

## A CHARGE TO KEEP: A WORD TO THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Bishops, we have a charge to keep. Because of your call, the special General Conference of 2019 met in St. Louis last February to consider proposals from the Commission on a Way Forward, which you appointed. As you witnessed, that General Conference discussed, deliberated, debated, and decided the way forward for The United Methodist Church. Though a majority of you reportedly favored the One Church Plan, General Conference adopted the Traditional Plan. By adopting the Traditional Plan, General Conference 2019 spoke for The United Methodist Church—and according to The Book of Discipline, only the General Conference speaks for the whole church. In its April 2019 decisions, the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church ruled that the Traditional Plan's petitions that had earlier been found to be constitutional are indeed constitutional, the petitions that had been found to be unconstitutional are indeed unconstitutional, and the petition that created an exit plan for congregations is constitutional.

In the Council of Bishops April 26 press release on the most recent Judicial Council rulings, Bishop Ken Carter, the president of the Council, concludes: "Our polity [i.e., United Methodist government] disperses authority to lay and clergy delegates to General Conferences in writing legislation and to the Judicial Council in interpreting the constitutionality of that legislation. Bishops are in the role of providing spiritual and administrative leadership, which is to say, putting in practice the discernments of these two bodies. While additional questions may arise as the new church laws take effect January 1, 2020 (except in Central Conferences), today's decisions provide a path for local churches and annual conferences to move forward. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we pray that we will fulfill the law through our love for one another (Galatians 5:14)." (emphases added)

Unfortunately, since General Conference 2019 ended, many United Methodist leaders have ignored, belittled, degraded, threatened to disobey, and/or promised to challenge and work to overturn the Traditional Plan. For exactly this reason, it is absolutely mandatory that you—who have been elected, consecrated, and trained for episcopal ministry—"put] into practice the discernments of [the General Conference and the Judicial Council]" (Bp. Carter).

Council of Bishops and bishops, The United Methodist Church (both laity and clergy) needs you to set aside your personal opinions and to lead the church as the General Conference determined and the Judicial Council decided. The United Methodist Church needs you to propose church doctrine and uphold church discipline—not your doctrine and not your discipline. The United Methodist Church desperately needs you to be servants of Jesus Christ, the Head and Lord of the Church, in the way that General Conference in good faith discerned what His Headship and Lordship require for the Church.

If you choose to refuse or resist the decisions of General Conference 2019, you leave the laity and clergy of The United Methodist Church to wander in the wilderness as sheep without shepherds.

If you, with fidelity and love, teach and uphold the decisions of General Conference 2019, you will abide by the spirit and letter of The Book of Discipline, place the unity of The United Methodist Church above your preferences, and signal that only Jesus Christ is the Head and Lord of the Church.

Thank you for considering this challenge to shepherd the Church.

In Christ,  
Rev. Paul T. Stallworth  
Lifewatch Editor and President

## THICKEN OUR SKIN

Thoughtfully and humbly proposing the Church's historic, ecumenical faith, both inside and outside The United Methodist Church, is challenging these days. It is challenging for all United Methodists—bishops, pastors, and laity. It seldom, if ever, results in a standing ovation. Sometimes such a proposal is rejected. Sometimes the one who makes such a proposal is hated and then called a hater by the one who is actually doing the hating. Therefore, God might use the following Litany of Humility (which C.S. Lewis referenced in a March 1948 letter) to thicken some United Methodist skin around the world. (PTS)

### LITANY OF HUMILITY (1880)

O Jesus meek and humble of heart, *Jesus, hear me.*  
From the desire of being esteemed, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being loved, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being sought, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being honored, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being praised, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being consulted, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being approved, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the desire of being considered, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being humbled, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being despised, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being rebuffed, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being calumniated [spoken against falsely], *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being forgotten, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being ridiculed, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being wronged, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

From the fear of being suspected, *Deliver me, Jesus.*

That others may be loved more than I, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.*

That others may be esteemed more than I, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.*

That others may grow in the opinion of the world and I diminish, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.*

That others may be employed and I set aside, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.*

That others may be praised and I forgotten, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.*

That others may be preferred before me in everything, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.*

That others may be more holy than I, provided I am as holy as I can be, *Jesus, grant me the grace to wish.* ♥

## VERY LATE REFLECTIONS ON GENERAL CONFERENCE 2019

### Preaching at the Beginning

Bishop Kenneth H. Carter, Jr. is the bishop of the Florida Area and the president of the Council of Bishops. He also is one of the three bishops who served as moderators of the Commission on a Way Forward. It is not surprising that Bp. Carter was asked to preach the sermon during the Sunday (February 24) morning worship service of General Conference.

