

We Confess



May - July
2016

Wesleyan Covenant Association: An Open Letter to the People of The United Methodist Church

June 29, 2016

As clergy and lay leaders of healthy, vibrant orthodox United Methodist congregations, and as teachers preparing the future clergy leaders of our denomination, we welcome the creation of the Wesleyan Covenant Association. In these times of great uncertainty about the future of The United Methodist Church, we believe it is important for orthodox congregations, clergy, and laity to work together, to support one another, and to encourage each other. We long for a church committed to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the last, the least and the lost.

Committed to the Wesleyan expression of orthodox Christianity, we believe the church can and must do better. We are alarmed by the growing loss in average worship attendance in many of our annual conferences. We regret the now numerous instances where colleagues in ministry have broken covenant with the rest of the church and sowed the seeds of schism. We are grieved by the actions of annual conferences that have decided not to conform to our Discipline. And we are disappointed in leaders who have failed to maintain the good order of the church. Consequently, the work of faithful pastors and laity has been undermined, healthy congregations have left the denomination, and thousands of United Methodists have gone in search of other places to worship and serve.

We believe the Wesleyan Covenant Association will give orthodox United Methodists hope for the future and serve as a source of encouragement as the church works through a critical period of discernment. We want to serve in close partnership with our brothers and sisters in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. And we want to be prepared to act as one in light of the important work and recommendations of the Bishops' Commission on the Future of the Church. We encourage all orthodox clergy and laity to remain steadfast and faithful in these uncertain times. We believe the Wesleyan Covenant Association will bind us together and make us a strong, united witness for Scriptural Christianity.

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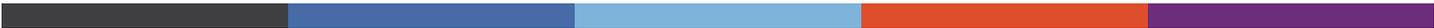
We believe that God is “doing a new thing.” We believe a new and better day is coming for the people called Methodist who are committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, and the church’s being a missional force determined to reach a lost culture. We yearn to step into this new future together with others of like minds and hearts.

Please visit the Wesleyan Covenant Association website (www.wesleyancovenant.org) to learn more about it. We also hope you will plan to join us in Chicago on October 7, 2016, for the first gathering of the association.

We are confident you will be hearing more about the association in the weeks and months ahead, and we trust you will join us as we band together for the sake of a vibrant, Wesleyan expression of orthodox Christianity.

In Christ,

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		Martin Nicholas Sugarland UMC Sugarland, Texas	<i>* Church names provided only for identificational purposes.</i>



CONFESSING MOVEMENT URGES PATIENCE; BELIEVES IN A HOPEFUL FUTURE FOR UNITED METHODISM

Reports in the media on the recent UM General Conference did not report one of the most important stories, mostly because it was not a part of the official proceedings. This story had to do with very important confidential conversations among some of the top leaders of the church during the General Conference as to how United Methodism can face its future with integrity. These conversations were initiated by Bishop Warner Brown, the outgoing President of the Council of Bishops and included leaders of progressive, centrist and evangelical groups.

While there have been many dialogues, discussions, and debates taking place in the church on matters surrounding human sexuality, these recent talks were different in that the participants seriously faced the crisis in the United Methodist Church. According to the participants there really was a sense of Holy Conferencing and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These conversations appeared to be leading to agreement that various compromise suggestions such as “live and let Live,” or local option, or tweaking language in the *Discipline* would not resolve the conflict.

When the entire Council of Bishops was apprised of the direction of the talks there was reluctance to give wholehearted approval. They felt disrupting the assumed unity of the church seemed impossible. When the “private” conversations became public the bishops were asked to give leadership, and with General Conference approval, they proposed a plan to work through a special commission to carry on the conversations. This plan was approved. What has been reported is that the General Conference could not decide on matters of human sexuality and is turning the work over to a special commission. It would be more accurate to say that facing the reality of the church’s crisis a special commission has been given the assignment to suggest a denominational solution which would respect the integrity of all the interested groups.

