

The Confessing Movement

within The United Methodist Church



Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord!

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Struggling for the Soul of the UMC

In just a few short months one thousand United Methodists from across the world will gather in Tampa, Florida for the 2012 meeting of the General Conference (GC), the supreme law-making body of the denomination. The United Methodist Church (UMC), except in Africa and the Philippines, is a denomination in decline. Only 5 percent of its local churches in the U.S. were judged in a denominational study to be highly vital. Even where the U.S. Church is largest (in the Southeast), it showed a decline of 1.2 percent in membership between 2006 and 2009. All of the other sections of the U.S. posted larger declines.

Much of the agenda for the 2012 GC has been set by leadership groups such as the Connectional Table, the Council of Bishops, the Call to Action Committee, and the general boards and agencies. That agenda is dominated by administrative proposals. One proposal would consolidate nine major boards and agencies into one entity-The Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry- with five different offices. The Center would be governed by a 45-member General Council for Strategy and Oversight. The General Council would then elect a 15-member Board of Directors to implement the work of the Center. Supervision for the total work of the Church would be done by an Executive General Secretary along with heads of each of the five Offices. \$60 million of our General Church apportionments for 2012-2016 would be set aside for special allocation by the General Council.

Another proposal would establish the office of a “set-aside bishop” to exercise certain leadership functions across the entire Church. Still another would explore whether the Church can afford to continue granting a guaranteed appointment to all ordained clergy after they have served just two years.

(Continued on page 2)

In This Issue:

- Struggling for the Soul of the UMC
- A Chance to Exit from RCRC
- Amending Our Mission Statement
- Making General Conference Truly Representative
- Elijah VS. The Baal Prophets- I KINGS 18
- Evangelicals Organize in NY Annual Conference
- In the News

We Confess

Some of these administrative proposals could help the Church, especially if they would reduce the financial apportionments that local churches have to pay. But our Church's main problem is not administrative; it is spiritual and theological. The UMC in the U.S. is unsure of its Gospel, its good news, its primary message.

Though some trends of the UMC are discouraging, remember that God never leaves himself without a witness. There are some hopeful trends in the UMC, mostly at the local church level. If God is going to renew the UMC, it will be from the bottom up, not from the top down. And God seems to be using the UMC in Africa to lead the renewal. Wouldn't it be just like God to take the least affluent part of our denomination (that is, Africa) and use it to reform the rest of the Church?!

Even in the U.S., most liberal churches are declining and most evangelical churches are growing; therefore, a gradual transformation is taking place. A few United Methodist seminaries, following the example of Asbury Seminary, are becoming friendlier to evangelicals, welcoming them as faculty members and as students. A seminary like United in Ohio is a striking example. Duke also shows some promise.

If 25 years ago, knowledgeable American Protestants had been asked to name the most liberal mainline denomination in America, many would have pointed to the UMC. Today no one would. The UMC is turning slowly, like a huge convoy of ships, in a more biblical, evangelical direction. In this struggle for the Church's soul, there is no honorable place for neutrality. Each believer must take a stand for biblical truth and Wesleyan theology. You can help by making a financial contribution to at least one reform group within the denomination. Your most important contributions could be on your knees and in your local church. Pray that God will delay his judgment on the UMC and grant us the mercy of more time for renewal. God alone can fix the UMC, but He needs courageous believers who will dare to take a stand. Maybe it was for just such an hour as this that you and I were called! ♦

A CHANCE TO EXIT FROM RCRC

Two United Methodist agencies, the Women's Division and the General Board of Church and Society, are members of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. RCRC lobbies to defend and expand the absolute right to abortion, whatever the circumstances, including partial-birth abortion. RCRC's position is clearly contrary to the carefully nuanced United Methodist position on abortion, expressed in Paragraph 161J of the Social Principles. RCRC's president and CEO, during the national debate on health care reform, called for the taxpayer funding of abortion. Most United Methodists disagree with that proposal. UM Bishop Scott Jones spoke for many Methodists when he stated: "While we United Methodists believe that persons have the right to health care, abortion is not

normally a health care issue. Rather, it is sinful behavior. Proposals in the recent health care debate to provide tax funding for abortions are very misguided. What you fund with tax dollars will increase."

At the 2008 General Conference, an attempt was made to require that these two UM agencies withdraw from RCRC. The crucial vote came at the very end of that Conference when many African delegates were missing, and it narrowly failed.

The 2012 General Conference could offer a better opportunity to sever all UM connections with RCRC. A non-Disciplinary resolution will be offered directing that the General Board of Church and Society and the Women's Division withdraw immediately from RCRC. ♦

AMENDING OUR MISSION STATEMENT

(The Mississippi Annual Conference has petitioned the 2012 General Conference to amend Paragraph 120 of the Book of Discipline to add these six underlined words.)

“The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls and for the transformation of the world.”

