

REBECCA'S WITNESS TO LIFE

by Rev. Stephen Bazan

"We know that God works all things together for good for the ones who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

"You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13)

It was Easter Day 2015. After the worship services and after a much deserved Sunday afternoon nap, Amanda, my wife, woke me up to give me a small present wrapped in a gift box. I proceeded to open the box and found a pregnancy test. After some further investigation, I discovered it was positive. We were going to have our first child.

I can only describe the immediate flowing of emotions as a strange combination of uttermost joy and fear uniquely tied together. It left me speechless and amazed at what God had done for us. The only other time I had felt a similar emotion was during our wedding, when I was standing before a church's altar, looking toward the back of the sanctuary, and seeing my bride walking toward me. My life had changed. It was exciting and humbling. It inspired an inner realization that my role and responsibilities in life had shifted even further from loving myself to giving myself wholly to another.

CHALLENGES

Fast forward to late September 2015, after what we thought was going to be a routine ultrasound. Something was wrong. Rebecca -- the name we, before marriage, had picked for our first daughter -- was not growing on schedule. She was at 26 weeks, but her measurements were 4 weeks behind. After being sent to a specialist to try to obtain a diagnosis, we learned only that her growth had slowed to almost nothing. No diagnosis was indicated, genetically or otherwise. Several months later we would finally get the diagnosis of Triploidy. All we knew was that every time we checked there was a heartbeat, but there was no measurable growth. Late September to late October was the longest month of our life together.

During that time, Amanda was hospitalized twice for high blood pressure, which never turned out to be Preeclampsia. However the immense stress she

experienced was enough to make anyone's blood pressure skyrocket. Decisions had to be made. Since there was always a heartbeat and no diagnosis of Preeclampsia, there was no medical need to induce labor. Rebecca was alive as far as we were concerned. But we knew that her condition was "incompatible with life." Furthermore, the stress of waiting for the inevitable was taking a toll on our spirits. Where else could we turn but to God in prayer?

I knew what The United Methodist Church and I believe about ending the life of a little one during pregnancy. I read, reread, and reread the statement in our Social Principles which claims, "We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life." (Paragraph 161J, The Book of Discipline [2012]) Rebecca was alive with a heartbeat. She was a life created and given to us by God. Hers was an imperfect life, as are all of ours to some degree. She was a life worth saving at all costs. Except in this case, there was nothing that could be done to save her. All that could be done was to place our decisions in God's hands to lead us. We trusted wholly in God's providence, that His will be done, and that we find a way to praise God after this.

A week at the hospital came. Test after test said the same thing: heartbeat strong but body incompatible with life. The doctors finally came and told us that it was medically justifiable to induce labor with the presumption of no intervention. We were told that Rebecca would most likely not survive labor -- but if she did, she could receive palliative care. We, her mother and father, could hold her and love her for as long as we could.

WITNESSES TO LIFE

As we began the labor process, I found time to put out a prayer request to our North Carolina Conference family. Just a few hours before Amanda delivered Rebecca, I received a phone call from Bishop Hope Morgan Ward. During the call, my bishop said the most comforting words I could have heard that night. She said she was praying for us "as Amanda prepares to deliver Rebecca to the Lord." That was the providential moment for us. Instead of this being a curse, we received a gift. A gift to present this life directly back into the hands of the One who had formed her. And that is what we did.

We held her lifeless body that night in our arms. We cried a lot. We loved her as long as we could. We simultaneously praised God, for we knew where her life was held. However, Rebecca had not finished her work on earth. Rebecca also gave a witness about our lives with God. And I want to pass along her witness to you...

We held a memorial service at our parsonage with Rebecca's ashes present. Some close friends and members of the congregations I served at that time were present. A pastor-friend presided over the service for us, and I gave a brief witness. All I could think to say on behalf of our daughter was that her short life shows us that even an imperfect life is cherished by God. All lives are cherished by God. That includes unwanted lives. That includes lives toward which we would rather turn a blind eye. That includes lives enslaved to sin. God truly loves all lives, and God asks us to love all lives as well. Furthermore, God loves all lives enough never to leave any life imperfect. In the case of Rebecca, her life was incompatible with life in this world, but we trust that she is (and will be) redeemed in God's Kingdom. In the case of imperfect lives in this world, Jesus comes to transform us so that we can perfectly love God and one another.

