

Lifewatch

09/01/20
A Quarterly Newsletter
for United Methodists

LIFEWATCH CONTINUES

The United Methodist Church's current vibe is a palpable sense of the quiet before the storm—or the quiet before the next General Conference. Segments of the church—especially the Council of Bishops and the “identity” agencies—seem reenergized by their participation in anti-racism advocacy. Since many of their words and deeds seem consistent with what the organization Black Lives Matter is saying and doing in the streets, some United Methodist members and congregations have yet another reason to disengage from their denomination: so members reduce (or eliminate) their giving to their local churches, and local churches reduce (or eliminate) their apportionment payments to their Annual Conferences. With apportionment dollars down, United Methodist elites must be concerned about the viability of most of the denominational bureaucracy beyond the local church. All of this is unfolding during virus time, when most United Methodist congregations and Annual Conferences are put on hold in many ways. This is a dispiriting time for the Church and for Christians.

On top of that, the editor of Lifewatch recently retired from pastoral ministry. After striving to serve faithfully Whiteville United Methodist Church (in Whiteville, NC) for eight years, I moved out of its pastor's study on June 23, a Tuesday, at about 1:15 in the afternoon, and became for the first time in decades a pastor without a study.

Let this be known: I am thankful to God and to the Whiteville Church for the long pastorate. The Whiteville Church offered “freedom for ministry” (Richard John Neuhaus), and encouragement for ministry, to this pastor. Some in the congregation were quite supportive of the Lifewatch ministry—to the point of helping to prepare letters to mail to General Conference delegates! Also, my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Terry Hunt, the new pastor of Whiteville Church, for his contributions to an extraordinarily smooth and hopeful transition.

With all that is “going on,” as we say today, this might be a good time to put to rest, in a thankful and respectful way, the ministry of Lifewatch. With denominational schism thought to be near, with matters related to race and racism appearing to dominate church and society, with the virus stubbornly sticking around, and with the responsibilities of relocating weighing heavily, the death and burial of Lifewatch would give some additional peace and quiet to some beleaguered United Methodists—beginning with this editor!

But the ministry of Lifewatch within The United Methodist Church should not, cannot, and will not be put to rest. Why? Because there needs to be a voice in The United Methodist Church today that speaks consistently for the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. There needs to be a voice that witnesses to the faith of the Church—not just the personal faith of the Christian. There needs to be a voice that lifts up church doctrine and discipline as gifts from Christ for His gracious and just rule over the Church—not as unfortunate, organizational necessities. There needs to be a voice that consistently defends life and opposes abortion, that defends marriage and opposes its redefinition, because life and marriage have been a part of the Church's catholic substance—faith and life, Scripture and Tradition, doctrine and discipline—from the Age of the Apostles to the present.

Lifewatch's voice and its proposals of Christian truth do not appeal to all United Methodists. And Lifewatch's voice and proposals will not, most probably, move denominational mountains. We understand that. But this United Methodist elder believes it is enough to speak and to write and to serve the truth in love. To propose the truth in love. To witness to the truth in love. That is enough. That is what I believe Lifewatch is called, by God, to do. And that is what Lifewatch will continue, with God's help and yours, to do. (PTS)♥

HOW THE CHURCH, FAITHFUL TO THE GOSPEL AND TO THE BIBLE, DIMINISHES RACISM

It can be honestly said that N.T. Wright functions as the pope of the Protestant world. Seriously. When N.T. Wright speaks, we listen. And listen we should.

Wright is author of countless theological books and articles. He is now the Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, the Evangelical College of Oxford University. In June, he posted a textual version of “Undermining Racism: Reflections on the ‘black lives matter’ crisis” on his personal website (ntwrightpage.com/2020/06/14/undermining-racism-complete-text/). The text of his talk begins with a helpful summary statement: “The churches are in the wrong, not because they have not obeyed the politically correct agenda, but because they have not obeyed their own foundational character.” A video version of this excellent talk can be googled, found, and watched at YouTube. (Please note: in the quotations that follow, the editor has taken the liberty to edit very lightly Wright's original words.)

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It is sent, free of charge, to interested readers. Editor, Rev. Paul T. Stallworth: 2400 Foxcroft Road NW, Wilson NC 27896 (910)207-1492.

Administrator and Publicity/Outreach Coordinator, Mrs. Cindy Evans: P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338 (636)294-2344.

Gift checks should be made payable, and mailed, to: Lifewatch, P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338.

