

## TWO BISHOPS AGAINST TWO CONGREGATIONS

*The following letter was mailed to two bishops in the hope that they might reconsider and reverse two recent appointments. (Since April 25, the Mt. Bethel Church began the process disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church, its senior pastor surrendered his United Methodist ministerial credentials, and the church filed a formal complaint against the involved bishop and district superintendent.) You are invited to read this letter and articles written by Rev. Fenton and Rev. Lambrecht, and to write your own response to Bp. Hauptert-Johnson and Bp. Schol. (PTS)*

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson/North Georgia Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church/1700 Century Circle, NE—#100/Atlanta, GA 30345

Bishop John Schol/New Jersey Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church/205 Jumping Brook Road/ Neptune, NJ 07753

April 25, 2021  
Good Shepherd Sunday

Dear Bp. Hauptert-Johnson and Bp. Schol:

Easter Season grace and peace to you and yours.

During the Season of Easter, the Church catholic celebrates the victory of the risen Christ over death, sin, and the evil one. Sadly, I believe that portions of your recent ministries have betrayed Christ and the power of His resurrection.

To that, you might reply: Rev. Stallworth, what or who gives you standing to evaluate the ministries of bishops who reside beyond the boundaries of your North Carolina Conference? To that reasonable question, I respond with two answers. First, in The Baptismal Covenant, I vow to “be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church, and do all in [my] power to strengthen its ministries.” This letter of admonishment is written to you as an attempt to be faithful to Christ and to strengthen United Methodist ministries. Second, in the Ordination of Elders service, I promise to “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 [my] ministry.” Out of

loyalty to (not dissent against) The United Methodist Church and its faith and its life, I am challenging recent episcopal acts of yours. Therefore, because of loyalty to Jesus Christ and loyalty to The United Methodist Church, I am writing to you. That is, I believe, sufficient standing.

Last week Rev. Walter Fenton of the Wesleyan Covenant Association wrote and distributed “Disruption at Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church, Largest Congregation in North Georgia Annual Conference” (April 20, 2021). Then Rev. Thomas Lambrecht of Good News authored and posted “Turmoil in New Jersey” (April 23, 2021). Written by United Methodist clergy in good standing, these articles describe both of you making recent appointments in an apparently belated fashion and without adequate consultation, unsettling large congregations made fragile by the pandemic, treating pastors as pawns to be moved (rather than clergy to be honored), and dismissing pleas for reconsideration from laity and lay leaders.

In these two cases, your ministerial acts are surprising, your resistance to Christian conferencing puzzling, and your insistence on getting your way disturbing. Exactly this kind of ministry—by you and by other bishops (who promised to seek the church’s unity and serve the church’s faith)—has played a large part in leading The United Methodist Church to the brink of schism.

Of course, Rev. Fenton, Rev. Lambrecht, their readers, and I do not have all the facts. Of course, there is another side to these stories. Of course, there appears to be a rush to judgment. Of course, all these things are true. However, this truth remains: Your appointment of new pastors to Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church in Marietta, GA and to the Bethany Korean United Methodist Church in Wayne, NJ has demonstrated disregard for Christian love, common civility, and United Methodist law. Is that what you desire?

Through the years, I have worked and written in favor of The United Methodist Church remaining unified and seeking reformation. What you have done in these two appointments helps to ensure a coming schism. Is that your goal? (I trust that your ministries are not now determined by your belief that a denominational division is inevitable, so you are manipulatively ushering congregations [especially larger ones] toward the post-separation United Methodist Church.)

Good Shepherd Sunday is observed throughout the Church today. With the living Good Shepherd in mind, I urge you to reconsider—and reverse—your recent

appointive acts addressed above. Without reconsideration and reversal, you will appear, to many, to be acting against the well being of some of the sheep of Christ's flock.

I challenge you to be faithful, to Christ the Good Shepherd and His Church, for the sake of the world.