Bp. Carter began by reading Scripture lessons compellingly relevant to the General Conference that Sunday morning and to The United Methodist Church in our time: "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross thus putting to death that hostility through it." (Ephesians 2:13-16, NRSV here and following, emphasis added)

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21, emphasis added)

"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:1-3, emphasis added)

### A Pause in the Action

Here, your scribe calls a time out.

Back in 2003, In One Body through the Cross: The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI), edited by world-class Lutheran theologians Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (who crossed the Jordan in 2017), was published. The book was a call to Christian unity "to the churches from an ecumenical study group." For your information, Dr. Billy Abraham (a United Methodist at Perkins School of Theology/SMU) and Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright (a British Methodist at Duke University Divinity School) were signatories of The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity.

In short order, a conference based on the book In One Body through the Cross and its Princeton Proposal was held at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University. It was a most memorable conference led by theological greats—including Dr. Abraham, Dr. Carl E. Braaten (Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology), Dr. Richard J. Mouw (now president of Fuller Theological Seminary), Rev. Richard John Neuhaus (then at First Things, now in the Church Triumphant), Dr. R. R. Reno (now at First Things), and Dr. David Yeago (now at Trinity School for Ministry). Dr. Timothy George, then Dean of Beeson Divinity School and now recently retired, was in attendance and acted as host as well. Interestingly, also in attendance at that conference was a young Rev. Ken Carter, pastor of Providence United Methodist Church in Charlotte, NC. How is he remembered? During the conference, Rev.

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

Carter gave this fellow pastor his calling card.

All this to say: in his sermon at General Conference 2019, from the Biblical texts he read to the theological foundations on which he stood to the Christian unity to which he aspired, Bp. Ken Carter might well be seen returning to his theological roots. Those roots include pursuing Christian unity (now within The United Methodist Church), transcending the worn-out ecumenism promoted by the National Council of Churches for years, and committing to a kind of “evangelical orthodoxy” (Bp. Carter’s phrase used in his sermon). As he noted on a couple occasions after presenting this sermon, Bp. Carter wrote and preached this sermon with a guiding goal in mind: that his sermon would be able to engage, encourage, teach, and challenge not only the 2019 General Conference but also all the congregations that he had served during his years of pastoral ministry. In saying that about his sermon’s goal, he seemed to admit that he was indeed returning to his theological origins.

### **The Story of God**

Early in the sermon, Bp. Carter spoke about the Commission on a Way Forward as “a process of watching and listening. It was not an interruption of God’s work. It was and is God’s work. It was not a distraction from the mission [of the Church]. It was and is the mission. And now that work and mission are in your [General Conference delegates’] hands. Take a moment to look at your hands. This work is in your hands.” Again, the commission was not a distraction from the mission of the church, it was the church’s mission. How very true. For the commission and the General Conference were helping The United Methodist Church to discern how Jesus Christ is leading His Church; see Matthew 28:20.

The bishop went on: “We gather in submission to the cross and the flame within us. Every one of us is a person who has professed his or her faith in Jesus Christ as...Lord and Savior. Amen? And so we will pray here for the gift of the Holy Spirit to make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world....

“...So what connects us?

“Not all of our [individual] stories. What connects us is God’s story. And I have reflected on how radical the life and ministry of Paul was.” While respecting each story of each Christian, Bp. Carter acknowledged the Church’s overarching “story of God,” which could also be called the story of the Gospel, the Gospel story, or “the story of the world” (Robert Jenson).

Later in the sermon, the bishop noted that we are “the people of the cross and the flame. So, we have been called in humility, which means we allow our [individual] story to become a part of God’s greater story. We don’t suppress our story. We rejoice in our story. But conversion is allowing our story to be a part of God’s greater story. And we are gentle with each other, which means we do no harm. Because every person who will share in this community has been created in the image of God. And we are patient. We bear with one another in love....” Here Bp. Carter is making clear that The United Methodist Church is not simply a sacred canopy over individuals who are busy telling their own, individual stories; rather, the Church is a people formed by the story of God, which receives (and transforms) the stories of women and men, girls and boys, who are baptized into Christ and His Church, forgiven by God, and set on the road to sanctification in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **God Is Able**

Bp. Carter returned to Ephesians: “In Paul’s writing for us this morning there is a movement from evangelism to doxology to life together. God overcame the almost insurmountable division between our sin and divine holiness. God overcame these divisions in the New Testament and united the church for mission. God through Jesus Christ shows us the way of peace—peace amidst our polarizations and binaries....