Dr. Maxie Dunnam, former president of Asbury Seminary, and Senator Patricia Miller, Executive Director of The Confessing Movement were included in the confidential conversations. The Confessing Movement is prepared to offer help and suggestions to the committee. The Council of Bishops will make the appointments later this year.

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GC 2016 HOLDS THE LINE ON HOMOSEXUAL PRACTICE ISSUES

While the United Methodist General Conference at Portland, Oregon, May 10-20 dealt with many issues, the one issue of concern for many church members is whether the conference would change any of our church's stands on issues relating to same-sex marriage and homosexual practice. The bottom-line report on homosexual practice issues was that the present stance remains as it has been: that being the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching; marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman; the church does not ordain nor appoint self-avowed practicing homosexuals; no church funds are to be used to advocate for the acceptance of homosexual practice; and pastors who conduct same-sex weddings are subject to charges.

Unfortunately, this does not mean that we can now put this matter behind us so that we can concentrate on our mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. More controversy will face the church in days ahead but it should be understood clearly that The United Methodist Church in its beliefs as stated in the *Discipline* stands for the traditional Christian understanding on human sexuality.

AFRICAN DELEGATES HELP UNITED METHODISTS REALIZE IT IS A GLOBAL CHURCH

By Dr. Riley Case

I met with two African delegates about a week after General Conference and asked them their impressions of the conference. They generally approved and explained they were greatly encouraged by the conference. This should remind us that sometimes we concentrate so much on the problems of the church that we fail to remember that The United Methodist Church is a great church. We are a growing church (thanks to the church in Africa). Men and women and children come to know Christ in United Methodist Churches. We have ministries to those in need. We reach out to the disenfranchised, the poor, the hurting, and the lost. Sometimes it takes something like the enthusiasm of our overseas members to remind us of this greater reality.



GENERAL CONFERENCE VOTES TO WITHDRAW UM SUPPORT FOR U.S. CAMPAIGN TO END ISRAELI OCCUPATION

By a vote of 478-318 the UM General Conference voted to withdraw United Methodist support for the Campaign to End Israeli Occupation.

Progressives in the church seem to have a lot of problems supporting Israel, the only true democracy in the Middle East. The major problem is focused on the West Bank and Israeli occupations there. The general boards and agencies of the church, particularly the Board of Global Ministries and the Board of Church and Society, have urged divestments from U.S. companies that have a presence in the West Bank.

A number of other petitions dealing with Israel were discussed but were not brought to a vote. Legislative committees defeated efforts to divest from Caterpillar (48-8) and a petition that called for an educational campaign against Hewitt Packard.

Charge Conference Now Given Responsibility to Promote the Doctrinal Standards and General Rules of the Church

The Confessing Movement celebrates a new paragraph in the section of the Discipline dealing with the duties of the charge conference. Para. 247.20 instructs the conference to promote awareness of concurrence with the Doctrinal Standards and the General Rules of the church. It is revealing that up to this time the charge conference was to support awareness of and concurrence with the Social Principles but no mention was made of the importance of doctrine and moral practice.

UNITED METHODISM MOVES TOWARD LIFE, WITHDRAWS FROM RADICAL PRO-ABORTION GROUP

Despite the fact that the Social Principles of the United Methodist Discipline has a nuanced and careful statement on abortion the church has often been characterized as pro-abortion. This is because of a resolution in the Book of Resolutions titled Responsible Parenthood and because two of its agencies, the United Methodist Women and the General Board of Church and Society are members of an extreme pro-abortion group, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).

This has changed. By a 425-268 vote the UM General Conference directed the United Methodist Women and the Board of Church and Society to end ties with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). The United Methodist Church helped to found this organization in 1972, even before the Roe vs. Wade case was decided for abortion by the Supreme Court. Since that time the coalition has advocated for abortion without restrictions—the legal ending of unborn life for any reason at any point during pregnancy. The group supports partial-birth and sex-selection abortion.

In addition, and for good measure, the General Conference also voted against replacing in the Discipline the Responsible Parenthood resolution.