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Anti-Racism as Cultural Accommodation

N.T. Wright begins his reflections by describing a scene that is now a part of United Methodism's playbook: In 1975, "I was a delegate at the World Council of Churches Assembly in Nairobi. We sat in the vast hall in alphabetical order of countries, the UK was immediately in front of the USA, and we got used to one American after another getting up to tell the world at some length how guilty they were of racism, imperialism, and lots of other 'isms.' We did not use the phrase 'virtue signaling' back then, but that is what was going on. Well, that was forty-five years ago. All that confession, but no amendment of life. (And, I hasten to add, I have seen the same over the years in Britain: grand resolutions and no real change.)"

Wright carries on: "Let me be blunt. It simply will not do merely to say, 'Racism is sinful, and we must get rid of it.' The churches worldwide have known that for a long time, and it has had little effect...."

"There is a double danger in just repeating the ethical imperative 'not to be racist.' First, it makes it sound as though we are taking our ethical instructions from the more radical, or even 'woke,' factions in our society, and are scrambling to get on board with a prevailing secular agenda. When the church tries to be politically correct, it just looks pathetic, like ... clergy in the 60s trying to be 'with it' by quoting the Beatles. Woe betide us if we go *that* route—all sorts of other things will come down that channel, at least half of which we ought to reject. Some will even say that if the church wants to be relevant, or indeed missional, in today's world, we must fall into line with where the world is going. That was, of course, the argument of the German Christians [who followed National Socialism's lead] in 1930s Germany. Have we learned nothing?

"But second, what we now call 'racism' is not simply, for Christians, a failure to obey one or another moral standard—e.g., that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. It is deeper even than that. It is a failure of *vocation*. The church of the anointed Jesus, the world's true Lord, was designed from the start to be a worldwide family, God's new model of human life.... The point was that we were supposed to be, in our personal *and in our corporate* lives, small working models of the ultimate new creation which God has promised to make and has launched decisively in raising Jesus the Anointed One from the dead. That has always been our glorious vocation. Rejecting racism and embracing the diversity of Jesus' family ought to be as obvious as praying the Lord's Prayer, celebrating the Eucharist, or reading the four Gospels. It is not just an extra 'rule' we are supposed to keep. It is constitutive of who we are." (underlining added)

Being the Church Counters Racism

If the church's vocation is not simply shouting "Racist!" at every turn, according to N.T. Wright, what is it? Be the church! Wright explains: "[St.] Paul's vision of the church shines out in every letter he writes, but perhaps particularly in Ephesians. Actually, his famous doctrine of 'justification by faith' is expounded in only two letters—Romans and Galatians—and mentioned briefly in the odd verse here and there elsewhere. But his vision of the united church across all the traditional boundary lines, particularly the ethnic ones

(with 'Jew and Greek' as the central paradigm), is laid out emphatically in every single letter.... He insists on the radical mutual welcome that must take place between Jesus-followers of different ethnic backgrounds and different cultural practices that go with those backgrounds. The whole point is 'that you may with one heart and voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord, the anointed Jesus' (Romans 15:6)....

"Part of the intricacy of Biblical theology is the installation, within the present world, of advance signposts [or signals] of what God wants to do in the ultimate future.... The church itself is supposed to be the new advance signpost.... God justifies sinners by grace through faith so that they may together constitute this advance sign of his ultimate new creation. Or, if you like, God is going to put all things right at the end; and in the present he puts sinners like us right ('justification') so that the company of justified sinners can become both a sign of, and an active agent within, those future purposes.

"That is why, in Ephesians 3, Paul then declares that *through the church the many-splendored wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*. In other words, the very existence of this polychrome but united church—a phenomenon which Caesar would love to have been able to bring about but never could—is the sign to the watching world, and particularly to the watching powers of the world, that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. This is basic New Testament ecclesiology.

"The church is not, then, simply a loose association of people who have all had similar spiritual experiences and so get together from time to time to encourage one another, as they escape the world and look forward to going off somewhere else. The church is the new family of Jesus-followers, those who have died with him to their old spiritual allegiances ... and discovered their new identity as Anointed people, Messiah people. Their present flesh-and-blood existence as this extraordinary, even miraculous, single family is precisely the point, the sign and foretaste of God's purpose for the whole world.

"This family, in fact, is called to be a worship-based, spiritually renewed, multi-ethnic, gender-blind, polychrome, mutually supportive, outward-facing, culturally creative, socially responsible, fictive kinship group.... [T]his family is to be a sign to the world that there is a different way to be human, not as a faint and fading aspiration, but as a strong and subversive signal of the way in which God's new creation is a reality-in-waiting, challenging the world's ways of organizing human life. Living in this way is not an optional extra for followers of Jesus, a kind of added hobby for those who want something different on top of their regular Bible Study or prayer meetings. It is part of the deal...."

Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer in John 17, shortly before his betrayal [included,] 'That they may all be one—so that the world may believe.' [v. 21] That was his prayer, and it should be ours as well. Think what that means: Jesus is implying that if we fail here, we are handing to unbelievers apparently good grounds for denying that he had been sent by God...."

“We should expect challenges to the ideal of [the church as] a single family, and we should expect to address them with wise, prayerful, and decisive action to ensure the continuing unity [of the church].... And by the way, this [understanding of the church] affects *everything*, from economics to medicine to sexual behavior to education to worship styles—you cannot pick and choose. New creation means new creation, across the board.”

Wandering from That Grand Church

Wright proposed two problems, in history, that splintered the one church.

First, “in the sixteenth century, the aim was to get Bible translations and new liturgies in all major European languages, and that has been extended worldwide ever since.... [N]obody seems to have noticed that this was creating, almost at once, ethnically based churches....” These churches then established their own doctrines. The result? German Lutherans. Dutch Calvinists. Scottish Presbyterians. English Anglicans. White churches. Black churches. And so on. In a word, denominations.

According to Wright, a second “factor ... is deeper, and I think more disastrous. This is the almost universal assumption in the western churches that the whole point of Christianity was to ‘go to heaven when you die,’ so that how things get organized in church life become essentially secondary. This is almost the total victory of Platonism....”

“[I]n our present day, many scholars ... have been insisting that Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith ... was *both* about what we call ‘ultimate salvation’ (new creation and mind, not ‘going to heaven’) *and* about the coming together of Jews and Gentiles into the single family of Abraham; and that these two belonged tightly together.”

Modernism v. Post-modernism: An Underlying Conflict

Wright steps back and considers racism in the larger society: “[W]e are now in the situation where we all feel guilty because of racial tension and violence—and the further violence which is unleashed when, as in war, one evil opens the door to many others (riots, looting, mindless violence). But we do not have, as a society, the spiritual or indeed the philosophical means to handle it. As a church we have those resources, if only we remember where to find them.

“The situation is made more confusing because the Enlightenment project [of modernity], though in some ways still in full swing and generating the idea of a multicultural unity, has itself been challenged from within by what we call postmodernity. Over against the homogeneous ‘solidarity’ [of modernism], post-modernism has insisted on the ‘difference’ between all identities, generating an ‘identity politics,’ which we all know well and which produces aspiration and then grievances when those aspirations are not met....

“Enlightenment modernism has wanted to eliminate racism because all people should be identical. Post-modernism wants to eliminate racism because all people are different, and should be valued and respected as such. These two conflicting analyses are ... lost to sight when slogans are shouted, and the streets fill with violence. The ideological confusion seems to fuel the anger rather than checking it.

Those who get hurt are often, of course, the most vulnerable.”

Six Responses to Racism

N.T. Wright’s first response to racism returns to the title and purpose of his essay: “[I]t will not do simply to wring our hands over racism. We must understand why it has emerged in the forms it has, and how the Biblical gospel of Jesus, when allowed free rein, undermines it.”

Wright notes a second response: “[T]he Pauline vision of the church offers what neither modernism nor post-modernism can achieve: the *differentiated unity* in which the multiple human differences, refracted through the prism of the new life in the Anointed Jesus, form the coherent unity of the Body of Christ with its many members.”

Third, he proposes that Christians claim their Christian identity above all others. Just to be clear, “the Christian ‘identity’ is to be a Messiah person: ‘in Christ.’ This means that one’s basic life-stance is of one who has ‘died’ to the past and come alive to the new world: ‘if anyone is in the Messiah,’ writes Paul, ‘—new creation!’ [II Corinthians 5:17] ... the new identity is the basis of the true ecclesial fellowship which ought to be putting the world to shame. ‘I through the law died to the law that I might live to God; I am crucified with the Messiah, nevertheless I live, yet not I but the Messiah lives in me.’ [Galatians 2:19-20] That is who we are, and that is what makes us the genuine, God-given brothers and sisters of all others of whom the same is true.”

Wright’s fourth response to racism involves Christian unity: “the need at every level for church leaders and ministers to get together across traditional boundaries, especially where ethnic difference is visible and obvious. It is vital to get to know one another, to pray together, to read scripture together, to find ways of doing together everything they possibly can, including sharing in worship, swapping pulpits, and so on.”