There are so many lessons that our time with Rebecca is still teaching Amanda and me. Lessons about the extraordinary capacity of the church for loving others. Lessons about God's grace, which is so abundantly offered to us before, during, and after our greatest needs. Lessons about our call to be witnesses and protectors of life from conception to death. Lessons about God's capacity to turn tragedy into praise. And lessons about our humility before God in the choices we make.

We are now expecting our second child this September. This time we have been given a boy. So far, everything is coming along perfectly. The excitement and fear are still present, but we know that our Lord is the Lord of life, and that God's gift of life is witnessed through every moment we have with Him.

Rev. Bazan is the pastor of Flat Rock United Methodist Church in Henderson, NC. Isaac Wesley was born on September 17.♥

SO, DO NOT SIT OUT THE ELECTION. GO AND VOTE!

by Father Frank Pavone

Unless Jesus Himself is on the ballot, we are always going to be choosing among imperfect candidates. In this life, everything -- including politics -- is a messy mixture of good and evil, virtue and vice, truth and falsehood.

At the same time, there are always differences that can be found between the candidates. When we feel like one is just as bad as the other, that must not become an occasion to lose interest in the process but rather an occasion for focusing even more effort on learning the positions of the candidates. These candidates need to focus on

distinguishing themselves from their opponent. You can be sure there are things they have said and done to highlight the differences, and so one is always going to be closer to our principles and viewpoints than the other.

In evaluating this, we look also at the differences between the parties that those candidates represent. Each party is an entire universe of philosophies, ideologies, causes, positions, and people. Each party is a whole army of people who are going to surround and advise the candidate, and fill many positions of influence if that candidate is elected.

For instance, in the case of the presidential race, we have to ask which people this president would nominate to serve on the United States Supreme Court and other federal courts. We have to ask what direction they lean toward on the most fundamental issues of life, religious freedom, marriage, and family -- and again, in what direction their party leans on those issues. Remember, it is not just that the candidate shapes the office; the office also shapes the candidate, and so does the party and its prevailing positions. Which people would this president, furthermore, appoint as Surgeon General, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and so many more?

We have to be patient with ourselves and with the process and carefully choose the person and party that are closest to our principles, starting with the most important issues. From a moral viewpoint, our discernment in voting does have a starting point: without life, we do not have anything else. Every right we have depends on the right to life -- we need that in order to possess and exercise those other rights. In evaluating our vote, therefore, we have to start by asking who will strive to protect that most fundamental right.

Voting is a moral obligation; participation in the political process is a democratic virtue. Citizenship is not merely a duty and privilege, it is a way to advance the culture of life. Every vote, and every voice, does matter in our nation's political life.

You do not have to be certain about how every choice or action of your candidate is going to turn out. If there is a probability -- or even a possibility -- that your candidate will do the right thing and make the right choices, that possibility is better than the certainty of someone who will make the wrong choices. When faced with a certain evil and a possible good, choose the possible.

So, the bottom line is that we should not skip an election. We should vote. Sometimes we may feel that we are doing wrong by voting for either candidate. Some feel tainted by voting -- but do not think for a moment that not voting keeps you pure! We have to consider the fact that we influence the election whether we like it or not. Skipping a vote also influences the election because it takes a vote away from the better of the two candidates. Voting is about reducing evil, and the choice to reduce evil is a good.

We have to remember, too, that our vote is not meant to make us feel good. It is meant to influence society in the right direction by putting people in public office who will help make that happen. Neither is voting an opinion poll of

our thoughts about candidates. It is a transfer of power. And it is a gamble. God does not always give us clear, predictable choices. He expects us to use our best judgment.

