

Lifewatch

09/01/12
A Quarterly Newsletter
for United Methodists

A HEARTFELT THANKS

On June 26, my family and I moved from Morehead City, NC to Whiteville, NC. For eleven (11) years we had lived in, and enjoyed, Morehead City, as this pastor (with the steady support of my wife, Marsha) had served St. Peter's United Methodist Church. Newly appointed to the Whiteville United Methodist Church, we moved in June. By the grace of God and with much help from many friends (in Morehead City and in Whiteville), the move went well.

Your editor would like to take this opportunity to say a heartfelt thanks to St. Peter's United Methodist Church. For eleven years, St. Peter's Church faithfully stood behind Lifewatch's witness to the Gospel of Life and Lifewatch's editor. Year after year, prayers were offered, encouragement was lavished, and financial gifts were directed to support Lifewatch. For that (and much more), I thank St. Peter's Church. For that (and much more), I also thank God.

A special word of thanks is due Ms. Carole Stalnaker, also known as "Stalk," the Church Secretary at St. Peter's Church. Time and again, Carole went way beyond the call of duty in getting out large mailings—including letters to all United Methodist bishops and letters to all General Conference delegates. Her outstanding work was always excellently done in a timely way. Again, Carole, thank you.

The situation has changed. St. Peter's Church has a new, distinguished pastor in Rev. Steve Castle. And Whiteville United Methodist Church has a new pastor in yours truly. Though these pastoral changes have occurred, this Lifewatch editor and the larger Lifewatch community remain firmly and fully committed to witnessing to the Gospel of Life within The United Methodist Church.

This is written with a heart made profoundly grateful by St. Peter's United Methodist Church and Carole Stalnaker. —Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth ♥

PASTORAL PRAXIS FOR LIFE

One-Day Seminar on Ministry for Life
Beeson Divinity School/Birmingham, AL
9/11/12—Cost: \$25.00

www.beesondivinity.com/pastoralpraxisforlife
or call 205.726.2731

TESTIMONY FOR LIFE

The following letter was written to the General Conference delegates on the Church and Society B Committee. Though not distributed to each committee member because of timeliness issues and conference rules, this letter is truthful, and it demands a wide reading. —Editor

Church and Society B Committee
The United Methodist Church
April 24, 2012

Dear General Conference Delegate:

I grew up in The United Methodist Church. Understandably, I sought the counsel of the same pastor who had confirmed me in the church when I was faced with an unplanned pregnancy from rape seventeen years ago.

The first thing I remember my UM pastor telling me after I shared my burden was this, "Put your mind at ease; in the eyes of the church, any decision prayerfully considered is OK, and in your case, I think you should have an abortion." I remember thinking to myself, "Isn't there something in Psalms about this?" But in my confusion, I thought perhaps this may be a case where the meaning of Scripture had changed over time and I was wrong. My pastor had been to seminary and surely must know more than me.

I trusted her judgment and made the most regrettable decision of my life two weeks later. My pastor had assured me that abortion would help me to get on with my life and move past the rape. She stressed the importance of my doing so, and not getting "stuck" as she had seen happen to so many other women who had been traumatized. She was wrong. The abortion felt like being raped again, only worse, because this time I had consented to the assault. Afterwards, I felt emotionally numb for over four years, until repentance brought me back into a right relationship with God, and healing began.

The same pastor also urged a friend of mine, a single parent, to choose abortion. Our pastor said it wasn't fair to her other children to bring another child into her home. She didn't consider my friend's barren sister would have welcomed the baby. Unfortunately, I did not know about this until after her abortion. Because of my own shame, I had not told her about my own experience...otherwise I would have encouraged her to continue the pregnancy.

Lifewatch is published by the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, a network of United Methodist clergy, laity, and churches. It is sent, free of charge, to interested readers. Editor, Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth: 902 Pinckney Street, Whiteville NC 28472 (910)642-3376. 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.
Email: cindy@lifewatch.org/Web site: www.lifewatch.org © Copyright 2012 by Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, Inc.

Although I am very encouraged by the positive changes in The Book of Discipline concerning the sanctity of life (Paragraph 161J), there is more work needed. Our UM pastors should never encourage abortion except in the direst of circumstances to save the mother's life. Our pastors should never refer women for abortion, but instead to a local Christian pregnancy help center with staff trained to counsel women on their options. We should be promoting life-affirming options instead of referring women for abortions, which may further traumatize them and cause them to wrongly believe that God wished them to do so. As a Christian church, we should also cease to participate in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), which affirms abortion as acceptable in God's eyes. Clearly, Scripture still speaks otherwise.