Fifth, “church leaders must find ways of getting together with community leaders—again, at every level and from every background—and finding out where there are real grievances to be addressed and where people are using those ... grievances as a cover for advancing other agendas, including various forms of anarchy.” This will generate penitence among Christians—not for being “insufficiently ‘woke,’ but for [failing] to live out our calling in the gospel as members of the Messiah’s body” to be “a sign to the world ... that Jesus is Lord and that, in him and by his Spirit, new creation has been launched, of which the church is the advance guard.”

Sixth and last, N.T. Wright hopes: “That’s what we need right now: a glorious amnesty of mutual forgiveness. Not of sweeping it all under the carpet. What’s needed is clear-eyed recognition of the evil [of racism] that has happened, and tearful-eyed repentance both for that evil and for the resentment which it has caused. And then forgiveness. Wiping the slate clean. All the virtue-signaling in the world cannot achieve that. But the gospel of Jesus can. It can pave the way to a fresh start. A sign to the world that the crucified and risen Jesus—the one who forgives, the one who puts things right at last—is its rightful Lord.”

Back in the early 2000s, many Annual Conferences and

local churches, in the United States, held Services of Repentance and Reconciliation (for Racism). Those worship services represent a liturgical framing of what N.T. Wright describes in his sixth suggestion. It would be most interesting to return to the liturgies of those services and to study them—especially their Prayers of Confession—to see how repentance for racism was understood. That would help United Methodists to measure our unfolding faithfulness (or unfaithfulness, or mixed record) on racial matters.

A Footnote

Throughout “Undermining Racism,” N.T. Wright reminds us of the Bible’s transformative truth about the church. It changes the reader and the hearer. According to the Bible, the church, as a colony of God’s new creation in God’s first creation, makes the difference in this world with regard to racism.

Likewise, the church, as a colony of God’s new creation in this world, makes the difference in this world with regard to abortion. In the church, the unborn child and mother and father, however dire their circumstances might be, are subjects of the church’s joyful welcome and sacrificial love.

So often, the church truly being the church, truly being new creation, makes all the difference in the world. (PTS)♥

ABRAHAM SPEAKS—BILLY, THAT IS

Dr. William J. Abraham used to be the Albert Cook Outler Professor of Wesley Studies at Perkins School of Theology of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX. As of this summer, Dr. Abraham is the Inaugural Director of the Wesley House of Studies at Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University in Waco, TX. It is good that Dr. Abraham’s talents will continue to be offered, and wisdom shared, to the Church and the churches. This move will most probably free him, to a degree, from the never-ending church struggle within The United Methodist Church.

Last fall, on November 9, 2019, Dr. Abraham delivered a talk entitled “In Accordance with the Scriptures: The Bible and the Creeds” at Transformed!, which was the Wesleyan Covenant Association’s Fourth Global Gathering. The 2019 Global Gathering took place at Asbury United Methodist Church in Tulsa, OK.

During his lecture, Dr. Abraham brought down the house with laughter when he suggested how the Church should handle professional theologians: “Bring us out when you need us. Then lock us away for the rest of the time.”

The Two Ways Confronting The United Methodist Church

Dr. Abraham depicted in vivid terms the crisis, the two ways on offer, now before the church. Since the postponement of the next General Conference, his description of the crisis in The United Methodist Church remains relevant and valid: “We [United Methodists] now face a clear choice. Sometimes things have to be put in a strict either-or. Our Lord did this when He spoke: there’s a broad way and a narrow way. There is a broad way in which a church can be a church; and there is a narrow way in which a church can be a church. This is the choice that we face up ahead.

“The broad way is straightforward. It is going to be a church which is built on sex and gender. Think about that. It is going to be a church that is built on rebellion against the conciliar policies and practices of the Church. [Please note this editorial comment: capitalized Church, here and below, indicates catholic or universal Church; lower-case church points to a denomination or a congregation]. It is going to be a church that is built on non-rational means of persuasion. Fill in the details. [That is, remember the public hysteria displayed by centrists/liberals and progressives at the end of General Conference 2019 in St. Louis (and beyond).] It is a church that will be built on individual personalities and even rock-star public personas. And it is a church that is going to be built on the shifting sand of post-Christian, secular experience and cultural proclivities. I do not want to be part of a church like that.