Fr. Pavone is the president of the National Pro-Life Religious Council (NPRC), to which Lifewatch belongs. He is also the national Director of Priests for Life. This brief essay is from Uniting for Life: A Christian Pro-Life Newsletter (2016, Issue 3).♥

POLITICAL PLATFORM PLANKS: ON LIFE AND ABORTION

Below you will find the first two paragraphs, from the platform statements on abortion, which were recently adopted by the largest political parties in the United States. Why select abortion as the one and only issue for political comparison?, you ask. Because this one issue currently involves life being taken from over 1,000,000 unborn children each year. Also, after enduring an abortion, mothers are often deeply wounded in many ways. May the comparison begin. (PTS)

2016 Democratic Party Platform

Securing Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice

Democrats are committed to protecting and advancing reproductive health, rights, and justice. We believe unequivocally, like the majority of Americans, that every woman should have access to quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion -- regardless of where she lives, how much money she makes, or how she is insured. We believe that reproductive health is core to women's, men's, and young people's health and wellbeing. We will continue to stand up to Republican efforts to defund Planned Parenthood health centers, which provide critical health services to millions of people. We will continue to oppose -- and seek to overturn -- federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman's access to abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment. We condemn and will combat any acts of violence, harassment, and intimidation of reproductive health providers, patients, and staff. We will defend the ACA [Affordable Care Act or Obamacare], which extends affordable preventive health care to women, including no-cost contraception, and prohibits discrimination in health care based on gender.

We will address the discrimination and barriers that inhibit meaningful access to reproductive health care services, including those based on gender, sexuality, race, income, disability, and other factors. We recognize that quality, affordable comprehensive health care, evidence-based sex education and a full range of family planning services help reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and thereby also reduce the need for abortions....

2016 Republican Party Platform

The Fifth Amendment: Protecting Human Life

The Constitution's guarantee that no one can "be deprived of life, liberty or property" deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that "all" are

**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND
THESE ANNUAL EVENTS,
WHICH WILL TAKE PLACE
ON JANUARY 27, 2017 (FRIDAY),
AT THE UNITED METHODIST BUILDING
100 MARYLAND AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

9:30 a.m. LIFEWATCH SERVICE OF WORSHIP

The Reverend Dr. Stephen Rankin
preaching

Chaplain and Minister to the University
Southern Methodist University/Dallas, Texas

3:00 p.m. LIFEWATCH BOARD MEETING

**ORGANIZE A LARGE GROUP FROM YOUR
CHURCH TO ATTEND!**

"endowed by their Creator" with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to children before birth.

We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortion or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare. We urge all states and Congress to make it a crime to acquire, transfer, or sell fetal tissues from elective abortions for research, and we call on Congress to enact a ban on any sale of fetal body parts. In the meantime, we call on Congress to ban the practice of misleading women on so-called fetal harvesting consent forms, a fact revealed by a 2015 investigation. We will not fund or subsidize healthcare that includes abortion coverage....♥

THE RULE OF CHRIST AND THE RULE OF LAW

Some United Methodists can have a self-willed vision of the Church. They believe -- often, they say, "in their hearts" -- that the Church should be what they want the Church to be, that the Church should proclaim what they want the Church to proclaim, that the Church should do what they want the Church to do. As you can tell, the three key words here are "what they want." (There are some United Methodist leaders who go along with this individualized vision of the Church. So they attempt to organize and order the life, ministry, and mission of the Church to maximize the choices of laity and clergy. That is, these leaders basically let individual Christians have their own way; so these leaders must then play at being, or pretend they are leading, the Church: they must create the illusion of the Church, all

the while they are actually dedicated to encouraging individuals to having things their way -- whatever their way might be and might mean.)

St. Paul sees the Church quite differently. To take just one example from the Apostle's writings, he declares to the Church at Ephesus: "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:20-23, NRSV) The New English Bible clarifies slightly: "He put everything in subjection beneath his feet, and appointed him as supreme head to the church..." (1:22)

God the Father makes God the Son the "head" (NRSV), or the "supreme head" (NEB), of the Church. That means Jesus Christ is not subject to the Church. To the contrary, the Church is subject to Jesus Christ, as the body is subject to the head.