“Yes, through it all, there are these dividing walls. We come to St. Louis pretty divided. I’m no stranger to the statistics and the surveys. But could these be the three days where Jesus might resurrect us, and raise us to a new life, and reconcile both groups and all our associated tribes into one body?

“And if I could be permitted to be theological for just a moment, could it be that Jesus Christ has actually already done this?”

### **Some Uncomfortable Questions**

The bishop began to close well: “Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And so this leads to a series of uncomfortable questions. Have we made every effort? Have we made every effort? Have we made every effort? Can we allow our stories, as important as they are, to become a part of a much bigger story? What if we imagined, as my spiritual director says, that this means more to God than it does to us? What if, in our life together in these three days, we become an outward and visible sign of the cross and the flame? What if—what if we sought to hold together an evangelical orthodoxy with a radical hospitality to all people, and trusted that God would journey with them and with us toward a holiness that finally is not ours to define in this life? What if we admitted many of us live in post-Christian cultures? What if we admitted that when we speak of holiness, the world hears judgment? What if holiness is experienced these three days as we encounter the God of Isaiah 6 [‘high and lofty’], and in small circles of trust with each other, which we once called Class Meetings and Band Meetings, or to coin a phrase, Christian Conferencing? What if separation is never the path to holiness? What if division is never the way to revival? What if schism is never God’s dream for the church? What if searching for the exits is easier but less faithful, more about our preferences, but having very little to do with the one who never searches for an exit in relation to us? What if there’s a deep center, a great tradition worth claiming? We know how to sing this, and we sing this in our churches, and it goes to the very nature of who God is.... (Please note the emphases on “evangelical orthodoxy” and “a great tradition” above. These are not insignificant references. They are crucial markers that point back to The Princeton Proposal, and that should be noticed and recalled.)

“Friends, in these three days, make every effort, make every effort, to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Those are not my words. They’re in our book. Make the unity of the body of Christ your passionate concern. And remember you are the people of the cross and the flame. It might even be possible to say that in these three days you are the stewards of the cross and the flame....

### **Some Good News**

“[Rev.] Zan Holmes said once, ‘No sermon should end (We are about to end! Amen?) without two things happening. [First, w]e should give God the credit.’ And so friends, if we find a way forward, we will give God the glory. Amen? And

[second] he said, ‘No sermon should end without there being some good news.’ So hear the good news: What God has promised, God is able to perform. Hear the Good News. God is able. Amen.” With that, Bp. Carter’s sermon ended.

It might be noted that the day before Bp. Carter’s sermon was preached, on Saturday, a Service of Holy Communion had been celebrated. After The Great Thanksgiving had been prayed, bishops were sent out with Bread and Cup to distribute to General Conference delegates and observers. Around Section 122, there had been what appeared to be an irregular distribution of elements by self-identified, LGBTQ folks who used pretzels as bread. This illustrated a “dismemberment”—or tearing or disunifying—of the church that Bp. Carter had previously named.

Now that General Conference 2019 is months in the past, it is possible to see that Bp. Carter’s opening sermon was an excellent way to begin General Conference 2019, and even now it remains quite helpful to the entire church. Through this sermon, God speaks to all of us to keep a focus on Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, maintain a stubborn commitment to unity, and to remain active and hopeful in the church’s life. To Bp. Carter, the preacher of this sermon, a commitment to unity would include responding to his own challenges, abiding by the decisions of General Conference 2019 and encouraging other bishops to do the same, and not pandering to one group in the church to the neglect of others. To those who disrupted General Conference 2019, a commitment to unity would include a public apology for such actions to the larger denomination. To those who disapprove of the decisions of General Conference (from bishops to clergy to members), a commitment to unity would include not violating the discipline of The United Methodist Church. To those who approved the decisions of General Conference, a commitment to unity would include showing extraordinary hospitality to all inside, and outside, The United Methodist Church. And when and where we fail in our focus on Christ, unity, and hope, we should be quick to seek forgiveness from the God who is merciful, and with God’s grace begin anew.