“Now here is an alternative. A church that is built on our Lord’s teaching on marriage and the vision of creation that informs it. Now we have a lot of work [to do] in order to unpack that. But that is crucial. It is going to be a church that is built on respect for canon law, for corporate discipline, and for civility toward our critics and our enemies. It is a church that will be built on rational, respectful means of persuasion. It is a church that will be built on hard-won consensus in conferencing—and thinking and speaking and arguing—together like they did in Acts 15. And it is a church that will be built on the rock of divine revelation in the Scripture and the reliably enunciated material that is given in the great creeds of the Church—especially The Apostles’ Creed and, my favorite one, The Nicene Creed.

“So I want to say: this is a stark and inescapable choice for United Methodists as we move forward. We can have a church built on sex, on rebellion, on non-rational means of persuasion, on individual personalities, on secular interpretations of experience. Or we can have a church built on our Lord’s teaching on marriage, that is built on affectionate loyalty to the life and practices and doctrines of the Church, that is built on rational and civil means of persuasion, that is built on hard-won corporate, conciliar consensus, and that, in the end, is built on Scripture and the creeds. If you hear nothing else [from me], I want you to take that choice home and ponder it.”

God Is Competent, So the Bible Can Be Understood

In his talk, Dr. Abraham moved on to talk about rightly interpreting the Bible. After all, being the Church requires faithful and reliable Biblical interpretation: “Now I know when people talk about Scripture and divine revelation, they say, ‘It all [comes] down to interpretation. You’ve got your interpretation, and I’ve got my interpretation.’ And then you go round in circles. Or you develop a set of buckets. Or whatever other image you’ve got.

“Now here we have just got to stand firm.

“Our dear brothers and sisters in the Catholic Tradition wrestled with this. They said, ‘Well, we are going to need the [Church’s] Tradition to help understand the Scripture.’ But then the Tradition is bigger than Scripture. Which is why in the nineteenth century [they] eventually said, ‘Well, we really need a special bishop in Rome, and he’ll tell us what the true

interpretation is.’ But the problem is, how do you interpret what the pope says?

“We stand, at this stage—in my judgment, I do—in the Reformed Tradition, which says: when God speaks to us in Scripture, God is not incompetent. When God says Yes, we can

understand it. When He says No, we can understand it. Otherwise, we have a totally incompetent deity. We have a God who did not make us in such a way that we could not hear Him and understand Him; and when He speaks to us in His word, well, He can’t get through to us. That is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we are not intimidated by claims about the relativism of interpretation. God is not incompetent. He has spoken to us, and we are going to stand by the revelation that is given in Scripture. And we are going to be immersed, or buried, in Scripture—to become all that God wants us to be.”

Why the Church Stands on the Creeds

Dr. Abraham also made the case that the creeds are absolutely necessary to the Church’s faith and life: “Athanasius (296-373) is our North African hero. He is my favorite theologian out of the early period. He was a genius and a churchman of the highest caliber, in my judgment. He was run out of his cathedral five times—by the government, no less!

“The whole point of the creeds is not only to preserve the deep truths of the Christian faith in a summary that is meaty and accessible but also to protect the Church against the elites who come along and always tell you, ‘Well, we know better than they did.’....

So, “[t]here are two key reasons why we United Methodists have to take the creeds seriously. One, the absence of The United Methodist Church’s formal commitment to the creeds has left us vulnerable to, in many ways interesting and even persuasive, attacks on the deep elements of the Christian faith. We need to correct that mistake in the history of Methodism, if I may say so.” How? By regularly using the God-given creeds, and by striving to understand them.

“And the second deep reason ... is: who is going to protect the sheep from the wolves? Who is going to protect the little ones who are going to be eaten alive by the leaders—big, phony intellectuals, big wannabe-famous people? Who is going to protect the little ones from all of that? It is the deep structures, doctrines, sacraments, and life of the Church. And within that, it is absolutely crucial that we be clear about the significance of Scripture and the creeds in the life of the church.

“When I was trained, the objection to the deep truths of the Christian faith was: ‘The faith is false. It’s irrational.’ How can you believe in that and science?’ Now, the objection is: ‘It’s not false. It’s poisonous. These creeds were put together by people who were power-hungry and trying to impose their view of God and Christ on the whole of the Church.’ This is nonsense. This is appallingly bad history. The point of the creeds is not only to preserve the truths of

“When God speaks to us in Scripture, God is not incompetent. When God says Yes, we can understand it. When He says No, we can understand it.”

the Christian faith in a summary that’s meaty and accessible, but also as protection of the church against the elites.”

Conclusion

Dr. Abraham has placed before United Methodists the choice, restated in three different ways, that we must make. First, to be a church of

the broad way or to be a church of the narrow way. Second, to be a church with Biblical interpretation that distrusts God’s competence or to be a church with Biblical interpretation that trusts God’s competence. Third, to be a church set free from the Church’s creeds or to be a church gladly declaring the Church’s creeds. Again, that is the three-fold choice confronting United Methodists.