Thank you for your consideration. I am praying God will guide you during these days as you work on these critical issues.

Sincerely yours,

Nicole W. Cooley/5 Doe Hill Drive/Churchville, VA 24421/
(540)490-2015 ♥

A BIOLOGIST LOOKS AT ABORTION

by Dr. Gary Crum

Roe v. Wade, the infamous decision on abortion handed down by the United States Supreme Court on January 22, 1973, was announced in the papers while I was living in New York City and going to graduate school at Columbia University. As I read that amazing article in the New York Times, I was reclining in an armchair in the upstairs student lounge at the Columbia University School of Public Health. The article's effect on me was immediate and profound. I felt the Supreme Court had made a biological error of catastrophic proportions.

THINKING ABOUT ROE

You see, in Roe, the Supreme Court declared an in utero human being was not a person—that he or she had no rights—but that he or she would nevertheless have those rights a second later when he or she was born. This flew in the face of all I had been taught as a biologist and as a Christian.

I remembered my freshman biology instructor back in 1963 harshly speaking to a careless student at the next lab table. When the student was roughly handling a fertilized chicken egg later to be used in an embryology experiment, the instructor told him, "Don't kill it." My lab partner and I giggled at the instructor's silly use of so harsh a word, kill, for an egg—until we later gazed through a hole the instructor made in that egg's shell and saw the little embryonic chick's heart beating away and floating in the pale yolk, already pumping red blood through tiny blood vessels. That egg contained a beating heart, and so it could indeed be killed. Even as naive freshmen, we could easily understand that simple biological truth.

Ten years after that lab event, when the Supreme Court decided in 1973, it was, to me, as if unborn human beings were ruled to be somehow not alive, or ruled to be like rats or reindeer or some other nonhuman organism. This was the legal ruling, in spite of all that biology told me about their

physiologic and genetic makeup. It was like the Supreme Court was saying the species of the organism was not important for assigning him or her basic human species rights; only his or her location (in the womb or out) counted.

So, sitting there in the student lounge, I immediately put down my newspaper, jumped from my chair, and hurried to the pay phone that was on the far wall. (Pay phones were ubiquitous back then.) I grabbed the huge New York City phone book, which was precariously balanced on the phone's too-narrow writing shelf, and began searching for a pro-life organization to support.

New York City was already probably the most liberal abortion-rights state in the nation, save perhaps Hawaii. Historically, the local newspapers had lots of pro-life and pro-choice battles reported in them. So I knew there had to be abortion-related groups operating in a nerve-center like Manhattan.

As I flipped through the flimsy, yellow pages, my head continued to swim. The Supreme Court had said even New York's liberal abortion laws were too restrictive. Indeed, it had said all state laws now had to be rewritten to allow abortion virtually anytime, even for economic and minor health reasons, based on the Supreme Court's companion ruling of Doe v. Bolton, which was announced the same day in 1973. This was going far beyond the narrow cases which had been before the court. By setting legislative policy, this was, in my opinion, a blatant case of court activism.

I eventually found an organization in the phone book that looked like it might be a group fighting New York's very liberal abortion laws: NARAL (National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws), which was later more accurately renamed the National Abortion Rights Action League. I hurriedly dialed the number for NARAL. When the receptionist answered, I asked if they were against abortion. She replied with a little irritation, "What do you think?" I told her, "I really do not know." (I was more motivated than informed.) She explained they were not against abortion. So I thanked her for the information and went back to looking within the huge phone directory for a pro-life organization.

Eventually I found a "Heartbeat" pregnancy counseling organization that said it was definitely against abortion. I sent them some money in the next mail, which made me feel a little better.