Let us be honest. It is tempting, very tempting, to watch, listen to, or read Bp. Carter’s sermon and think: “Heck, he was just preaching all this unity stuff to try to get the One Church Plan passed.” In today’s United Methodist Church, it is quite tempting to be so cynical. But temptation and cynicism are the easy way that requires no faith in, and no obedience to, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The better way is the way of faith in God the Father through God the Son in the power of God the Spirit, obedience to this Triune God, and hope in the same God. The point is: without God’s help, we will slide into the trap of temptation and cynicism; with God’s help, we can be made the Church, day by day.

### **The Decisions Made**

General Conference 2019 accomplished what it was asked to do: it chose a “way forward” for The United Methodist Church, and that way forward was the Traditional Plan. That General Conference 2019 passed the Traditional Plan amazed, and perhaps shocked, many. After all, most resident bishops serving their areas, many retired bishops, the Council of Bishops (and its website dedicated to promoting the One Church Plan), the “centrists” (led by large-congregation pastors such as Rev. Adam Hamilton and Uniting Methodists, and Mainstream UMC), the university presidents of the National Association of Schools and Colleges of The United Methodist Church, the

Association of United Methodist Theological Schools, executives of the denominational boards and agencies, and the most liberal and progressive caucus groups and participants in the church opposed the Traditional Plan. In spite of this apparently overwhelming opposition, the Traditional Plan prevailed in three different votes at General Conference: in the prioritization vote on Sunday, in the Legislative Committee vote on Monday, and in the final, plenary vote on Tuesday. (It also indirectly prevailed when the motion, which would have substituted the One Church Plan for the Traditional Plan, failed.)

Again, we must be determined and clear about what happened at General Conference 2019: General Conference decided—through debate, deliberation, and vote—a way forward for The United Methodist Church. It decided against the One Church Plan. It decided against the Connectional Conference Plan. It decided against the Simple Plan. And it decided not to leave St. Louis without a way forward established. Instead, General Conference decided that the Traditional Plan is the most faithful way forward for The United Methodist Church.

So, what does it mean that the Traditional Plan is the way forward for United Methodism?

First, the passage of the Traditional Plan means that current United Methodist Church teaching on human sexuality—and its accompanying marriage and ordination practices—will remain in place in United Methodist faith and life. As Lifewatch has noted many times, this current church teaching is consistent with the witness of Scripture and the Tradition of the Church through the ages. The Traditional Plan’s continuance of the Church’s faith was, is, and will be of primary importance.

Second, the passage of the Traditional Plan means that accountability, to church discipline, will be enhanced. These accountability measures were necessary because, during the last several years, when the church’s discipline (or rule of law) was breached, no real consequences for those committing the infractions would result; that is, those supposedly upholding the church’s discipline (oftentimes bishops, but clergy and laity as well) often found (or claimed to have found) loopholes in The Book of Discipline so that the initiation of due-process proceedings, the proof of guilt, the decision for conviction, and the consequences of conviction were seldom reached. With such loopholes in place, discipline-breaking without consequence over many months, even years, led many to see that The United Methodist Church was in chaos. The Traditional Plan was adopted to remedy this situation.

The Traditional Plan is made up of 17 petitions (or bills). Around half of those petitions had already passed judicial review by the Judicial Council. Those petitions, that once again passed the Judicial Council’s review of April 2019, go into effect in the United States on January 1, 2020. Those petitions are:

\* the definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” is expanded to include those who are living in a same-sex marriage or union (Traditional Plan #1, Petition 90032);

\* bishops are prohibited from consecrating self-avowed, practicing homosexual persons as bishops, and from commissioning and ordaining such persons as clergy (Traditional Plan #5, Petition 90036);

\* clergy who are found guilty of performing same-sex weddings would face mandatory penalties: a one-year suspension without pay for the first offense, and revocation of ministerial credentials for the second (Traditional Plan #11, Petition 90042);

\* the District Committee on Ministry and the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry are prohibited from recommending for ministry those who do not meet denominational qualifications, and a bishop presiding over a clergy session at Annual Conference shall rule an unqualified candidate out of order and ineligible for consideration (Traditional Plan #12, Petition 90043);