Exactly that choice, in three forms, faces United Methodists before the next General Conference. Exactly that choice, in three forms, will face United Methodists during the next General Conference. Exactly that choice, in three forms, will face United Methodists after the next General Conference. Furthermore, exactly that choice, in three forms, will face United Methodists whatever their denominational destinations after the next General Conference. All United Methodists—traditionalists, centrists, and progressives (and others!)—now face, and will face, the ecclesial choice that Dr. Abraham proposes above.

In other words, the choice Dr. Abraham is presenting to us United Methodists is this: Will you be the Church submitted to the word, the presence, and the guidance of Jesus Christ? Or will you be a religious organization subject to the whims stirring in the hearts of its elite leaders and to the cultural winds blowing through the general society?

By posing the choice so boldly, Dr. Abraham is helping United Methodists to make decisions that are most faithful to Jesus Christ and His Church. (PTS)♥

TRANSPARENCY GOES AWAY

In 2001, The United Methodist Church adopted the slogan “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors” to try to welcome as many people as possible into the denomination. Without regard to race, age, gender, sexual orientation, theological perspective, scriptural understanding, all people and their opinions would be welcome to participate in the life of local churches.

Over the course of several General Conferences, I have felt those open hearts, minds, and doors slam shut. Let me explain.

In 2004, as the new Lifewatch Administrator, I ordered and received postal addresses for all General Conference delegates. So we printed labels and mailed letters to each of the 1,000 delegates to promote the passage of legislation that protected human life.

In 2008 and 2012, for \$80/order, I purchased and received from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) printed mailing labels for General Conference delegates. So we then mailed letters, with Lifewatch’s life-honoring witness, to all delegates.

In 2016, technology had improved so that instead of paper mailing labels, GCFA sent an Excel spread sheet containing all delegate contact information. So we then prepared labels and mailed letters as in prior years.

After 2016, there was a noticeable change: the vanishing of transparency.

Before the 2019 Special General Conference, I made many calls to GCFA to request delegate address information. I-will-get-back-to-you promises went unfulfilled. I was met with stalling, stonewalling, and shunning by denominational employees. Finally, I resorted to using the delegate names and addresses published in the 2019 *Advance Daily Christian Advocate* (ADCA) and typing the postal labels. So again, we sent letters to all the delegates—this time without the assistance of GCFA.

Earlier this year, with the 2020 General Conference approaching, we prepared the Lifewatch letter and tried to obtain delegate address information for our mailing labels. However, there was no transparency and no pretense of openness. The 2020 ADCA did not include the postal addresses of the delegates. In addition, many of the Annual Conference websites did not include that information.

I spent many hours looking through US Annual Conference websites to find delegate addresses—either postal or email. No Annual Conference listed postal addresses. Nineteen gave one email address for the entire delegation. Nine listed email addresses for all their delegates. Three noted only the delegates' names. And two contained no contact information.

Apparently, only with considerable effort can United Methodists contact a fraction of the General Conference delegates to inquire about their positions, to share thoughts and concerns, or to offer prayers. Why? Well, certainly, security is a concern. But as elected delegates from Annual Conferences, delegates should be as approachable and accessible as elected public officials.

The United Methodist Church boasts about its openness, diversity, concern for the other, and tolerance. However, making delegate contact information nearly unavailable reeks of bureaucratic coordination, arrogance, and intolerance—precisely by those who should be planning for a General Conference that is democratic, and transparent, under the rule of Christ.

In defense of life,

Cindy Evans, Lifewatch Administrator♥

THIS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

We must be honest here. Transparent. Truthful. Donald Trump has driven many Americans—Democrats and Republicans, Christians and non-Christians, United Methodists and non-United Methodists—crazy. Every morning they must get up with one goal in mind for the day: to oppose President Trump—his personality, his character,

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his family, his policies, his tweets, his speeches, his White House, his campaign, everything about him. They eagerly read the “4000th op-ed arguing that Donald Trump is a unique danger to the country and the world” (Bari Weiss’ July 14, 2020 resignation letter to *The New York Times*). Political opposition to the man who resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, gives each of them an additional (or their only) purpose in life. Trump Derangement Syn-

drome does not come close to capturing what is going on here. This opposition routinely morphs into hate. Needless to say, this is not a good way to live life—let alone the Christian life.