MY WITNESS TODAY

Since that day in 1973, I have been active in fighting abortion and debating its advocates. When I meet a Christian or a non-Christian who thinks abortion is right, I say something like this: "I am personally against abortion, because I do not support violence. Most abortions in the United States are done by taking a sharp, surgical object (and/or powerful suction device), and sinking it into the body of a developing human being with a beating heart, and then rending the unborn until most of the blood flows out and the heart stops beating, and, finally, employing a powerful suction device. The dismembered body is then discarded. This is a bloody, violent act which destroys an innocent human life and cannot be anything I want to condone." And I sometimes add the gruesome fact that this

"I really cannot pretend to be a legal expert. But as a biologist, I clearly see abortion as unacceptable, and I decry its ready availability in our midst. In my mind, it is justifiable only when necessary to prevent the likely death of the mother."

violent act takes place about three thousand (3,000) times a day in the United States.

Yes, embryonic and fetal humans are much smaller than us; and they are not as capable as we are. But so are newborns, to whom the Supreme Court thankfully does not deny human rights.

I really cannot pretend to be a legal expert. But as a biologist, I clearly see abortion as unacceptable, and I decry its ready availability in our midst. In my mind, it is justifiable only when necessary to prevent the likely death of the mother.

To those who have had abortions or encouraged them—and there are millions of people in that category—I ask you to find peace through the total forgiveness that comes from God through His Son's atoning sacrifice on the cross, and to turn from supporting violence to supporting life. Let's stop the killing.

—Dr. Crum has a B.S. in biology from the College of William and Mary, the M.S. and Ph.D. in entomology from the University of Kentucky, a post-doctoral Master of Public Health from Columbia University, and a post-doctoral master's degree in philosophy and social policy from George Washington University. Currently a program administrator at the University of Virginia's College at Wise, he is also a pastor of three United Methodist congregations in the Abingdon District of the Holston Conference. Dr. Crum can be contacted at gec8a@uvawise.edu.



RCRC WATCH: MEET THE NEW CEO

While the 2012 General Conference was unfolding in Tampa time, Rev. Harry Knox was announced as the new CEO and president of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). (Perhaps the timing of this announcement was intended to distract attention from the fact that, for the first time, a General Conference legislative committee had voted to withdraw United Methodist agencies from RCRC.) Most recently the interim executive director of Integrity USA, the LGBT caucus within the Episcopal Church, Rev. Knox was once a pastor in the Metropolitan Community Church and a pastor in The United Methodist Church.

As this report is written (in early August), the RCRC website's home page (www.rcrc.org) features an "Introducing Harry..." video. In what follows, this editor will quote from the video several of Rev. Knox's more engaging statements and then comment on them.

"My life's work has been about equality." To be sure, Rev.

Knox has been, and remains, dedicated to equality throughout his ministry. For example, he has been committed to advancing the equality of the heterosexual lifestyle and the homosexual lifestyle, the equality of heterosexual marriage and homosexual "marriage," and the equality of various courses of action in response to a pregnancy. However, when it comes to the unborn child, equality apparently does not apply. In Rev. Knox's estimation, the unborn child does not measure up to other people; the unborn child counts for a bit less. Working to make sure that people continue to have the right to take the life of the unborn, Rev. Knox has, and promotes, less respect for the little ones. Unfortunately, with regard to the unborn child, Rev. Knox is about inequality.

"And now I have been called to lead a new movement, a religious movement for reproductive justice. Challenging injustice is holy work." Rev. Knox certainly has a new job at RCRC. But he is not joining "a new movement." The pro-choice movement, which he is joining, has been a part of American public life for over 40 years. Defending the Roe v. Wade decision in religious terms in American public life, RCRC (founded as the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights) has been around since 1973.

Also, it is curious that Rev. Knox uses the word justice. In Christian ethics, justice first concerns protecting the poor, the little people, those who cannot speak for themselves, those who cannot defend themselves from those who are more powerful and aggressive. That is, justice first concerns protecting people such as unborn children. Rev. Knox's version of justice does not challenge injustice against the unborn child. It does the opposite. It promotes the current injustice of aborting or killing over 1,250,000 unborn children per year in the United States. He calls his work of maintaining this violent status quo "holy work." Not so. It is very unholy work.

"The current war on women in the name of religion is as bad as I have ever seen. It's so vicious that it is hurting all of us—men, women, children, all of our families." In using war-on-women rhetoric, Rev. Knox is resorting to some partisan-political language of our time.

But let's turn the tables for a moment. Let's assume there is indeed a "war on women." Well, exactly who or what is the enemy in this war against women? I suggest that, in our time, the war on women is being conducted by what might be called the Sexual Revolution and its allies. Like no other social movement in American society, the Sexual Revolution has deeply harmed women socially, spiritually, and economically. Ironically, it could be argued that RCRC is a long-term agent of the Sexual Revolution and that, as such, RCRC is harming the very people it intends to help.