\* a bishop can dismiss a complaint only when it has “no basis in law or fact.” in other words, a bishop cannot wave off a complaint he would simply prefer not to handle; also, this petition mandates an expanded paper trail (Traditional Plan #13, Petition 90044);

\* the one who files a complaint is now involved in the process of “just resolution” or mediation (Traditional Plan #15, Petition 90046); and

\* the church can now appeal a trial-court verdict to the Judicial Council if it involves errors of church law (Traditional Plan #16, Petition 90047). (The above list is from “2019 General Conference Legislation under Review,” which was compiled by Ask The United Methodist Church and United Methodist News, and found at United Methodist News Daily Digest - March 15, 2019.)

The other petitions of the Traditional Plan were conclusively ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council in April. However, those considered unconstitutional could be amended, submitted, and adopted by General Conference 2020.

Third, General Conference also adopted a disaffiliation plan (Petition 90066). In April 2019, the Judicial Council found this disaffiliation plan to be constitutional. This plan would allow a congregation to leave The United Methodist Church with its property if: two-thirds of its church conference approved; it pays the previous twelve months of its apportionments and an additional year of its apportionments; it pays its share of its annual conference’s pension responsibilities; and its decision is supported by a majority vote of the annual conference. This plan goes into effect immediately. (“Judicial Council Affirms the Traditional Plan,” Good News Statement, April 26, 2019)

### **Crash at the End**

Please bear with this report a little bit longer.

General Conference’s last day—that is, Tuesday (February 26), the day when General Conference went into plenary session, so that it could pass (or reject) petitions that had been passed by the Legislative Committee (which was composed of the entire General Conference and which met on Monday, February 25)—was a very long and disappointing day. As the day wore on, the bishops who presided over the plenary session—Bp. Palmer and then Bp. Harvey—were less and less able to preside over the proceedings in a constructive, coherent way. The delegates who opposed the Traditional Plan manipulated parliamentary processes and General Conference rules—for example, by using many frivolous Points of Order—to delay the amendment of, and the vote on, the Traditional Plan. There is a pressing lesson here: General Conference needs—no, requires!—a professional parliamentarian to preside over its more contentious sessions. The bishops are no longer capable of presiding at all sessions of General Conference.

Despite bishops incompetently presiding, delegates cynically delaying, and activists noisily disrupting, the Traditional Plan passed on Tuesday. At the point of passage, on

that Tuesday afternoon, the protests in the observers gallery cranked up considerably. Chanting, loud singing, and sloganeering broke out. This went on for hours. In addition, again and again, the official agenda was interrupted and delayed—by long breaks and by many Points-of-Order negotiations—so that only the passage, with minimal amendment, of the Traditional Plan took place. As noted above, the passage of the Traditional Plan ignited those who had opposed it.

At the very end of Tuesday’s plenary meeting, Bp. Carter was scheduled to lead General Conference 2019—delegates, observers, and bishops—in a 20-minute, concluding Service of Worship. However, since delay had been the theme of the day, that theme returned at the end of the working day. Low-grade chaos, and random chants and shouts, delayed even the brief time set aside for worship.

Just before Bp. Carter returned to lead the assembly in the worship service, Rev. Donna Pritchard, chair of the Western Jurisdiction Leadership Team, stood, took the microphone, and warned the 2019 General Conference: “[W]e in the west have been functioning for years as one church, committed to full inclusion, seeking to be a home for all God’s people. Rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, grounded in Scripture, and committed to mission and ministry, the Western Jurisdiction intends to continue to be one church, fully inclusive and open to all God’s children across the theological and social spectrum.” Her words seemed to serve as a flare shot up in The Dome that announced: the Western Jurisdiction will not abide by what General Conference had just decided. Needless to say, many other voices (including those of some bishops) have joined this chorus.

How disturbing. After laity, clergy, and bishops had dedicated themselves to faithful prayer for the Commission on a Way Forward and for the General Conference for month after month. After The United Methodist Church had spent millions of dollars on the Commission on a Way Forward and on General Conference. After the Commission had devoted countless hours to formulating the plans placed before General Conference. After the Conference had been planned, had assembled, had deliberated, and had decided. After all these sacrifices, the Western Jurisdiction stands and says it will do what it wants to do. What arrogance. What zeal without reason. What a blatant breaking of the denominational covenant.

