teaching on human sexuality is true. Though thin and inelegant

and lopsidedly focused on homosexuality, our denomination's human-sexuality teaching is generally true.

[The following portion was added to the January remarks -- for a Unity Dialogue presentation at St. Francis United Methodist Church in Cary, NC on April 7.]

Our church's teaching on human sexuality is true because our church's teaching is consistent with the witness of the Bible, United Methodism's "true rule and guide for faith and practice" (The Confession of Faith, Article IV).

The Bible's teaching on human sexuality emerges most clearly when Jesus challenges the Pharisees to a more elevated understanding of marriage: "...from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'" "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'" (Mark 10:6-9, NRSV) In those words, our Lord is teaching that the appropriate relationship for human sexual expression is marriage, and that this truth is demonstrated by creation and revealed in Genesis. The two claims from Genesis, of course, are: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them..." (1:27-28a); and "Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.' Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." (2:23-24) Later in the Bible, in his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul picks up the theme of marriage from Genesis and Jesus, and Paul understands marriage to reflect "the great mystery" of Christ and the Church: "'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church." (5:31-32) The Bible -- Genesis, Jesus, and Paul -- makes clear that human sexual expression is intended and reserved for the covenant of marriage. This Biblical teaching has guided the Church, and determined the Church's teaching, for nearly 2,000 years. This teaching, from the Bible and by the Church, is true. That is United Methodist doctrine. It should be continued by General Conference.

Because our church's human-sexuality teaching is true, I propose that any departure from that truthful teaching would have dire consequences for the church. The late German systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014) warned in 1996: "If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the Biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on Biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." (Christianity Today, November 11, 1996 in Pro Ecclesia, Fall 1997)

To Pannenberg's claim, I reply Amen....

4. Dr. Bill Arnold (Asbury Theological Seminary) and Dr. David Watson (United Theological Seminary) provide some excellent, concluding thoughts: "When we find ourselves in disagreement with the General Conference, we are of course free to speak our minds and propose changes. If the General Conference does not vote to implement changes, we are not free, however, simply to

disregard the decisions of this governing body. To do so compromises the integrity of our common covenant, our decision-making processes, and our life together. In particular, for those who have taken vows of ordination or have been consecrated as bishops, we are not simply under the authority of our own consciences or the caucus groups with which we affiliate, but the larger church in its decision- and policy-making capacities.

"If The United Methodist Church is to remain one denomination, it will be necessary for us to decide together that our teachings, policies, and decision-making processes really do matter. If we cannot affirm this, then we may be a loose confederation of churches, but we do not constitute a church. Any denomination needs to be 'United' [as in United Methodist Church] by more than an uneasy compromise between rival groups with incompatible views. Authentic unity must be grounded in doctrine, discipline, and Kingdom-centered mission. Anything less is cheap ecclesiology, which values [a thin] unity above theological substance. Genuine unity in our denomination cannot be simply an uneasy detente...." (Preamble to the Covenantal Unity Plan)

Thank you for your attention.♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

May 23, 2016 [email]

Dear NPRC [National Pro-Life Religious Council] Members,

In case you missed this story [at <http://lifenews.com/united-methodist-church-quits-pro-abortion-coalition-after-years-of-promoting-abortion/>], I wanted to share it with all NPRC members.

I want to congratulate Pastor Paul Stallworth and all the United Methodist clergy and members who worked so hard to affect change in The United Methodist Church's association with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).

This is a great step forward for United Methodists and for the entire pro-life movement....

Thank you and God bless,
Ernest L. Ohlhoff
NPRC Treasurer
Washington, DC

For years, Lifewatch has been privileged to belong to, and work with, the National Pro-Life Religious Council. Therefore, the above congratulatory email was most gratefully received.

May 23, 2016

Dear Mrs. Evans:

Holly Gruenwald has brought to our attention the action of the quadrennial General Conference on May 18th [that is, the vote to withdraw United Methodist organizations from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice]. We applaud your efforts as we work together to preserve unborn life....

Yours for Life,
Mary Bates, Treasurer
Wisconsin Right to Life -- Milwaukee Chapter
P.O. Box 70745
Milwaukee, WI 53207

May 27, 2016 [email]
Hello John [Lomperis] & Paul,

I am so excited by the vote of The United Methodist Church (UMC) to withdraw from RCRC and also not to renew the one resolution on abortion ["Responsible Parenthood"]. You undoubtedly worked hard to achieve this victory, and I am grateful for your faithful labor!