"Let's not be fooled. The intention of our opponents is not to just ban abortion and make it harder to get birth control. It is to send women back to the Dark Ages. It is to strip women of their fundamental, human rights. Our opposition is fierce and relentless. I am appalled by their complete lack of respect for women. More religious people have to speak up for reproductive rights. We can't let religious bullies silence us." To be honest, to have fewer than 1,250,000 abortions in

American society per year would be moral improvement. And birth control, more thoughtfully used and not automatically employed, would indicate moral progress. But nobody is interested in "[sending] women back to the Dark Ages." (Whatever that would look like.)

Consider this scenario, which is played out thousands of times each day in American society: a woman is driven to an abortion clinic, ushered into a room where the abortion will occur, strapped into stirrups, violated surgically, and left to remember that event for the rest of her life. Do the laws and thinking that make that event possible show "respect for women?" Does that event show respect for the tiny girls whose lives are violently ended?

So, welcome Rev. Harry Knox to lead the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights. As can be seen above, Rev. Knox's new job has great challenges and grave contradictions. (*PTS with thanks to Jeff Walton and his article ["Abortion's Holy Worker" at The American Spectator website, <http://spectator.org/>, accessed on 08/01/12]*) ♥

LIFEWATCH OBJECTS TO UMC'S LACK OF ACTION ON RCRC

The United Methodist Church's General Conference, the policy-making body for the 12-million-member global denomination, ended last week in Tampa, FL without considering important proposals related to the denomination's ongoing affiliation with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). General Conference meets only every four years.

Rev. Paul T. Stallworth, pastor of Whiteville United Methodist Church (Whiteville, NC) and president/ editor of Lifewatch (www.lifewatch.org), commented in the following way. Soon after the conclusion of the 2012 General Conference, this press release was sent to many media outlets.

"It was a real disappointment to see our denomination's General Conference managed in such a way that delegates were not given the opportunity to deliberate and decide on proposals related to life and death. Managed is the word. For it seems that decisions were made, by a few, that prevented the conference from dealing with RCRC and some other life issues. Remember that before anti-RCRC legislation was ignored by the entire conference, it had passed a legislative sub-committee and a legislative committee.

"It is especially disturbing that the clock was run out on these matters—when there seemed to be plenty of time for the conference to grapple with the important matters of restructuring The United Methodist Church and the church's teaching on homosexuality. Greater justice and mercy, to the unborn child and mother, is delayed and denied for another four years.

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

"Yes, we will have to wait another four years. During that time, church members and friends will be harmed by the practice of abortion, and others will leave our denomination out of the discouragement that affiliation with RCRC brings many United Methodists. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice will continue to use and abuse our church's name to advance its pro-choice political agenda. And our denomination's blank-check endorsement of RCRC's false and harmful teaching—that the abortion of unborn children, who are created in God's image, is 'God's work' and 'holy work'—will remain.

"But over the next four years, Lifewatch will not be silent. For we trust, we know, that '[t]ruth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.' That is especially true when we identify Jesus Christ, the Lord of Life, as the truth." ♥

QUESTIONING CHURCH AND SOCIETY

First, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into federal law. Then in January of 2012, as part of that federal law, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandated that health-insurance plans cover contraception, abortion-inducing drugs, and sterilization. From the beginning, certain religious employers—specifically, houses of worship—were exempted from this mandate. However, other religious employers—such as hospitals and universities—were not. Following widespread public objection, the Obama Administration adjusted its mandate so that religious employers, other than houses of worship, would have their insurance companies cover the costs of birth control, including abortifacients and sterilization. However, this did not satisfy objections to the original Health and Human Services mandate. Therefore, states, universities, hospitals, schools, and Catholic dioceses have filed over 20 lawsuits, on the grounds of religious liberty, to block the revised mandate. Those lawsuits have yet to be decided.

As these controversial events unfolded, the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church consistently and uncritically supported the HHS mandate. In its public statements and editorials on the mandate, Church and Society tended to change the subject—from religious liberty to other subjects, such as contraception.

However, this dispute, now under consideration in the courts, is clearly about religious liberty. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution begins: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Thereby, the American experiment in ordered liberty is built, in part, on the constitutionally promised freedom of religion.