Finally, at the end of the last day of General Conference, it was time to worship. But no time remained. So Bp. Ken Carter offered a Call to Worship, a Prayer, a Scripture Lesson, a Sermon, and a Benediction all at once, when he said: “People of our church, in the midst of brokenness, God is with us. We wish you the blessings of God as you return to your communities, to your churches, to make disciples for the transformation of the world. Again, we wish you the peace of the Lord, even in the midst of all that we have experienced. And, the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will be with you. Amen.”

Brokenness. Indeed.

God’s presence. Indeed.

And perhaps even His judgment.

### **A Postscript on the Bishops**

In a post-General Conference interview, Bp. William H. Willimon noted: “If we’ve shown one thing, it’s that what bishops do—or don’t do—is almost irrelevant. The bishops labored for two years and came up with these three plans and

backed the One Church Plan (which would allow local congregations to decide about LGBTQ ordination and marriage) and pushed that. But the General Conference seems united: We don't trust bishops. I tried to advocate for the One Church Plan and found out that many progressives felt it didn't go far enough in providing affirmation and protection for LGBTQ people. On the other hand, traditionalists said, 'This is a power play by the bishops to throw this on us even though we've demonstrated through many votes we don't want it.'" ("Bishop Willimon on Why No Plan Can Unite United Methodists" by Yonat Shimron, Religious News Service, February 26, 2019, emphasis added.)

Well, Bp. Willimon is correct about distrust of the bishops.

But let's be honest. General Conference does not trust the bishops because the bishops have not proven themselves to be trustworthy. For years, the bishops—the bishops of The United Methodist Church, the very ones consecrated to stand up for the church's doctrine and discipline—have ignored or resisted the doctrine and discipline that General Conference had carefully and painstakingly decided. Therefore, through their words and deeds, the bishops have demonstrated that they could not be trusted. By not trusting the bishops and by turning down the One Church Plan, General Conference 2019 was simply behaving with commonsense—and trying to find a new way forward for the whole church.

For The United Methodist Church, today is a new day. A way forward has been chosen. Perhaps, because of the grace of God and the fear of God, the bishops will lead The United Methodist Church by teaching her doctrine and upholding her discipline. The bishops' refusal to do so made General Conference 2019 necessary. The bishops' refusal to do so—in the months and years to come—would make make General Conference 2019 a tragic waste. (PTS) ♥

## CULTURE-OF-DEATH WATCH

### Infanticide Long Ago

"Recently, archaeologists working in northern Peru made a discovery they called 'disturbing and disquieting.'

"Digging in the outskirts of the pre-Columbian city of Chan-Chan, they found the remains of about 140 children and 200 animals, mostly llamas. The condition of the children's remains made it clear that they had been sacrificed along with the animals, perhaps in response to some emergency or dire threat. According to the Washington Post, it's the site of 'the largest known child sacrifice in the world.' ...

"Whatever precipitated the child sacrifice, the Chimú were far from alone in their attempts to placate the gods by slaughtering their children. Their conquerors, the Incan Empire, also practiced child sacrifice in times of emergency.

"In the Old World, the Carthaginians, who were descended from the biblical city of Tyre, sacrificed children to their gods at shrines the Hebrew Bible called 'tophets.' The Romans made a big deal out of this fact in their anti-Carthaginian propaganda, conveniently omitting the fact that they did the same in response to the Carthaginian general Hannibal's invasion of Italy.

"The Carthaginians weren't the only ancient people who emulated Canaanite child sacrifice. Pre-exilic Israel practiced

this demonic rite, as well. In Jeremiah 7, the Lord denounces the 'high place of Topheth' where the people 'burn their sons and daughters in the fire.'

"On account of this abomination, the Lord said that 'I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall become a waste' ...

"...God, as Christianity would later teach the world, doesn't demand our children as a sacrifice, but rather sacrificed His own Son on our behalf.