In Christ,

(The Rev.) Paul T. Stallsworth

Lifewatch Editor and President

Cc: Bishop Hope Morgan Ward/Raleigh Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church/700 Waterfield Ridge Place/Garner, NC 27529 ♥

## THE LAW OF LOVE: AGAINST CHURCH SEPARATION

by Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth

*This article was first submitted to Firebrand Magazine ([firebrandmag.com](http://firebrandmag.com)), an online, theological publication edited by Dr. David F. Watson.*

“To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians with whom we were before united is a grievous breach of the law of love.”

John Wesley, “On Schism,” #11

A few years ago a resident bishop commented in this manner: “Theology taught in seminary is fine. Church doctrine is okay. But today, what really counts in The United Methodist Church is love. Bishops and pastors just need to love their people. That’s all. If they do, everything in the church will work out.”

What does the bishop’s love look like? Too often, what is called “love” is nothing more than affirmation: the affirmer affirms the affirmed, and that helps both the affirmer and the affirmed to feel good about themselves. In American society, where “the triumph of the therapeutic” (Philip Rieff) has occurred in recent decades, the lover most often expresses so-called love (or good will) toward the beloved, and that results in good feelings for both. This feel-good love invades most post-modern life, popular culture, and societal institutions—even the churches. In The United Methodist Church today, love equals affirmation, and love yields good feelings.

However, when the Church catholic speaks about love, that love should be defined and determined by the Bible’s witness and the Church’s doctrine—not by popular culture, fast-moving fashions, and fleeting feelings. Again, love for the Church should be guided by Bible and doctrine, not CBS and popular CDs.

There are, of course, different types of love. C.S. Lewis names four: affection (storge), friendship (philia), romantic (eros), and charity (agape). The love that is sacrificial—agape—should dominate the faith, practice, and proclamation of the Church. The Church trusts, practices, and proclaims sacrificial love: the love of God for the world, which is demonstrated most powerfully in the death of His Son Jesus on the cross for the salvation of the world (John 3:16). The Church and the Christian respond to God’s sacrificial love by offering their sacrificial love to God and to neighbors.

Sacrificial love always involves the lover sacrificing for the

actual (not just the apparent) good of the beloved. Often the lover’s sacrifice is painful, and often the beloved’s reception of sacrificial love is difficult. Sacrificial love, according to Bible and doctrine, is not about superficial affirmation and good feelings (though sometimes they are involved). Sacrificial love, according to Bible and doctrine, involves what is actually good for the beloved—for example, truth-telling and thanksgiving, repenting and forgiving, salvation and service, faithfulness and witness.

Again, unfortunately, feel-good love permeates The United Methodist Church today. Unfortunately, feel-good love is disrupting the faith, life, and witness of The United Methodist Church today. Even so, God’s grace, truth, and providence can change that.

Seeking anew to love sacrificially, to love truly, The United Methodist Church and United Methodists can recommit to: (1) confessing anew the Lordship of Jesus Christ; (2) engaging in Word-and-Sacrament ministry; (3) aiming for faithfulness over the long term; (4) employing doctrine and discipline for the good of the community and its members; (5) using due process in response to controversy in the church; and (6) leaving the ultimate judgment to Christ. These tasks do not undercut sacrificial love. They require sacrificial love, and they would generate additional sacrificial love.

### 1. Lordship

*“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....”*

—Ephesians 1:20-23 (NRSV, here and following)

*“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”*

—Galatians 3:27-28

Jesus Christ—once crucified and risen, the greatest demonstration of sacrificial love and vindicating victory—is the Lord of this world, the Church, and the Christian. He is “head both of guidance and government, and likewise of life and influence, to the whole [Church] and every member of it.” (Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament, hereafter WNNT) The Lord Jesus Christ gives the Church and the Christian their essential, life-transforming, world-resisting identity. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church and the Christian confess that Jesus is Lord, and live and love sacrificially in ways that are consistent with their confession.

A church and a Christian, satisfied with the world’s acceptance, fall silent about the Lordship of Christ. They tend to confess themselves and their own identities, apart from Jesus Christ, who first and sacrificially loved them.