RATIONALE: The transformation of the world is certainly a legitimate goal of the Church. Jesus taught us to pray, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). However, the top priority of the Church is to save souls. Before Jesus was born, an angel told Joseph what Jesus’ primary purpose would be: “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Jesus himself endorsed that purpose when he said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). St. Paul affirmed our Lord’s primary purpose when he wrote to Timothy, saying, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (I Tim. 1:15). Surely our Lord’s primary purpose should be the Church’s top priority also.

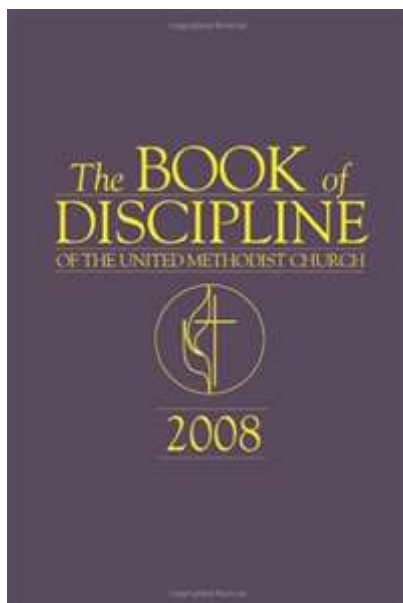
John Wesley put primary emphasis on the salvation of eternal souls. He said, “You have nothing to do but save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work” (Jackson, VIII, p. 310).

The transformation of the world only becomes a realistic goal **AFTER** people have experienced salvation and new birth through Jesus Christ. And the transformation of the world will not be completed until Jesus Christ returns in glory. In the meantime, the Church should be clear that saving souls is our first order of business, and transforming the world follows from it. ♦

MAKING GENERAL CONFERENCE TRULY REPRESENTATIVE

Currently the Book of Discipline specifies in paragraph 502d that “every annual conference shall be entitled to at least one clergy and one lay delegate to General Conference. This ruling is causing an increasing unfairness in the allotting of delegates. As some annual conferences continue declining while others, especially in Africa, are growing rapidly, representation at General Conference no longer reflects our membership accurately.

For example, the European central conference declined 8.5% over the past quadrennium; nevertheless, it still retains 42 delegates. The Philippine Conference declined by 27.6%, yet it gained 6 delegates! Europe and the Philippines together have 1.7% of UMC membership, yet they have 9.2% of the delegates at General Conference. If General Conference membership were truly proportional, Europe would have just 8 delegates and the Philippines would have just 14. Instead, the two of them currently have a total of 90 seats at General Conference. ♦



ELIJAH VS. THE BAAL PROPHETS- I KINGS 18

(The Claremont Seminary unauthorized revised version)

In First Kings, chapter 18, we read about a dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel between Elijah, God's prophet, and the 450 prophets of Baal. Altars are built and sacrificial bulls are placed on them. Then the Baal prophets implore their god to send down fire on their altar. But nothing happens. Then Elijah asked Jehovah to ignite his altar. Like lightning, fire from heaven zaps the altar and consumes the sacrifice. Before the sun sets, the Baal prophets pay with their lives the penalty for serving a false god.



Now, by way of imagination, let's suppose that Elijah had imbibed the training given centuries later at The United Methodist Church's seminary in California—Claremont School of Theology. Claremont's leaders believe that all major faiths are equally valid paths to God. Dr. Jerry Campbell, President of Claremont, has declared that Christians who feel the need to evangelize persons of other faiths have "an incorrect perception of what it means to follow Jesus." Currently Claremont is providing clergy training for Jews and Muslims. Later the School hopes to train Hindu and Buddhist leaders.

If Elijah had shared Claremont's worldview, he might have stopped that confrontation on Mount Carmel; indeed, he might have offered the following olive branch: "You prophets of Baal, why should we be in conflict? Can't we simply respect our varied ways of relating to the deity? You call him Baal, and we call him Jehovah, but is that any reason for us to argue? Come let us share our varied perceptions of the deity. Indeed, is there any reason why you prophets of Baal cannot receive your theological training in our Jehovah School in Jezreel? I think I can persuade King Ahab and Queen Jezebel to offer scholarships to your young prophets in training. Dear friends, we worship the same God, though we have some different perceptions about his nature. We must not allow those differences to separate us!"

If Elijah had made such a speech long ago on Mount Carmel, the fire of God would still have come down. But our jealous and exclusive God might have consumed not only the altar but the prophet Elijah along with it. The second commandment still reads:

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

Here is the bottom line: Claremont plans to lend its facilities and United Methodist image to the education of religious leaders whose primary mission will be to contradict the central claims of Christianity. Last year the United Methodist Church gave Claremont \$869,000 in funding. During that year a total of eight United Methodist students graduated. Figure that cost per student! Just imagine what that \$869,000 could have produced if it had been designated for seminary training in Africa!