"In fact, early Christians took the Jewish prohibition on child sacrifice and extended it to cover contemporary Roman practices such as abortion and infanticide. Ultimately, it's because of Christianity's clarity on the killing of children that we find the discovery at Chan-Chan so chilling today, despite our own culture's embrace of moral relativism...." (John Stonestreet with Roberto Rivera, "God vs. Child Sacrifice: The God of Abraham Is a Very Different God," Breakpoint Daily from the Colson Center, March 21, 2019)

### Nazi Germany Killed Disabled Babies

"Killing disabled babies is not just an ancient practice. During World War II, German doctors committed infanticide, which was considered a 'healing treatment' that prevented suffering. 'Baby Knauer'—the first disabled baby to be killed under [cover] of law in Germany—was born with serious disabilities, including blindness. His parents wrote Hitler a letter asking that doctors be permitted to put their children 'to sleep.' Hitler sent his personal physician, Karl Rudolph Brandt, to verify the facts and assure the infant's doctors that they could kill the child without legal consequence, which they did. In 1973, Baby Knauer's father was quoted by Robert Jay Lifton in The Nazi Doctors, as recalling appreciatively that 'the *Führer* had granted us the mercy killing of our son. Later, we could have other children, handsome and healthy, of whom the Reich could be proud.'

"Hitler's infanticide policy was kept a secret from the German people, and unlike Baby Knauer, most infanticides took place without parental consent. After the end of the war, infanticide of disabled babies was universally condemned a crime against humanity. Some German doctors who participated in the pogrom were hanged." (Wesley J. Smith, "The Least of These," www.firstthings.com, Web Exclusives, 3.5.19)

### Abortion Law Passes in New York State

On January 22, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a bill entitled The Reproductive Health Act [or RHA]. According to George Weigel, this title's deception "would make George Orwell gag."

So what is in the bill?

"The New York RHA declares abortion on demand, *at any moment in a pregnancy, up to birth*, a fundamental right. A healthy infant born in New York State today could have been legally killed yesterday, according to the RHA. And the killing would not be pretty. For third-trimester abortions involve either poisoning the unborn child or collapsing its skull by the grotesque procedure known as 'dilation and extraction;' the mother then gives 'birth' to a dead baby who's been executed in a manner that would revolt anyone with an iota of feeling, were similar violence perpetrated on a dog or cat." (George Weigel, "The Moral Depravity of Andrew Cuomo & Friends," www.

[firstthings.com](http://firstthings.com), Web Exclusives, 2.6.19, emphasis in the original.)

### Similar Law Nearly Passes in Virginia

“A similar Virginia proposal [that is, similar to New York State’s bill] made huge news but failed in committee....

“...Governor of Virginia Ralph Northam received [support] after asserting that babies who survive late-term abortion can legally be left to die. Northam falsely (according to a study published by the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute) states that late-term abortions are restricted to ‘cases where there may be severe deformities, there may be a fetus that’s non-viable.’ Northam later said: ‘So in this particular example, if a mother is in labor, I can tell you exactly what would happen. The infant would be delivered. The infant would be kept comfortable. The infant would be resuscitated if that’s what the mother and the family desired, and then a discussion would ensue between the physicians and the mother.’ Northam, a physician, is a specialist in pediatric neurology. His statement, made with such clinical detachment, chilled many. But Northam was defended—notably by [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com) liberal columnist Michelle Goldberg. Meanwhile, the [Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com) reported the brouhaha as merely a ‘Republican pounce’ political story, not a question of significant moral import.” (Wesley J. Smith, “Infanticide Becomes Justifiable,” [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com), Web Exclusives, 2.6.19)

### Immoral Laws Push Society toward Resolution

“It was at this courthouse [the Old Courthouse in St. Louis, MO] that two slaves, Dred Scott and his wife, Harriet, began a more than decadelong legal saga in 1846. The two argued that, having lived for a significant time in free states, they could not be re-enslaved. After the case wound through the Missouri legal system, the [United States] Supreme Court ruled in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857).

“In a particularly vicious decision, the court held that the Scotts were not human persons, and thus had no rights. The 7-2 opinion said the Constitution’s framers considered blacks to be an ‘inferior class of beings who had been subjugated by the dominant race.’ The court held that the law must therefore continue to treat African-Americans as ‘unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.’ The institution of slavery outlived Scott, and in the eyes of the law he remained the chattel of his master.

“This decision, according to Civil War scholar Shelby Foote, backfired. Slave owners were subject to a public outcry as they were forced to admit the logical corollary of slavery. The slave was not human, but property, with no rights. Even those defending slavery thought again, admitting that their argument had gone too far. The ruling emboldened abolitionists, re-energizing their decades-old project to defend the human rights of the black slave.