Five brief comments, on this complicated matter, are in order. First, the freedom of religion has legally been understood to apply to churches and to institutions that churches build to serve the public (for example, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, and social-welfare agencies). The thinking behind the HHS mandate is based on a narrow understanding of religious liberty that applies only to the churches themselves.

Two, it could be argued that the HHS mandate involves the "establishment" of a kind of secularist "religion." Though a rather unconventional religion, it is an attempt at establishment nevertheless.

Third, the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church contain a strong statement on the "Rights of Religious Minorities" (Par. 162B, The Book of Discipline [2008]). It declares, in part: "We urge policies and practices that ensure the right of every religious group to exercise its faith free from legal, political, or economic restrictions.... We condemn all overt and covert forms of religious intolerance.... We assert the right of all religions and their adherents to freedom from legal, economic, and social discrimination." For Catholics and Evangelicals (and probably more than a few United Methodists), the HHS mandate involves exactly such "restrictions," "intolerance," and "discrimination."

Fourth, the Social Principles note under "Church and State Relations" (Par. 164C): "The rightful and vital separation of church and state, which has served the cause of religious liberty, should not be misconstrued as the abolition of all religious expression from public life" (emphasis added). Therefore, The United Methodist Church, as a church, has profound concern for religious liberty in public life.

And fifth, the General Board of Church and Society might consider its own future. After all the court cases have been decided, if the HHS mandate stands and if religious liberty in America is thereby curtailed, might not the government at some point in the future act to limit Church and Society's public witness on political matters? It is a theoretical question, but not out of the realm of possibility.

The bottom line is this. When political matters of national significance arise, the General Board of Church and Society owes United Methodists and the larger society more than predictable partisan positioning. At the very least, thoughtful political commentary, that acknowledges the valid concerns of all sides in a political or legal dispute, would be a good place to begin. (PTS) ♥

CONFESSION OF A PRO-LIFE FEMINIST

"...[W]omen are not a monolith. And there is a growing group of passionate women who are transforming what it means to be a woman. Allow me to introduce them to you. We are women who reject both the anti-male feminism of the 1960s and the 'girls gone wild' mentality that's pervasive today.

"We are women for whom the idea of artificial birth control as 'preventive care' is deeply insulting.

"We are women who view the intentional killing of children not as a constitutional right, a matter of privacy or a necessary evil but, rather, as profoundly anti-woman and the antithesis of love.

"We are women whose lives contradict the idea of

an inevitable clash between religious liberty and women's health. We are women who believe that something precious is lost when fertility is intentionally excluded from marriage, a sacred bond and a total giving of each spouse to the other.

"We are women who believe that sex and pregnancy aren't just health issues; they are also inextricably linked with family, morals, faith and values. And we are women who love everything about being a woman, including being mothers. We have noticed that the rise in the availability and use of cheap birth control coincided with increases in the rates of sex addiction, divorce, unmarried childbearing and abortion.

"We have also noticed that while contraceptives and legal abortion promised to eliminate the exploitative attitude of men toward women, they have had the opposite effect...

"We don't wish to take the country back in time; rather, we aspire to move it forward, beyond a time when women are treated as objects and pitted against their children and their religious institutions—and toward a time when truly emancipated women embrace their intrinsic dignity and, with it, their authentic womanhood." —*Lila Rose, the founder and president of Live Action (from "The Cry of the Anti-Abortion Feminist," <http://dyn.politico.com>, accessed on 04/04/12)* ♥

ODEN ON SCHISM AND THE BISHOPS

Back in April, just before the 2012 General Conference was to begin, Dr. Thomas C. Oden published an article in First Things (April 2012) against schism. (Dr. Oden, you will remember, is one of the great Protestant theologians in America today, a professor at Drew University, and a member of the Lifewatch Advisory Board.) His essay took its title—"Do Not Rashly Tear Asunder"—from this sentence from John Wesley's sermon "On Schism:" "Do not rashly tear asunder the sacred ties which unite you to any Christian society." In the essay, following Wesley's lead, Dr. Oden argues, on Biblical and Traditional grounds, against The United Methodist Church dividing over matters related to homosexuality.

While not an absolutist against schism, Dr. Oden is definitely against it. Near the end of his article, he notes: "Would I participate in the formation of another denomination? This would bring down upon us a thousand new problems. We would walk away with what some might regard as a pure conscience, but with an insurmountable burden of litigation, congregational division, building churches from nothing, and adding to the rancor."