About Ephesians 1:22, Rev. John Wesley writes: "An head both of guidance and government, and likewise of life and influence, to the whole and every member of it. All these stand in the nearest union with him, and have as continual and effectual a communication of activity, growth, and strength from him, as the natural body from its head." (Wesley's Notes on the New Testament)

This truth about the headship of Christ over the Church is also captured in the doctrines of The United Methodist Church. According to Article V--The Church, of The Articles of Religion, "the visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men (sic) in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." (The Book of Discipline [2016], Paragraph 104) That is, the church lives where Jesus Christ is present in and over a congregation -- in the Word preached faithfully for Christ, in the Sacraments administered faithfully for Christ, and in the order and discipline upheld faithfully for Christ. (Notice how this doctrine suggests the three traditional offices of Jesus Christ in and over the Church: Prophet, Priest, and King.) Obviously, clergy and laity are under Christ, so we are fortunate recipients of what Christ graciously offers.

In The Confession of Faith, another source of The United Methodist Church's doctrine, Article V--The Church asserts: "We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ," where "the Word of God is preached by men (sic) divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world." (The Book of Discipline [2016], Paragraph 104) Like the doctrine

above, this one describes the Church as a "community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ." The Church exists under Christ and draws life from Christ -- again, from the Word preached as Christ intends, from the Sacraments observed as Christ commands, and from the discipline upheld as Christ leads. Also in this doctrine, the Church is understood as a body subject to its head, not as a body ruling itself -- as a recipient of gifts given by Another, not as a giver of gifts to itself.

To the average United Methodist, all this sounds somewhat precious and high-minded -- perhaps from a recently minted seminary graduate who is anxious to show off what has just been learned during formal theological education. However, it reminds us that, by the grace and providence of God, the Church (including The United Methodist Church) now living through history, as a pilgrim people, has a Lord, a head, a shepherd, a commander, a leader. Therefore, the laity and clergy of the Church do not have to make up what it means to be the Church. Instead, the laity and clergy of the Church simply trust (to the point of obedience) God to shape and sustain the Church, while they await -- in faithful service of the world -- the Lord's glorious return to, and total repair of, this world.

THE RULE OF LAW

So how does Jesus Christ's sovereignty over The United Methodist Church get demonstrated? A regular, routine exercise of Christ's sovereignty is made real in The United Methodist Church through the challenge to abide by The Book of Discipline, which contains church doctrine and church discipline, which are established by General Conference in response to the Word of God. A more jurisprudential way to put it is this: Jesus Christ rules and guides The United Methodist Church through "the rule of law" (both doctrinal and disciplinary) that is contained in The Book of Discipline. To be sure, the denomination's rule of law is not exactly the same as Christ's reign over the denomination. However, the church's doctrine and discipline, and Christ's reign, regularly and routinely overlap. Therefore, the rule of law in The United Methodist Church should be respected and observed; and it should be violated only with fear, trembling, and a willingness to pay the price for any violation.

Unfortunately, in our day, jurisdictions, annual conferences, conference boards of ministry, clergy, and laity are intentionally going against The United Methodist Church's standing rule of law. United Methodist institutions that, and individuals who, want homosexual behavior to be morally normalized and accepted throughout the church are flagrantly going against the church's doctrine and discipline -- or rule of law -- and thereby daring the denomination to take action in response to theirs.

It seems as if those who do not accept established United Methodist teaching on human sexuality, do not accept the church's rule of law. And those who do not accept the church's rule of law seem unwilling to accept the reality of Christ's rule over the church. For a church,

that creates a very dangerous situation. If some people in a church do not accept the ecclesial rule of law, that church is threatened by disruption and by chaos. At exactly the time when a church needs order -- that comes from all abiding by the rule of law, and that permits serious discussion and debate to occur in the conferences of the church -- that order becomes impossible because an aggressive minority, convinced of its own rightness and righteousness, pays no attention to the rule of law. That minority becomes a rule unto itself. It behaves like an adolescent who never met a law or a rule of law that seemed reasonable.