In November, this president who drives so many bonkers will presumably face Joe Biden in the presidential election. How should Lifewatch readers vote?

This United Methodist pastor does not have a nice, neat, catchy answer to that question. But I do have three suggestions to propose.

First, do *not* vote only on the basis of feelings—raw, visceral emotions. Untutored, unchecked feelings so often mislead. Rather than emote, voters are wisest to exercise political discernment, judgment, reason.

Second, remember that single-minded, clarifying sentence from Article I of The Barmen Declaration (1934): “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.” Christians, first and last and always, trust and obey Jesus Christ. Even when it comes to voting. We Christians live and even vote in response to Jesus Christ—not in reaction to the things of this world (e.g., a president whom some cannot stand). Admittedly, Jesus Christ the Word of God does not implore: “Vote for Biden!” or “Vote for Trump!” But He, whom we always seek to trust and obey, says and does enough in Scripture that we can discern some guidance for our voting.

Third, in the midst of all today’s anti-Trump noise (some of which is legitimate), recall that there are not insignificant reasons for voting for him. For example, Trump advances an agenda that seeks to protect the most vulnerable members of American society (e.g., unborn children and their mothers, the critically ill, and so on), to insure a strong version of religious liberty, and to appoint judges who are guided by the letter of the Constitution and the laws. At the same time, the current president has an undeniable downside.

In the end, voters must compare the president’s character, policies, and leadership potential to the Democratic challenger’s character, policies, and leadership potential; decide which of the two candidates will most probably best serve the common good of the nation; and vote accordingly.

As a Christian following Christ and as a citizen exercising reason, cast your ballot. And pray that God’s merciful sovereignty (which includes judgment) will be exercised through the Lordship of Jesus Christ over this American experiment in ordered liberty. (PTS)♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Thank you for supporting Lifewatch’s witness for the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church and beyond. As always, your financial gifts to Lifewatch can be forwarded in three ways. First, write a check to “Lifewatch” and send it to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. And third, if you are over the age of 72, give a gift from your IRA as a tax-free distribution. (This means a gift [up to \$100,000 ...!] can be transferred from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and can count toward your minimum required distribution without being considered as taxable income. If you are considering giving a gift from your IRA, please first contact Mrs. Evans in the Lifewatch office.) During this time of the virus, Mrs. Evans and I are particularly grateful for you, for your friendship in Christ, for your prayerful support, and for your financial support. (PTS)

- Earlier this year a postcard from Life Dynamics in Denton, TX was delivered to our mailbox. The back of it presents a jarring, but accurate, message about Planned Parenthood. (As you know, Planned Parenthood is Abortion, Inc. in the United States—that is, it performs more abortions in the nation than any other provider.) The message reads: “Meet Planned Parenthood. It’s the New Klan doing what the Old Klan never could.

“They [the New Klan] saw abortion as the way to eliminate minorities. So they made it legal and flooded black neighborhoods with abortion clinics. Then, the United States government and giant multi-national corporations began to funnel billions of dollars into Planned Parenthood and the rest of the abortion industry.

“The result is: Since 1973, more black people have been killed by abortion than have died from AIDS, accidents, homicides, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease combined. Today, more African-Americans are executed by the abortion industry every week than were lynched by the Old Klan in over 150 years. And in some parts of America, more black babies are aborted than are born.

“At this point legalized abortion has reduced America’s black populations by over 25%, and it is now the most effective tool ever devised for voter suppression. Legalized abortion is cultural suicide. [Leaders in the churches have] a moral and divine obligation to fight this evil and lead [their] people in the struggle to end it.

“Start now! Watch ‘Maafa 21.’ This feature-length documentary will prove to you that eugenics and racial genocide have always been the driving forces behind legal abortion. Watch it for free, or order it on DVD, at www.maafa21.com.”

- Many nice United Methodists are probably repulsed by such “negativity” against Planned Parenthood. “All that could not possibly be true,” they protest in thought.

But it is true. Bradley Mattes, in his July 9, 2020 online article “It’s Only Window Dressing,” connects the dots between Margaret Sanger, Planned Parenthood, and racism.

Mattes reminds us: Margaret Sanger is the founder of what is now called Planned Parenthood. In her article “Birth

Control and Racial Betterment,” she claimed: “Like the advocates of Birth Control, the eugenists (including Sanger), for instance, are seeking to assist the race toward the elimination of the unfit.” Throughout her writings, she called those whom she described as “the unfit” other names, such as “weeds ... overrunning the human garden,” “morons,” “misfits,” and “the maladjusted.” In Sanger’s mind and time, these slanderous names were understood to apply to African Americans.