A couple of months later, Dr. Oden responded to several thoughtful letters to the editor that his article had generated. Oden's letter concludes with these two paragraphs: "Within Protestantism there are two conflicting ecclesiological memories: a history of

dissent, a brave and noble tradition epitomized by words like purist and dissenter, and a history of consent, epitomized by Anglicans and Methodists, who within confessional boundaries seek to manifest the unity of the body through charity and patience. Wesley belonged to the latter tradition but sought to renew it, and so do I. In the battle over sexual ethics, both of those memories are tested. The former splits. The latter seeks reconciliation despite deep differences.

"The traditions of consent depend heavily upon the faithful leadership of the episkopoi and the presbuteroi. We earnestly pray for faithful bishops to lead the way in scriptural teaching of the doctrine of holy matrimony. Scriptural teaching is what the bishops are ordained to do. They have forgotten the terms of their consecration. They have failed. Wesley grasped that failure in his time, but sought patiently to renew it from within. But within the next twenty years, faithful bishops will arise, likely out of Africa, who will regain the momentum for reconciliation." (emphasis added, June/July 2012)

Dr. Thomas C. Oden's analysis of our bishops' failure to teach the Church's faith is spot on. We pray that his hope for "faithful bishops" is just as accurate. (PTS) ♥

BISHOPS CHARGED TO TEACH

As Dr. Thomas C. Oden reminds us above, the bishops of The United Methodist Church are consecrated, in large part, to teach. That was made clear, in a powerful way, during the Consecration of Bishops at the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference on July 20.

The liturgy of the consecration service emphasized the teaching dimension of episcopal ministry. During the service's Examination of the recently elected bishops, they were challenged: "You are called to guard the faith, to seek the unity, and to exercise the discipline of the whole church; and to supervise and support the church's life, work, and mission throughout the world. As a servant of the whole church, you are called to preach and teach the truth of the gospel to all God's people; to lead the people in worship, in the celebration of the Sacraments, and in their mission of witness and service in the world, and so participate in the gospel command to make disciples of all nations."

"Guard the faith." "Seek the unity." "Exercise the discipline of the whole church." "Preach and teach the truth [!] of the gospel to all God's people." These are stirring, demanding challenges. If only they would be heeded.

Whether we want to admit it or not, The United Methodist Church is in a state of division. Progressives or liberals are on one side of the divide. Evangelicals and traditionalists (or Catholics, with a small c) are on the other side. Matters related to homosexuality—that is, teaching on homosexuality, the so-called "marriage" of two people who practice homosexuality, and the ordination of people who are of the homosexual lifestyle—illuminate the present division.

In this situation, truthful teaching of the Church's faith from the bishops and from the Council of Bishops would be good for The United Methodist Church. Certainly, not every

United Methodist would agree with what they would be offered in such teaching. But authoritative teaching from the bishops and from the Council would lead the church in the direction it should go, and it would focus the church's attention on "the truth of the gospel." That would be better than today's opponents just getting outraged about each other.

Bottom line: Bishops, teach the Church's faith! (PTS) ♥

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH: WHICH WAY FORWARD?

After the seemingly eternal run-up to the General Conference in Tampa, after paying attention to the various phases of the Call to Action project and its accompanying General Conference legislation, after debating and voting on various proposals related to the denomination's direction for 2012-2016, The United Methodist Church (through its 2012 General Conference) has decided to maintain its status quo, more or less. Certainly, there were marginal changes to the status quo here and there. But in the main, what is was preserved.

Maintenance of the status quo is not necessarily a bad thing. That is better than launching off into a half-baked program of structural reform that leaves the denomination more confused and worse off. As every adult knows, unintended consequences that result from well intended change can be devastating to an institution undergoing change.

Therefore, it is reasonable, perhaps necessary, to ask: at this time, what is the best way forward for The United Methodist Church? This pastor will place three suggestions on the table.