### 2. Word and Sacrament

*“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

—Acts 2:42

The earliest Church of Acts, according to John Wesley, had a “daily ... communion” that included “[h]earing the word” and “[r]eceiving the Lord’s supper” (WNNT). Moreover, The United Methodist Church’s doctrine defines the Church as “faithful men [sic]” (Article XIII—Of the Church, The Articles of Religion) and as “the redemptive fellowship” (Article V—The Church, The Confession of Faith), where the Word of God is rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. The Church’s duty is faithfully to propose (not impose) the Word of God and constantly (not occasionally) to offer the Sacraments of God. Word-and-Sacrament worship presents Jesus Christ regularly to address and to accompany His Church. Word-and-Sacrament worship forms the Church and the Christian in sacrificial love.

A local church that de-emphasizes Word-and-Sacrament worship cannot form clergy and laity to love sacrificially; so they are spiritually and morally deformed.

### 3. Faithfulness

*“...[P]roclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.”*

—II Timothy 4:2-5

*“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’”* —Matthew 16:24-25

The Church, including both clergy and laity, continuously preaches and teaches the Gospel—“[n]ot only when a fair occasion is given: even when there is none, one must be made.” (WNNT) The Church proposes the message from God, not messages full of “novelty and variety” that are nothing but “empty, soft, philosophical discourses.” (WNNT) Proposing the Gospel requires the Church, clergy and laity, to practice love that is self-denying and cross-bearing—love that sacrifices for the actual good of others. This “abourning love” (WNNT) comes from God; it helps the Church to labor and persevere through difficult times and circumstances.

Pastoral ministry without sacrificial love degenerates into people-pleasing activity. By altering the Gospel message of the Bible to please as many as possible, under the banner of love or the rationale of contextualization, a church forsakes its Lord, His message, and His mission.

### 4. Doctrine and Discipline

*“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are*

*A church and a Christian, satisfied with the world’s acceptance ... tend to confess themselves and their own identities, apart from Jesus Christ, who first and sacrificially loved them.*

*you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it....”* —Matthew 16:16-18

*“If another member of the church sins against you, go and*

*point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector....”* —Matthew 18:15-17

Jesus Christ builds and governs His Church. Christ builds His Church on “the faith which [Peter] hast [just] professed” or on Himself (WNNT) or on revelation from God, all of which are summarized by church doctrine. He governs His Church through disciplining and otherwise ordering its common life. Through doctrine and discipline, Christ provides for His Church’s common faith and common life. Required only to receive and transmit the Church’s faith and life, and relieved of the responsibility to make up the Church’s faith and life, the Church and the Christian are freed to love sacrificially.

A church—that builds itself on cultural principles apart from divine revelation, or suppresses doctrine in an attempt to avoid conflict, or refuses (in the name of love) to discipline its clergy and laity, or rebels against even the idea of doctrine and discipline—lacks the sacrificial love that is required to use the gifts of doctrine and discipline that Christ gives His people.

### 5. Controversy

*“The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate.... [James said:] ‘Therefore, I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood....’ Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch...with the following letter: ‘...we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you... For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials....”* —Acts 15:6-7a, 19-20, 22, 23a, 25, and 28

In the service of Jesus Christ, the Church preaches, teaches, practices, and transmits the Church’s faith (including doctrine and morals). The Church also makes room for reasonable dissent against the Church’s faith; such dissent presents a significant opportunity for the Church to defend the faith she has been given. When dissent becomes controversial and divisive in the ongoing life of a church, that church refers the matter in question to its relevant

governing assembly—for example, to the Jerusalem Council in the apostolic Church or to General Conference in The United Methodist Church. That body, in the power of the Holy Spirit (who is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of truth), decides to maintain, clarify, and/or develop the church’s teaching. Such decision-making is done out of sacrificial love for Christ, for brothers and sisters in the church, and for the sake of the church’s witness.