Evangelicals organize in the New York Annual Conference

The Wesley Fellowship, comprised of evangelical clergy and laity in the N.Y. Annual Conference, has recently reorganized in response to the planned rebellion of UM clergy announcing plans to break covenantal vows, church law, and perform same-sex marriages.

The latest challenge has come from the New York-based MIND caucus that has been given permission to print their news in the N.Y. Annual Conference newsletter. There they announced the names of 164 UM clergy that signed the nationwide statement of their willingness to defy church law and perform same-sex marriages.

The Wesley Fellowship aspires to become a strong, pro-active evangelical voice in the N.Y. area. Their number one goal is to gather like-minded clergy and laity who have not had the benefit of authentic evangelical renewal in many years. In 2012 they plan to host some revival, awakening services as well as teaching seminars on Wesleyan roots. Those wishing to follow their efforts are encouraged to follow their blog at www.wesleyfellowshipnyac.wordpress.com Just click the "follow" button on their blog page or enter your email address at the bottom of the right hand column.

(This information provided by Randy Paige, Wesley Fellowship President, and Kent Jackson, Secretary.)

*YOU CAN INFLUENCE THE NEXT
GENERAL CONFERENCE...NOW!!*

Many church experts believe that the General Conference of 2012 will represent a critical turning point for the UMC...either we will follow the other mainline denominations into terminal decline, or we will chart a new direction of fidelity to Scripture and Wesleyan theology. The Confessing Movement (CM) is preparing even now to have a maximum influence. Your help is critical, in terms of prayer and contributions. Some are skipping the Friday noon meal each week and using the time to pray for the UMC. Then they contribute their lunch money to the CM. For directions on contributing, just call our office at 317-356-9729. Or, go to our website at www.confessingumc.org and click on "donate." Thank\$ so much!!

In The News...



Training the Next Generation of Terrorists

According to the song in the musical SOUTH PACIFIC, you have to be carefully taught. That is, in order to pass along hatred and prejudice from one generation to another, it is important to teach those lessons to young children and youth.

Every day in many Muslim nations those lessons are being taught to the young. An example is Saudi Arabia, supposedly a friend and ally of the U.S. Yet, Saudi Arabia prohibits Christians from worshiping publicly, building churches, wearing crosses, or importing Bibles.

An 8th grade textbook in Saudi Arabia declares “The apes are the people of the Sabbath,

the Jews; and the swine are the infidels of the communion of Jesus, the Christians.”

Why is this kind of hateful indoctrination not being condemned by all major Christian denominations? Why is the U.S. State Department not using all its influence to stop this training of the next generation of terrorists? How many of our children and grandchildren will be killed by suicide bombers trained early to hate those who are different?

(Based on a report from CyberDissidents.org, published in the Wall Street Journal, December 28, 2011.) ♦

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at confessingumc.org next to the “Latest News” tab.

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In The News...

RELIGION IN AMERICA

Duke sociologist Mark Chaves has a new book out entitled AMERICAN RELIGION in which he gives a concise summary of religious trends in America over the last four decades. For most of the past three hundred years, he observes, something like 35 to 40 percent of the population have been regular churchgoers. For a very long time, over a third of Americans have strongly identified with religious institutions.

There have been some shifts. Since 1972 people have become more likely to switch churches and denominations. Catholics and Protestants intermarry a lot more. Without doubt, however, the biggest change in recent years has been the dramatic increase in the number of people who aren't religious at all. The statistics are striking. In 1957 a government survey reported that only 3 percent of Americans said they had no religious affiliation; but in a 2008 survey 17 percent said so.

It's not hard to understand how this change came to pass. From the profession to the New York Times and on to Hollywood, elite opinion has adopted a secularist mentality. This shift in elite culture, which was already underway in the 1950s, has altered the social imagination of middle-class America, making it possible for a school teacher in Des Moines, for example, to live confidently and unapologetically with no religion at all.

The rise of this secularist mentality is directly correlated to the decline of

mainline Protestantism, a social change in America the importance of which cannot be overestimated. It's hard for anyone under fifty to imagine, but places like Union Seminary in New York were once very influential. This is no longer the case, and as a result many of the leaders and activists who provide the agenda for contemporary American liberalism lack any living contact with religion.

By any reckoning, the emergence of this new secularist mentality helps explain our cultural and political conflicts today. In the areas of sex, marriage, and family, a confident and often aggressive secularist mentality frequently challenges the presumptive authority of the older Judeo-Christian consensus, redefining a great deal of American political life in terms of cultural and moral questions.

(This is a summary of an article in FIRST THINGS, December, 2011 issue.)



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Purpose Statement

**Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord.
The Confessing Movement exists to enable
The United Methodist Church to retrieve its
classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as
disciples of Jesus Christ.**

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