John, I read some of your statements. Paul, I am certain you were at work behind the scenes in that action. Your success in The UMC has inspired one of the commissioners (a Presbyterian Pro-Life Board member)...to write a commissioner's resolution to withdraw from RCRC. The PC (USA) also meets in Portland this year, June 18-22....

I am rejoicing and praying God will bless you both.

In Christ for Life,
Marie Bowen
Executive Director
Presbyterians Pro-Life

June 15, 2016 [email]
Paul,

I haven't gotten to read all of Lifewatch [June 1, 2016] yet (maybe at Annual Conference!). But I must say that your tribute to your dear mother was so touching and lovely. I'm sorry for this deep loss to you and your family. It looks like she was quite a woman of God, a servant of Christ, and a force to be reckoned with in the church.

May you continue to abound in the grace with which she walked all her days, and even now knows more fully.

Peace be with you, my brother.

Shalom,
Laurie
Rev. Laurie Hays Coffman
Director of Chaplaincy Services
Croasdaile Village Retirement Community
Durham, NC

July 2, 2016
Dear Rev. Paul,

Just a note to commend you on your recent Lifewatch newsletter (June 1, 2016). It was excellent! Especially your reports on General Conference.

I was also saddened to learn of your mother's passing and am grateful for her life of Christian service.

Respectfully,
Lee Musil
Burdett, KS

July 15, 2016
[Paul,]

Losing "Mama" isn't like any other, is it? I still wish I could share "stuff" with mine (after 14 years).

I pray your memories of her will soon be all the good times. We have lost only the physical presence; those now fully with God are still a spiritual presence with us as long as we remember them.

Many blessings for your work. I know our prayers are for all people -- of whatever age or condition -- to be safe and blessed for life.

Those "pro-choicers" seem to forget the ancient commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." No exceptions to that, folks!

This last issue of Lifewatch (June 1, 2016) was one of the best I've seen -- I'll be passing it on to our pastor, etc.

Wish I could support the cause with larger gifts...

A sister in Christ,
Rev. Gladys R. Williford

Rev. Williford was one of the first women to be ordained an elder -- on June 2, 1975 -- in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.♥

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YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- We are exceedingly grateful to you as you remember Lifewatch in your prayers and with your gifts -- especially now in the wake of General Conference 2016. A gift to Lifewatch can be given in two ways. You can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. And you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. Our heartfelt thanks to you, in advance, for your prayerful and financial responses.

- It is not surprising that United Methodist Women (UMW) wrote a response to General Conference 2016's decision to delete Resolution 2025. Responsible Parenthood from The Book of Resolutions (pp. 119-122). After all, a portion of United Methodist Women -- probably a small portion, probably involving its elites (paid and volunteer) -- have invested themselves for years in this resolution to keep it alive and expanding. Appearing on the UMW website, the official response was entitled "The Church Still Supports Women's Reproductive Health, But We Have Work to Do" (June 1, 2016). Trying to set the record straight, UMW claimed: "Misinformation on this issue abounds. Contrary to some reports, reproductive health care is not a code word for abortion." (emphasis added) However, just above its comments on misinformation, the article notes: "This resolution [Responsible Parenthood] upheld the church's affirmation of families' sacred responsibility to plan when and how many children to have and guarded women's right to access comprehensive reproductive health care, including the ability to end pregnancy legally and safely when this is necessary." (emphasis added)

Please compare the two underlined sections from the UMW article. If "reproductive health care is not a code word for abortion" is true, that must be because UMW believes "comprehensive reproductive health care" quite explicitly includes abortion. "Code" -- that is, cover -- is not necessary.

LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Lifewatch Editor
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UMW declares, up front and in public, that abortion is simply a part of the package called "reproductive health care."

- The United States Supreme Court handed down its Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt decision on June 27, 2016. It appears that the court's majority (5-3) believes that greater access to substandard, dangerous abortion facilities is better for women than less access to standard, safe abortion facilities. Apparently, the court's decision admits to acceptable losses of abortion-seeking pregnant women who die due to substandard clinics -- if those losses maintain the availability of abortion.

Remember the mantra? Abortion should be legal, safe, rare. Well, with over 1,000,000 abortions per year in the United States, abortion is certainly not rare. And with Kermit Gosnell's abortion-clinic horrors (in Philadelphia, where abortion is allegedly a regulated procedure) revealed and with the Texas standards struck down, abortion is not necessarily safe. And only because politically pro-choice forces rigidly refuse to negotiate any compromises, abortion remains legal.

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

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