A church that avoids disagreement and controversy, in the name of love, is a disordered, dysfunctional household. Furthermore, dissent that disrupts or intimidates a church assembly impairs that assembly’s ability to discern accurately Jesus Christ’s governance and guidance of His church through the power of His Spirit. Finally, a church that aims to please as many of its clergy and laity as possible—rather than trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ—is woefully misguided.

## 6. Judgment

*“He put before them another parable:…The slaves said to him [the master], ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”*  
—Matthew 13:24a and 28b-30

Jesus Christ is the Judge of the world and the Church. When He returns in power and glory at the end of time, He alone will pronounce the final judgment. Until then, the Church recognizes that it is a community of forgiven sinners—indeed, that each of the baptized is both saint and sinner at once. Encouraging both clergy and laity to “move on to perfection” (that is, perfect sacrificial love), through grace-empowered obedience to “the law established by faith” (John Wesley), and upholding both doctrine and discipline, the Church loves sacrificially, encourages all to love sacrificially, and rightly leaves ultimate judgment to Christ.

The Church is forbidden, by the Lord Jesus Christ, from “gathering the weeds,” in any way, by any means, even for the sake of apparently attractive ends (such as cessation of fighting in the church or an expansion of mission to the world).

## Concluding Challenge

By encouraging the adoption of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation, leaders of The United Methodist Church are admitting: they prefer dividing the church over sacrificially and lovingly fulfilling the difficult tasks of being the Church. Why? Because the love most prevalent among United Methodists emerges from, and aims for, sentimentality. Today love in The United Methodist Church has degenerated into good feelings.

Sacrificial love is different. To repeat, the icon of sacrificial love is Jesus Christ suffering hideously, dying obscurely, and hanging lifelessly—for the salvation of the world. Only with sacrificial love, that reflects His, can United Methodists: truly witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, dedicate their congregations to Word-and-Sacrament

worship, seek faithfulness to Christ above all else, put doctrine and discipline to work in the church, resolve controversy through a holy due process, and wait obediently for the Lord’s final judgment. Only with sacrificial love, that reflects His, can United Methodists be His Church.

Think of the sacrificial love God has for the world, the Church, and the Christian: This “[l]ove is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends…And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (I Corinthians 13:6b-8a,13) God’s love is steady, undeterred, and unrelenting. It is motivated not by feelings. Not by sentiments. It flows from sacrifice. Exactly that love is desperately needed in The United Methodist Church today.

In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Church united to become The United Methodist Church. Preaching at the Uniting Conference, Dr. Albert C. Outler (1908-1989, perhaps the father of The United Methodist Church) declared: “...our foremost need is for a vivid sense of the church we have been called to be.” (Perkins Journal, Spring 1974, p. 37)

From the birth of The United Methodist Church to the present, it appears that two “vivid sense(s) of the church” have competed and conflicted with each other. One sense of the church has aimed at continuity with historic Christianity. The other sense has attempted to free itself from the past to become more open and to adapt to the current age. This conflict in the church continued, worsened, metastasized, and then finally reached a tipping point toward division. Of late, this conflict has intensified to the point where many United Methodists now support the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation—a plan for separating or dividing The United Methodist Church. The Protocol, which aims to create a managed and orderly schism (without lawsuits, it is hoped), will likely be accomplished by the next General Conference adopting the Protocol’s petitions (i.e., legislative bills).

Again, the most basic reason for the Protocol’s passage and for denominational division is this: The United Methodist Church, including clergy and laity, lost a Christian understanding of love, agape love.

Our Lord reminds us: “‘Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’” (John 13:34b-35) As our Lord demonstrates, that love is from God. That love requires sacrifice. That love helps Christians to do what is difficult. That love helps Christians to be the Church. ♥

## LUKE 21:13

by Rev. Edward H. Johnson

While reading recently through Luke, chapter 21 verse 13 stood out. Maybe all of us have had that experience in which a portion of Scripture had special impact. Such was the case with Luke 21:13, which reads: “‘This will be your

opportunity to bear witness” (ESV, here and below).

The run up to these words of Jesus—as He prepares the disciples, both present and future, for the future—are as follows in verses 10-12: “Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought up before kings and governors for my name’s sake.’” Not a pretty picture.