APPLICATION OF THE RULE OF LAW

So, how should The United Methodist Church's rule of law be applied in specific cases in which complaints are filed and lawbreaking alleged? With careful and strict adherence to the plain meaning of the pertinent paragraphs of The Book of Discipline. (In other words, with minimal interpretation, and with absolutely no tortured interpretation.) With thoroughness. With respect for all -- all! -- involved. With transparency. And with no-spin communication to the larger church -- laity and clergy -- about what is happening and why, and about what is not happening and why. The Discipline guides, but the good of the larger church is never forgotten. The church's rule of law is for the good of the entire church, for the good of the entire body, which has been wounded by alleged lawbreaking in the community. Again, the church's rule of law is not just for the good of certain individuals within the church. So the Discipline and its rule of law should never aim to achieve, in the name of grace, the highest degree of comfort only for those accused. The Discipline and the rule of law should be employed to achieve the highest degree of justice and resolution -- as in "just resolution" -- for all.

When the church's rule of law is called into play, when its procedures and processes are underway, a secular dimension of church life does not intrude on the church's more spiritual affairs. Quite the contrary. The church's rule of law, on display in its procedures and processes, is a sign of Christ's rule over His Church. It is to be respected, followed, defended, and not gamed. Game the church's rule of law, or manipulate the church's rule of law, for individual gain (yours or another's) or political advancement or cause promotion, and you are interfering with the rule of Christ over His Church. That is not an eviable position.

All of us in The United Methodist Church -- those of low rank and high, those of poverty and wealth, those of theological ignorance and sophistication, the laity and the clergy and the bishops -- each one of us is equally under the rule of Jesus Christ. That is reflected by the fact that each one of us, without exception, is under The United Methodist Church's rule of law as stated in The Book of Discipline. In the United Methodist household, there are no privileged inhabitants. At least there should not be. (PTS)♥

A PARABLE FOR OUR TIME

A United Methodist pastor recently told the following story about the congregation he serves. He noted that a few churches in his town had recently joined together and held community worship services. It seems the participation of

the United Methodist congregation was lamentably low. So the Sunday after the community services had ended, one of the senior saints of the United Methodist church stood up during its weekly worship service and bravely said: "I was very disappointed by our church's lack of attendance at the recent community services. More of us should have been there. We should have done better."

As she sat down, her pastor offered a prayer of thanksgiving, for the truth had been spoken. He also breathed a sigh of relief, for he was not the one who had to speak it.

Acknowledging that it had fallen short of the mark, the congregation appeared to accept their saint's word of admonishment.

However, later in the same worship service, a man in the church stood up and unembarrassedly declared: "I want to say something about our attendance at the community services. There are several of us here that could not attend. We have jobs. We have got to go to work. There was no way we could have attended those services." Having said his piece, he sat down.

When the man sat down, it was like the elderly woman's, God-given word of admonishment -- which had had been spoken lovingly and clearly, and which had lingered in the air after it had been spoken -- had suddenly been erased or at least disempowered. The standard it set -- that God wills His people to worship together across denominational lines, and that United Methodists should aspire, with God's help, to reach that standard -- was gone. After the man spoke his word, only choice (attend the community worship service, only if you think you can; it is simply your choice) remained. Ecumenical-worship-service attendance was changed into just another choice, a nice thing, among other nice things that could be chosen and done (or not).

In The United Methodist Church, our life together is illustrated by the above story. God's Word -- especially about moral matters -- is taught, preached, or written. In response, someone stands up and offers up a heartfelt exception to what has been proposed. So the standard, the truth, which often involves real moral challenge that can be met only with God's grace, ends up shot down and on the floor. Think about marriage and divorce. Or life and abortion. Or human sexuality. No wonder that today there seems to be more choice in The United Methodist Church than doctrine and discipline.

Again, this is a parable about our United Methodist predicament. (PTS)♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

[received August 11, 2016]

To Rev. Stallsworth,

Please accept my...sympathy on the loss of your Mother, Mary Lou.

I am a 95-year-old WWII vet, and the father of a lovely, retired United Methodist pastor.... Of course, as a "cradle Catholic," I have always tried to obey the Church's teachings on contraception, sexuality, and abortion.

Please permit me to join you on your [gratitude] that your General Conference withdrew church boards and agencies from RCRC [Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice]. You have never relented in your efforts to bring that about!

Now that you have labored through these pages, I bid you success in your ongoing efforts to honor and preserve life, especially in the helpless, including of course the unborn.