First, acknowledge that The United Methodist Church is indeed a church. Every now and then, the following deep-seated yearning is articulated among some United Methodists: "We must again become an evangelistic movement, like Wesley's movement!" Well, as a matter of fact, Methodism's days as a movement are over. United Methodism is now a church. United Methodism has bishops and clergy, celebrates Word and Sacraments, maintains conferences and buildings, and ministers through colleges and seminaries and publishing programs. That is to say, United Methodism is now a church, for better or for worse. The United Methodist Church can strive to be evangelistic, and The United Methodist Church can host evangelical movements within her life. But first and last, United Methodism is now a church. The challenge is to be a church that reflects the headship of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel—by being unified, holy, Catholic, and apostolic. The challenge is to be a church that seeks to be faithful to Christ and the gospel.

Second, seek to recover the doctrinal foundations of The United Methodist Church. The Church is grounded on the truth. So, doctrine (or dogma) comprises the foundation of a church. If doctrine is not taken to be the foundation, something else will be substituted for it. For example, prevailing cultural norms can take the place of doctrine. Or

private religious experience can be used, or programmatic busyness, or procedures, or mission and social activism. However, these are poor substitutes. In time, they will give way. The Church and churches are grounded on truth or not grounded at all.

And third, insist that the active bishops and the Council of Bishops teach the Church's faith. The United Methodist Church's bishops and Council are blessed with the authority to teach and to lead through teaching. What they teach is the Church's faith—including matters related to homosexuality, to life, and to abortion. Without truthful teaching, from the Church's most authoritative teachers, the denomination will continue to wander in confusion, uncertainty, and fear. Truthful Christian teaching is needed in The United Methodist Church today. It is essential.

For years, many proposals have been offered as The Answer to our church's problems: spirituality, restructuring, updating worship, change programming, increase outreach, "rethink church." Perhaps we actually do need to rethink church. For us, rethinking church would challenge United Methodists to get serious about being the Church, about grounding our life together on doctrinal foundations, and about demanding that our episcopal leaders teach the Church's faith as never before.

That is one way forward. It is a way that is seldom mentioned. But it is a way that God just might bless.

(PTS) ♥

LETTERS TO LIFEWATCH

12 March 2012

Dear Rev. Stallsworth:

I enjoyed reading the reprinted sermon by Dr. James V. Heidinger II and the article by Rev. Tim Reeves in the 03/01/12 issue of Lifewatch. I was especially impressed by

Dr. Heidinger's review of the history of the abortion debate. Thanks for continuing to publish this important newsletter.

Sincerely,

Watson A. Bowes, Jr., M.D./Emeritus Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology/ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/Chapel Hill, NC/wbowes@gmail.com

14 June 2012

Dear Paul and Cindy:

I am an eighty-one-year-old, retired, United Methodist clergyman. Was ordained a deacon at age 22, elder at 24. Was pastor of the Smithland (KY) Circuit of 5 churches when I was 20. Served in the Louisville, North GA, and Holston conferences while at Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Left Kentucky in 1958 for Boston University to earn doctorate. Did. Served as senior pastor of the largest United Methodist church in New England for ten years, 1972-1982. Known many of our bishops—Mack Stokes, Bill Cannon (teachers at Candler), Jim Mathews, etc. The church has changed so much in the last sixty years that it isn't the same church in which I was reared and ordained. But there are still many who are preaching the crucified, resurrected Jesus and teaching the truth of the Church's faith. It will not be long before I see Him face to face! Hallelujah! I will surely say a good word for you!

Your distant brother in Christ,

Rev. Dr. George W. Webb/37 Chestnut Street/East Falmouth, MA 02536/(508)457-1436

03 July 2012

[email]

Our church receives your publication Lifewatch. We appreciate the good work you are all doing for the Lord, and we thank you for your very informative newsletter.

ORDER FORM: I wish to order: ___ copies of **THE RIGHT CHOICE: Pro-Life Sermons** (\$12.00/copy); ___ copies of **THE CHURCH AND ABORTION: In Search of New Ground for Response** (\$5.00/copy); ___ copies of **THINKING THEOLOGICALLY ABOUT ABORTION** (\$7.00/copy); ___ copies of **HOLY ABORTION?: A Theological Critique of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice** (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of **THE JERICHO PLAN: Breaking Down the Walls Which Prevent Post-Abortion Healing** (\$8.00/copy); ___ copies of **A LOVE FOR LIFE: Christianity's Consistent Protection of the Unborn** (\$10.00/copy); ___ copies of **30 DAYS FOR LIFE: A Prayer Devotional** (\$2.00/copy); and ___ copies of **THEOLOGY OF THE BODY SEMINAR** (Dr. Paul J. Griffiths)(\$10.00/DVD set). Prices include shipping.