However, right on the heels of this comes the “stood out” verse 13: “‘This will be your [let’s now say *our*] opportunity to bear witness.’” Admittedly, conditions at the present time in our culture are not as severe as described above or, if we were to read further, as verses 16-17. But pressure has been increasing and continues to increase, seeking to mute our witness to the Gospel of Life for which we particularly stand.

Two observations.

The first of these two observations is simply *our witness*. That is to say that, regardless of the level of push back, our witness is as vital as ever. We live in the midst of sharp division, discord, and vitriol within our nation and within The United Methodist Church. Contending for preborn human life and Biblical marriage has become a flash point, a line in the sand, literally fighting words almost. So unfortunate. It’s tempting to smile and move on, to soften our witness, to draw back. Yet, as the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (better known as Lifewatch) and as individuals, our witness is needed as much now, or even more so, than ever. In fact, does not verse 13 tell us this is our “opportunity”? If so, we are to seize it! Much is at stake.

If the first observation is our witness, the second is our witness *in love*. Yes, we are to seize the opportunity, to seize the moment. We are to stand firm. We are to contend, to bear witness. But our witness must be delivered in love. There may be push back. There may be name calling. (I’m sure all of us can think of several.) Some may count us as their enemies. Nevertheless, if for no other reason than that Jesus admonishes us to love—even our enemies (Luke 6:27)—our witness, as Lifewatch and as individuals, must be delivered in love. And who knows? The seeds of bearing witness in love may bear fruit in the heart of one or more detractors such that a Saul may become a Paul. Remember Saul who, as reported in Acts, violently opposes Christianity until his heart is transformed? We refer to him today as the Apostle Paul. It happened then. It can happen now.

Bear witness we must. And in love. Much is at stake. For some, eternity itself.

Lord, please forgive us for the opportunities to bear loving witness that we have allowed to pass by. Help us to respond faithfully to the opportunities before us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

*Rev. Johnson is a United Methodist pastor in Sandston, VA. His outstanding, devotional word was delivered at the beginning of the February 16, 2021 Lifewatch Advisory Board meeting.♥*

## **POLITICS AND BABIES BORN DURING ABORTION**

*Late in April, the ecumenical National Pro-life Religious Council (NPRC), to which Lifewatch belongs, released the following statement.*

On April 14, an effort was launched in the U.S. House of Representatives to save the lives of newborn babies who have survived abortion. A discharge petition was introduced, in an effort to have a vote on H.R. 619, the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act, which would increase protections for children who survive an abortion. This bill does not restrict abortion but simply protects those who survive it.

The discharge petition is a tool available to the minority party when the majority party leadership does not want to deal with a particular bill. If a majority of all House members indicate they want a vote, then the bill gets a vote.

If these men and women who were elected to Congress are not willing to even discuss a bill protecting babies born alive, what are they doing in public office?

Some babies do in fact survive abortion. One cause, for instance, is that in some late-term abortion procedures the child may inadvertently slip out through the forcibly-dilated cervix before the abortionist reaches in to dismember or otherwise kill the child.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has documented 143 cases of babies born alive after abortion.<sup>1</sup> The nine states which keep records of these cases have indicated 203 cases.<sup>2</sup>

Once born, these children deserve equal protection under the law and an equal standard of care, as any other baby born at the same stage. Instead, we continue to see babies left alone to die or actively killed. Others survive and join the hundreds of men and women who comprise the Abortion Survivors Network.

No one claiming to have a conscience, much less claiming the name of Christ, can legitimately hold that babies born alive can be discarded like trash.

The National Pro-life Religious Council strongly encourages all citizens to call their representatives to encourage them to sign the discharge petition for the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. More details are available at the website [www.BornAlive.US](http://www.BornAlive.US).