“In the past few weeks, as the constant debate around abortion has become especially heated, I’ve continually thought about Dred Scott. Like slavery did 150 years ago, abortion has deeply divided the U.S. and raised fundamental questions about the nature of our society....[After passage of the New York RHA and rejection of a similar bill in Virginia, i]s the U.S. having a Dred Scott moment on abortion?”

“Even some defenders of abortion acknowledge they may have gone too far. See the repugnance expressed at New York’s governor celebrating the morbid bill with a party. He also ordered the Freedom Tower to be illuminated in pink—shining on the names of 11 pregnant women who perished with their preborn babies on 9/11. A former Virginia governor and a sitting U.S. senator from the Old Dominion, both staunch abortion supporters, disavowed the radical bill in their state. It seems that some abortion supporters no longer hope it is safe, legal and rare. Rather, it’s celebrated, unregulated and frequent.

“The most destructive war in U.S. history settled the questions raised by *Dred Scott*. The U.S. won’t go there on abortion—God forbid. But the horror of New York’s extremism and Virginia’s flirtation with the same will spur determined but temperate resistance....

“Maybe those politicians who passed the law in New York and tried to do the same in Virginia unintentionally did the country a favor. Today more Americans are admitting, ‘My God, that’s sure not what we wanted. Doesn’t the baby have any rights?’ Perhaps soon, some of many saved babies could be named Dred or Harriet Scott.” (Timothy Cardinal Dolan, “Abortion’s Dred Scott Moment,” [Wall Street Journal](http://www.wallstreetjournal.com), February 8, 2019)

### Let Us Pray

“Eternal Father, Source of life, open our hearts to see and desire the beauty of Your plan for life and love. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that our love will be generous and self-giving, and we may be blessed with joy. Grant us great trust in Your mercy. Forgive us for not receiving Your gift of life and heal us from the effects of the culture of death. Instill in us and in all people a sense of the sacredness of every human life. Inspire our efforts to protect and care for the most vulnerable, especially women who are pregnant and their unborn children, the sick, and the elderly. Strengthen us in the hope that with You nothing is impossible. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who by His Cross makes all things new. Amen.” ([Imprint: A Publication of the Sisters of Life](http://www.imprint.org) [Spring 2019], back cover) ♥

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Abortion and Sexuality

P.O. Box 306, Cottleville MO 63338

06/01/19

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• This is a prayer to ponder after General Conference 2019: "O God, make the door of this house wide enough to receive all who need human love and fellowship; narrow enough to shut out all envy, pride and strife. Make its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling-block to children, nor to straying feet, but rugged and strong enough to turn back the tempter's power. God make the door of this house the gateway to thine eternal kingdom." (Thomas Ken, 1637-1711 [on St. Stephen's Walbrook, London])

• During General Conference 2019 in St. Louis, Rev. Richard Thompson, the senior pastor of First United Methodist Church of Bakersfield, CA, told a morally powerful story. One evening Rev. Thompson was intently watching a documentary on Nazi Germany's premeditated and systematic killing at Auschwitz. As the video report blared forth its grim tale, Aaron, Rev. and Mrs. Thompson's son who has muscular dystrophy, shuffled with effort into the room. After overhearing a bit of the documentary, the son said to his father, "Dad, they killed people like me. Didn't they?" Rev. Thompson replied in truth, "Yes, they did." That, in part, is why this newsletter is called "Lifewatch." Lifewatch wants to watch for, and call out, incidents of

taking innocent human lives, and the so-called "moral" justifications for taking innocent human lives, so that such lives might be more fully defended and protected.

• Mr. Jim Lung, a long-time reader and supporter of Lifewatch, emailed a response to a comment in the March 1, 2019 issue on the editor's "advice to address every issue theologically." Wrote Mr. Lung: "At one of our holy (sic) conferences [in our local church], I suggested that any discussion of 'homosexuality' had to begin with a discussion of what Scripture teaches about the human person, with particular reference to Genesis 1-3. My two assistant clergy were seated at the same (round, of course) table. One, embarrassed by my ignorance, lowered her eyes and worked to change the subject. The other expressed in puzzled consternation: 'Genesis?'"

"I pray that some cool head somewhere will take your advice. Otherwise, we [United Methodists] are toast."

Better yet, how about lots of cool heads in lots of places taking Biblical theology seriously. That might lead to avoiding the toast scenario.

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

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