Sanger was an ally of the Klan. Mattes notes that she “was asked to speak at a Ku Klux Klan rally and wrote about it in her book, Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography: ‘I accepted an invitation to talk to the women’s branch of the Ku Klux Klan in Silver Lake, New Jersey ... I saw through the door dim figures parading with banners and illuminated crosses ... I was escorted to the platform, was introduced, and began to speak ... In the end, through simple illustrations I believed I had accomplished my purpose. A dozen invitations to speak to similar groups were proffered.’”

For years, Margaret Sanger’s racist agenda continued to be implemented by Planned Parenthood. For example, “[a] stunning 79% of [Planned Parenthood outlets] are within walking distance of Black and/or Hispanic neighborhoods. [Obviously, this leads to a disproportionately high number of abortions of Black and Hispanic babies.] Racism is built into their current business model.”

However, recent anti-racism politics might be threatening the standing of Margaret Sanger—even in the organization that she founded. “Planned Parenthood’s highest annual honor, the Margaret Sanger Award [which had been awarded to Hillary Clinton in 2009 and Nancy Pelosi in 2014], was quietly discontinued in 2016.” Also, “Planned Parenthood’s flagship affiliate, the Margaret Sanger Health Center in Manhattan now sports a new name ... the Manhattan Health Center of New York....”

Racism and abortion are part of the same picture. Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood belong to the same picture.

- Surprises abound. Recently, a book from years ago—The Yoke of Obedience—The Meaning of Ordination in Methodism (Abingdon Press, 1988) by Dr. Dennis M. Campbell—came to mind. Dr. Campbell, you will remember, was dean of and theology professor at Duke Divinity School, then headmaster of Woodberry Forest Academy in Virginia. The title of his book—The Yoke of Obedience—comes from Rev. John Wesley and his Covenant Service: “We take upon ourselves with joy the yoke of obedience. We are no longer our own, but thine. Put us to what thou wilt. Rank us with whom thou wilt. Put us to doing. Put us to suffering. Let us be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let us be full. Let us be empty. Let us have all things. Let us have nothing. We freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.” (emphasis added) The above underlined Covenant Service sentences most probably led to the line “[f]ree us for joyful obedience,” which appears in the Prayer of Confession in the Services of Word and Table I and II. (The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989, pp. 8 and 12)

Toward the end of his book, Dr. Campbell summarizes:



Lifewatch
Taskforce of
United Methodists on
Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

09/01/20

- * How the Church diminishes racism
- * Margaret Sanger: Racism & abortion are part of the same picture
- * Dr. Billy Abraham: Is God competent?

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“As this book has suggested, Methodism’s theology of ordination is concerned less with the matter of the validity of ministerial orders and more with the obligation of the ordained to be ‘under orders’ for the gospel and church of Jesus Christ.

“Being ‘under orders’ means that one is obedient and accountable. Calvin insisted that one who is ordained must understand that ‘he is no longer a law unto himself, but bound in servitude to God and the church.’ The language of service, bonds, orders, and obedience is not compatible with secular, liberal, twentieth-century America. We do not like to admit to any limitations of individual freedom. But the Christian gospel challenges us because we are confronted by Jesus himself who, ‘though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross’ (Phil. 2:6-8).

“Ordained ministers are called to representative self-emptying lives of obedience and service. The greatest potential for renewal in ministry is for the ordained to reaffirm their high calling to live ‘under orders.’” (pp. 107-8)

Those words, strongly believed and purposefully written in 1988, are perhaps read and then set aside by many United Methodist bishops (and other clergy) who

decide they knew more about human sexuality than the Bible, Christian Tradition, and The Book of Discipline. In arrogance, they acted against The United Methodist Church’s doctrine and discipline. Precisely their disobedience might well end up leading The United Methodist Church into an apparently formal, managed, efficient schism at the next General Conference—if the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation passes.

Leaning on John Wesley, Dr. Dennis Campbell paints a compelling and challenging vision of ordination. At this late hour, can it be recalled and restored?

● “However much they [liberals] rage against dogmas, they are themselves the most stubborn dogmatists.” Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a Dutch Calvinist minister and statesman (quoted by Diederik Boomsma in “Just Hospitality,” a review of Christian Hospitality; and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear in First Things (May 2020, pp. 53-55)

● *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* “Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.”♥

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LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Lifewatch Editor
2400 Foxcroft Road NW, Wilson, NC 27896
910.207.1492 / paulstallsworth@nccumc.org

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