1. “Mortality Records with Mention of International Classification of Diseases-10 code P96.4 (Termination of Pregnancy): United States, 2003-2014,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

2. See the list of state health reports on <https://downloads.frc.org/ER/ER19E62.pdf> starting on p. 6.

*The National Pro-life Religious Council is a Christian coalition dedicated to the historic, Biblical teaching of Christianity on the sanctity of life. See [www.NPRCouncil.org](http://www.NPRCouncil.org).*



## **STRUGGLE AGAINST PERSONAL EVIL**

Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) was one of the great Orthodox theologians of the last century. He preached, taught, and wrote for the whole Church and for the world. A memorable video, “Discern the Spirits: Words from Alexander Schmemmann,” is posted by St. Vladimir’s

Orthodox Theological Seminary (svots.edu). In the video, Schmemmann speaks the following truthful words.

“For I think no one can today doubt that we are in a deep crisis. Not only political crisis. Not only economic crisis. But first of all, a spiritual crisis. So we Christians, we who confess Christ, have to go through that very stormy sea, waves of that sea [in] this world, with some clear-cut principles of discerning: What is right? What is wrong? What are we to do?”

“Discern the spirits. It is a spiritual discernment, and it is a spiritual discernment because what acts in this world are not abstract ideas or anonymous, impersonal phenomena. Behind everything there is a personal, personal presence. Never be ashamed of believing, naive as it may seem to people of our age. Never stop believing that the battle in this struggle is not between structures and systems, political or economic; people like that idea. No! The struggle is personal. It is the Spirit of God. It is the spirit of evil. From that [more personal] point of view, difficult as it may seem for us to understand, every personal victory over evil, may be even unknown to the world, has an impact on the whole situation. A saint leaves the world and lives somewhere else, no one knows about him, but he is participating in the great struggle which will be going on until the end of the world.”

Call it the struggle of God against satan, or the struggle of good against evil, or the struggle of the Gospel of Life against the culture of death. The struggle is the same. The Church is in the middle of the struggle, and that struggle enters even her life. Every local church is part of the struggle, and that struggle creeps into each congregation. Every Christian participates in the struggle. We know in our hearts. You participate. And so do I. God help us to discern—and to struggle—faithfully. (PTS) ♥

## YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- Support is essential for Lifewatch’s continuing witness for the Gospel of Life in The United Methodist Church. Financial gifts most certainly help to maintain and extend Lifewatch’s witness. Gifts to Lifewatch can be given in three ways. First, a check can be written to “Lifewatch” and sent to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. Second, stocks can be given to Lifewatch; but first, please contact Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. And third, those over 72 can give a gift from an IRA as a tax-free distribution. (This means a gift [up to \$100,000...!] can be transferred from an IRA directly to Lifewatch and can count toward the minimum required distribution without being counted as taxable income. If you are considering giving a gift from your IRA, again, please first communicate with Mrs. Evans in the Lifewatch office.) Know that Mrs. Evans and I are deeply grateful for you, your friendship in Christ, your commitment to His Church, your prayers for Lifewatch’s witness, and your financial support.
- Each issue of Lifewatch is mailed to be delivered on the first of the month or shortly thereafter. However, it seems these days the United States Postal Service (USPS) is late in delivering this newsletter to your mailboxes. Sometimes, weeks late. Why? We do not know. Our good publishing company in Pennsylvania has been contacted about this

problem and is doing what it can to address it. You might speak with your postmaster, as we did, to report any tardy delivery. After decades of outstanding service by the USPS, those of us at Lifewatch are surprised by this unfortunate development. Do you have some inside information about postal delivery? If so, please let us know.

- “Love says, ‘I sacrifice myself for the good of the other person.’ Abortion says, ‘I sacrifice the other person for the good of myself.’” So writes Rev. Frank Pavone in his Pro-Life Reflections for Every Day (p. 44), which is available from Cokesbury. The same love that sacrifices for the good of the child also sacrifices for the unity and reformation of the Church.