Name: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Please enclose your check, payable to Lifewatch, and mail to: Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville MO 63338.

SEND LIFEWATCH TO A FRIEND!

Extend your outreach—and ours—with a free subscription to a friend. Simply provide the information requested below. Also, your contributions—however large or small—will help advance the ministry of Lifewatch by inspiring United Methodists to love both the unborn child and mother. Thank you for caring enough to act.

Name: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Please mail to: Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville MO 63338.

Lifewatch is published by the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization.



Lifewatch
Taskforce of
United Methodists on
Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

09/01/12

- * The consequences of a pastor's counsel for abortion
- * UMC: Which way forward?
- * Meet the new CEO of RCRC

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lancaster PA
Permit No. 507

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

I'm emailing to get your permission to quote some information from your newsletter in our congregation's monthly newsletter. If we are permitted to do so, I will make sure to state where we got our material for any articles or subject matter that we publish. Our monthly newsletter only goes to our congregation, our shut-ins, our district superintendent, and our local newspaper.

—Patti Hanzel, Secretary/Trinity United Methodist Church/512 N. Mulberry Street/ Mt. Carmel, IL 62863/
tumoffice@yahoo.com

Of course it is okay to quote from Lifewatch in your church newsletter. We are honored when that happens. When you do, please note the source of the quotation, and how one can contact Mrs. Cindy Evans to subscribe to Lifewatch. —Editor ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- The dust of General Conference 2012 has settled. The heat waves of summer 2012 are making the days lazy and hazy. So this is a good time to forget about Lifewatch and our ministry for life. Not!
Please remember to support Lifewatch with your prayers and your gifts. Our ministry depends upon you and your generosity.
- The 2012 North Alabama Annual Conference voted to approve "a request for a Judicial Council ruling on the legality of the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and UM Women (UMW) participation in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice" (RCRC). (Danette Clifton, North Alabama Annual Conference, Newscope [June

13, 2012]) That is certainly good news—especially since the 2012 General Conference concluded before a vote could be taken on whether or not to withdraw United Methodist institutions from RCRC. Hope and pray that the Judicial Council will accomplish what General Conference was not able to achieve.

- Will the pastors in the Lifewatch community be preaching any political sermons before the November 2012 elections? We hope so. Partisan-political sermons are never in order. But sermons that lift up moral-political principles should always be welcome. If the lives of 1,250,000 innocent people are being violently ended by abortion each year in the United States, and if The United Methodist Church officially speaks to maintain this violence, what is a pastor to do? Avoid partisan politics. Avoid quietism. But speak the moral truth in love about life and the protection of life in American society.

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

Lifewatch Advisory Board

- Rev. Paul R. Crikelair**
Pastor, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania
- Mrs. Cindy Evans**
Administrator/Outreach Coordinator
Cottleville, Missouri
- Dr. Michael J. Gorman**
Ecumenical Institute of Theology
Baltimore, Maryland
- Dr. Amy Laura Hall**
Duke University
- Dr. Stanley Hauerwas**
Duke University
- Ms. Myrna Howard**
Alva, Florida
- Rev. Bill Hughes**
Wesley Foundation
University of Kentucky
- Dr. John E. Juergensmeyer**
Attorney-at-Law
Elgin, Illinois
- Rev. Harold Lewis**
Florida Conference Office
- Mr. John Lomperis**
Chicago, Illinois
- Dr. Thomas C. Oden**
Drew University
- Mr. Donald T. Siress**
Treasurer
O'Fallon, Missouri
- Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth**
President, Lifewatch Editor
Whiteville, North Carolina
- Don and Carla Thompson**
Somerville, Tennessee
- Rev. Pat Tony**
Pastor, Chatham, Virginia
- Mrs. Kim Turkington**
Lexington, Kentucky
- Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright**
Duke University
- Bp. Timothy W. Whitaker (ret.)**
Keller, Virginia
- Bp. William H. Willimon (ret.)**
Durham, North Carolina
- Bishop William R. Cannon**
(1916-1997)
- Dr. Albert C. Outler**
(1908-1989)

LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:
Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Lifewatch Editor
902 Pinckney Street, Whiteville, NC 28472
(910)642-3576 paulstallsworth@nccumc.org