With sincerity and admiration,
Jim Beaumont
Hinsdale, IL

August 30, 2016 [email]

Dear Paul:

I have just finished reading the current issue of Lifewatch, as well as your open letter of September 1 to the United Methodist bishops et al. that was enclosed. I congratulate you and your similar-minded colleagues for convincing The United Methodist Church's General Conference to withdraw from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). I checked the RCRC website today to confirm that, indeed, the UMC's agencies are not listed as a members. I only wish the Episcopal Church would come to its senses and follow suit.

In the September/October issue of Touchstone, the editors warn of the "mainline theological slippage" and the danger of losing the "culture wars." I am delighted to know that the UMC is pushing back and gaining ground.

I hope you are doing well.
Peace of the Lord, and sincerely,
Watson A. Bowes, Jr., M.D.
Emeritus Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC

August 31, 2016 [email]

Rev. Paul,

I admire and have the utmost respect for your long and courageous advocacy for the unborn. I have been a supporter for many years and am so thankful for the work you and your group continue to do...

I received the September 1, 2016 Lifewatch newsletter and read your open letter several times. I disagree with your position on the matter of unity in The United Methodist Church [UMC]. First you say the UMC should not divide, and then you say "however" -- allowing congregations to leave sounds like disunion and division to me.

I do not see how you can stay in unity with those who violate the church's discipline and their own vows. One of your points in "staying the course" is "by faithfully pulling back from the dissent that involves disruption." Pulling back -- isn't that what we have been doing for forty or more years, and how has that worked out? We are not now a united church and have not been for years. Do you see a gleam or glitter of hope the progressives will conference in good faith?

Is it not a question of The United Methodist Church

being united, but that likeminded, Bible-believing Christians are united.

In Christ,
Anonymous

September 1, 2016

Dear Anonymous,

Pentecost grace and peace to you and yours.

Thank you for your email that I read at home last evening. So thoughtful and honorable of you to write.... Also, your words of encouragement mean much to this pastor.

However, you disagree with my September 1, 2016 open letter's witness for the unity of The United Methodist Church. With so much turmoil in the church, I can see why. Unity, in the midst of major continuing covenantal breaches throughout the connection, indeed seems to make no sense.

That is why, sooner and not later, The United Methodist Church, as the Church of Jesus Christ, must lay down an ultimatum: All laity and clergy (including bishops), abide by the church's doctrine and discipline (even as you might personally dissent) or leave the church. If some (that is, Progressives) "[pull] back from the dissent that involves disruption" of the church, thanks be to God. If some leave, sadly, that is on them. Their departure diminishes the church; however, this kind of diminishment is a much lesser offense to God and the Gospel than the church dividing herself. Such diminishment is a messy, unfortunate situation, to be sure; but it does allow for the covenantal unity of The United Methodist Church to continue.

As the diminishment of the denomination might unfold, all who stay in the denomination would be responsible for abiding by the church's doctrine and discipline, and keeping any dissent within the church's order. Yes, I believe many Progressives are fully capable of dissent within the boundaries of church discipline. With my own eyes, I have seen exactly that.

The United Methodist Church dividing herself into two or three parts would be schismatic and scandalous; that would go against the will of Christ for His Church -- because of the Church's ecclesiology. I strongly believe that.

By the grace of God, The United Methodist Church has doctrine and discipline that are firmly based on Scripture well understood [by Church Tradition]. All of us in our church -- and I do mean all! -- fall short of our church's Biblically grounded doctrine and discipline. But we aspire to living it out in the Church and in the world. We fall short. But God, through amazing grace and through the Church, forgives us and frees us for other attempts to live faithfully -- and our Lord continually sanctifies us as He moves us toward the Christian perfection that demonstrates perfect love of God and neighbor.

I hope this is helpful to you.

Continue faithful, to Christ and His Church, for the sake of the world.

In Christ,
Paul T. Stallsworth

September 24 2016

Dear Paul,

Peace be with you!

At my different locations, Lifewatch catches up with me, and it is a welcomed arrival. Observations by PTS, in their astuteness, bear resemblances to those of RJN in the old First Things.

The last number of Lifewatch [September 1, 2016], with its rumblings of division [in The United Methodist Church], came to me when I was getting around to reading several reviews in the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly (Fall/Winter 2014) of books proposing that tensions over “same-sex marriage” find a home, so to speak, already in the acceptance of contraception.

Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* [*Of Human Life*], published in 1968, was battered in the affluent West beyond the telling, so ensconced on the scene were contraceptive drugs, devices, and surgical methods. Yet old truths, enunciated therein, supported subsequently by John Paul’s theology of the body and the “Gospel of Life,” have been validated in many ways, and Catholic communities that have embraced them have prospered.

The pressures upon the churches for approval of “homosexual marriage” follow logically when the conjugal act itself is admitted to be separated from its procreative end. An order is disturbed.

The practice of respecting the natural end of the conjugal act long provided, perhaps tacitly, a foundation for the protection of traditional marriage. The proscription of contraception was shared into the 1930s by Catholics and Protestants alike.

There is conspicuous resistance to contraception by a generation of Catholics formed by JPII. Articles in the evangelical monthly Touchstone and other signs among Protestants indicate challenges to the whole culture of

contraception. It would be amazing if, down the line, as people of all beliefs now joined in the battle against abortion, they would be united in examining together family life without contraceptives. It has already been occurring in ubiquitous local and international natural family planning sessions.

Keep pressing on for life.

In Christ,

Monsignor John Williams

Episcopal Vicar for Priests/Diocese of Raleigh

Southern Pines, NC

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• Thank you for remembering Lifewatch in your prayers and with your gifts. A gift to Lifewatch can be given in two ways. You can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Also you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. The entire Lifewatch community is most grateful for your faithful prayers and for your faithful gifts.

• Lifewatch is quite pleased that The Reverend Dr. Stephen Rankin will be delivering the 2017 Lifewatch Sermon next month in Washington, DC. Dr. Rankin is the Chaplain and Minister to the University at Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, TX. Involved in higher education for nearly twenty (20) years, he is the author of Aiming at Maturity: the Goal of the Christian Life (Wipf and Stock). Dr. Rankin is also an Elder in the North Texas Annual Conference. Please make every effort to attend the 2017 Lifewatch Service of Worship. (Additional details are located on page three of this newsletter.)

• “I’m grateful to the entire Planned Parenthood family. You made this campaign your own. It belongs to the staff,

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12/01/16

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the donors, and to the providers... I've been proud to stand with Planned Parenthood for a long time, and as president, I will always have your back...." ("Hillary Clinton: My presidential campaign 'belongs to' abortionists and Planned Parenthood," Lifesite, June 10, 2016)

This is from Secretary Hillary Clinton's speech to Planned Parenthood -- in Washington, DC -- on June 10, 2016. From Planned Parenthood, Secretary Clinton received an endorsement for President of the United States and its pledge of a campaign donation of up to \$30,000,000.

Just a reminder. In America, Planned Parenthood is Big Abortion. That is, Planned Parenthood is the largest provider of abortion in the United States.

- On September 4, Mother Teresa (of Calcutta) became Saint Teresa in a canonization ceremony at St. Peter's Square. During the ceremony, Pope Francis declared: "in all aspects of her life[, Mother Teresa] was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defense of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded. She was committed to defending life, ceaselessly proclaiming that 'the unborn are the weakest, the smallest, the most vulnerable.' She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime -- the crimes! -- of poverty they created. For Mother Teresa, mercy was the 'salt' which gave flavor to her work, it was the 'light' which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering." (<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/09/>)

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04/160904a.html, accessed on 09/05/16)

- These days Dr. R.R. Reno, at First Things, puts a lot of emphasis on the virtue of solidarity. For good reason. If the sovereign self, in search of the next conquest or high or good deal, is the icon of our age, solidarity (in one form or another) is somehow involved in the redemption of the sovereign self. Think about The United Methodist Church and its potential schism. Recognizing the God-given solidarity, that comes from the waters of Holy Baptism, from the bread and cup of Holy Communion, and from the journey with the People of God through history, quiets the drumbeat for division in United Methodist hearts and minds. And remembering the God-given solidarity between unborn child, mother, and father places a perceived and urgent need to get an abortion in perspective -- or on the list of things not to do. Dr. Reno's emphasis on solidarity today is extraordinarily wise. Just one more reason to subscribe to First Things.

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

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