- On April 8 (Easter Thursday, mind you), NARAL Pro-Choice NC sponsored a Zoom meeting entitled “Reproductive Freedom and People of Faith.” Its intent was to “discuss the intersections between reproductive freedom and faith.” Its discussion featured these participants: Omisade Burney-Scott (a “feminist, mother, and healer” living in North Carolina), Rev. Katey Zeh (Baptist minister and CEO at the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice), and Dr. Ben Brown (who uses the pronouns “he/him” and teaches at the Alpert Medical School at Brown University).

Needless to say, this discussion seemed to cancel the slightest mention of the unborn child. Evidently, the presenters believe: no mention, no existence.

Interesting that Rev. Zeh’s second book, due out in 2022, is entitled A Complicated Choice: Making Space for Grief and Healing in the Pro-Choice Movement. Complication? Grief—from what? Healing—from what? Is Rev. Zeh insinuating that an actual unborn child complicates “reproductive decisions” that mother and father make? And that the elimination of an unborn child results in grief and the need for healing? In the world of pro-choice activism, Rev. Zeh is brave even to mention these realities, and she is to be commended for addressing them.

- In August of 2022, the citizens of Kansas will vote on the Value Them Both [as in mother and unborn child] Amendment to the Constitution of the State of Kansas. Value Them Both, if adopted, would establish that Kansas’ abortion law would be democratically decided by the people’s elected representatives—not judicially handed down by unelected judges. If you live in Kansas and would like to help promote the passage of the Value Them Both Amendment, please contact Mr. Chuck Weber at the Kansas Catholic Conference. Mr. Weber, a friend of Lifewatch, can be reached at Chuck@kansascatholic.org. Also, if you have family or friends living in Kansas, please inform them of this opportunity. Thank you.

- “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. God blessed them...” (Genesis 1:27-28a, NRSV) “[T]hen the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being...but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to

the man.” (Genesis 2:7, 20b-23, NRSV)

Genesis emphatically declares, not once but twice: God created man! God created man, mankind, humanity, men and women. The human race was created by God—not by super-human beings, not by nature, not by science, not by chance. God is the creator of humanity.

That truth about humanity means that each and every person is created by God. Furthermore, according to the first creation story in Genesis, each and every person bears the image of God. The image of God in each person means many things—but at the very least it means that all persons are equal before God and all are equally blessed with God-given dignity.

Therefore, in the Church’s teaching about humanity, there is no room and no reason for claims of supremacy—that is, the ranking of one person, or one group of people, above others. Theologically speaking, supremacy of any kind is a falsehood. Frankly speaking, supremacy is a flat-out lie, because it is a falsehood intentionally told to elevate the alleged superior over the alleged inferior.

Whites are not superior to blacks. Nor are blacks superior to whites. Young women and men are not superior to their unborn children. Nor are unborn children superior to their mothers and fathers. “Straight people” are not superior to those who practice LGBT lifestyles. Nor are the LGBT folks superior to heterosexuals. People are not ranked—from better to worse, from most powerful to weakest, from most moral to most deplorable—by their identities. All—and the Church means all!—are created in the image of God. Therefore all—and the Church means all!—are image-of-God bearers, who are equal before God. Even though appearances and abilities, politics and ideology, would suggest otherwise. (By the way, the image of God in all does not erase very real differences in abilities and aptitudes, gifts and talents, that exist among people.)

● According to the CDC’s “Abortion Surveillance—United States, 2018,” a total of 614,820 abortions were reported. The overall abortion rate was 11.3 abortions per 1,000 women (15-44 years), and the overall abortion ratio was 189 abortions per 1,000 live births.

Among the 31 areas that reported “race/ethnicity data for 2018,” “White women” accounted for 38.7% of all abortions, and “Black woman” for 33.6% (though Blacks are only 13% of the US population). Regarding the abortion

*CDC Abortion Surveillance Report: “White women” accounted for 38.7% of all abortions, and “Black women” for 33.6% (though Blacks are only 13% of the US population).*

rate, there were 6.3 abortions per 1,000 White women, and 21.2 abortions per 1,000 Black women. Regarding the abortion ratio, there were 110 abortions per 1,000 live births to White women, and 335 abortions per 1,000 live births to Black women.

In 2018, approximately 652 White children were aborted each day, and approximately 566 Black children were aborted each day. This has been going on for nearly 50 years.

Yes, Black lives matter—and that includes Black unborn children. And yes, White lives matter—and that includes White unborn children. Indeed, All! lives matter—born and unborn.

● Rev. Forbes Matonga belongs to The United Methodist Church’s Zimbabwe West Annual Conference. Secretary of the Africa Central Conference, Rev. Matonga has written a paper entitled “A Church in Schism: An African Perspective on the Theological Impasse in The United Methodist Church,” which was placed (in three parts) on the Institute on Religion and Democracy’s website under UM Voices. The second part of the paper was posted on February 16, 2021 under the title “An Insider’s Outline of the Views of African United Methodists.” Near the end of the article, Rev. Matonga writes: “While the presenting issue that has led the UMC to this unfortunate point is homosexuality, we hope this paper has shown that the issues are wider and deeper than just human sexuality. We have deep theological disharmony.

“We for example have divergent views on the issue of abortion better known in the USA as the pro-choice vs. pro-life debate. Africans are clear on that subject. Abortion is murder. The Bible is very clear on when a life is considered life during the childbearing process. The prophet Jeremiah was known by God before he was even in his mother’s womb. He was not viewed as part of the pregnant mother. (Jer. 1:4-5) In the New Testament, Mary, the mother of our Lord Jesus, visited Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, who [from] his mother’s womb greeted Jesus who was still at a very early stage of development in his mother’s womb (Lk. 1:41-44) John and Jesus were already INDIVIDUALS though still in their mothers’ wombs.

“Such a biblically rooted position is the principled position of African United Methodists, which is also the position held by American traditionalists.”

Did I just hear several Amens?

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- “Be not afraid,” God and the angels declare throughout the Bible. But in challenging circumstances, fear comes so easily and so quickly; and it stays so long. Especially when it seems like we—traditional-evangelical, United Methodist Christians—are outnumbered. How can pastors and church members avoid being afraid of their bishops and district superintendents? Simple answer: friendship. Clergy and laity, embed yourselves deeply in a covenant group that speaks honestly about the Gospel and The United Methodist Church. In that group, talk honestly in theological terms, and enjoy the fellowship. Also, receive Holy Communion—that is, experience friendship with Jesus Christ—as often as possible. Friendship—with brothers, sisters, and Christ—goes a long way in curing fear. I promise. So would St. John Paul II, who set a grand example for maintaining courage in intimidating circumstances. Again, “Be not afraid!”
- In “Christians Made Me Jewish” (Commentary, April 2021, pp. 37-39), Matthew Ackerman writes about his experience in the Peace Corps: There “was a conversation I overheard during my training between a few of my fellow volunteers. The topic was abortion, and nearly all of the volunteers were reliably lined up on the pro-choice side of the question. But one person, a Catholic, probably the first Catholic I had ever met who affirmed that belief, held her lonely ground on the other side of the question. And she said something I had never heard before that stuck with me after. There was, she said, enough love in the world for every child that was created. We just didn’t

apply that love correctly. Or believe in it enough.”

- A bishop or a pastor neglects church doctrine or disobeys church discipline. Aware of the issue, a group of United Methodist leaders discusses it and comes to this apparently righteous (but often self-righteous) conclusion: “Since John Wesley’s First Rule was ‘Do no harm,’ we should just let this matter go.” However, there is a serious problem with this line of reasoning: overlooking a disciplinary breach that cries out for accountability does great (though often unacknowledged) harm to the church. “Do no harm,” from the lips and pens and computers of United Methodists, should never mean “Just let it go.”
- “...it struck me that ‘progressive’ Catholicism [and United Methodism!] might benefit from reading a passage from a letter that Flannery O’Connor [American writer, 1925-1964] wrote to her friend Betty Hester in 1955: ‘The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it emotionally....’” Thank you, George Weigel, for this nugget. (“God’s Harsh and Dreadful Love,” Web Exclusives, [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com), 04.14.21)
- *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* “Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.” ♥

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