DECLARATIONS OF NON-CONFORMITY AND ACTS OF CHURCH DEFIANCE

At least six annual conferences have passed resolutions of non-conformity against the United Methodist General Conference and the church Discipline over matters of marriage and human sexuality. There appear to be more cases in other annual conferences where persons are announcing themselves as practicing homosexuals and challenging the church to bring complaints and charges against them. In other places pastors are openly officiating at same-sex weddings.

This is really no surprise to those who have been a part of The Confessing Movement. Before General Conference persons who keep up with church politics predicted that if major changes were not made toward a more permissive stance on matters of human sexuality there would be groups in the church willing to engage in an increase of acts of disobedience, defiance, and rebellion against the order of the church. Although there will be a special commission to offer proposals as to how The United Methodist Church can proceed in light of our serious disagreements, a number of progressives in the church, including whole annual conferences, have indicated they will not wait for a commission or a special General Conference. They are prepared either to force the church to change by overwhelming acts of disobedience or, if necessary, to bring an end to United Methodism as we know it by making it impossible for the church to function. Unfortunately, it would appear that a number of bishops agree with them.

The issue, it seems, is not just the matter of human sexuality. At least two annual conferences have now joined the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice after the General Conference legislated removal from the coalition. In addition, some groups including institutions have voted to divest from US companies doing business in Israel despite General Conference actions.

The drama has not yet played itself out. We await future developments.

WESTERN JURISDICTION HAS NOMINATED TWO OPENLY GAY CANDIDATES FOR BISHOP

The Western Jurisdiction will be electing one new bishop when it meets in July. Of the several candidates for bishop announced, two have declared themselves to be gay or lesbian - these being Rev. Frank Wulf and Dr. Karen Oliveto, both from California. Dr. Oliveto is perhaps the better known having pastored Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco. According to an article in the New York Times Oliveto has, in defiance of the United Methodist Discipline, conducted more than 50 same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Oliveto has indicated that the issue facing the church is not human sexuality but how the church interprets Scripture. Numbers of persons point out that the overwhelming majority of Christian groups in all cultures and from varying denominations and in all ages have understood Scripture to mean what it says, basically that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Oliveto, however, apparently believes that all Christians of all ages have interpreted Scripture incorrectly.

While all sections of the country are experiencing membership decline in the UM Church, the decline in the Western Jurisdiction is reaching frightening levels. The whole jurisdiction, made up of the states of California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii, Utah, Montana, Idaho, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico, now possesses less than five percent of United Methodists in the U.S. The total membership is 20,000 fewer than a single annual conference, North Georgia.



NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE DEFIES DISCIPLINE; DECLARES NON CONFORMITY WITH THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The New England Conference, meeting June 16–18, has declared an act of “Non-Conformity” with the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. The conference declared: “we will not conform, or comply with the pronouncements of the Book of Discipline which discriminates against LGBTQIA persons.” A delegate asked the bishop to make a decision of law on the legality of the resolution. Bishop Sudarshane Devahhar indicated he would make such a decision within 30 days. After the 445–179 vote Pastor Skip Smith of Berwalk UMC in Maine declared before the conference: “I respectfully, sadly and through the Holy Spirit, leave the New England Annual Conference.”

NEW YORK CONFERENCE DEFIES DISCIPLINE; ORDAINS PRACTICING HOMOSEXUALS

The New York Annual Conference is one of several conferences in rebellion against the faith and order of The United Methodist Church. With an act of brazen defiance against United Methodism the conference has ordained four open and practicing gay or lesbian persons at its conference session June 11. The four had all signed an open letter to The United Methodist Church before the General Conference. When the bishop was questioned as to the legality of ordaining or commissioning openly gay practicing pastors, Bishop Jane Allen Middleton said it would be improper for her as bishop to make any substantive decision. One wonders why a bishop would not think it proper, if not a key component to their office to uphold the *Discipline*. We would love to hear from Bishop Middleton on that issue.

PACIFIC-NORTHWEST CONFERENCE DEFIES DISCIPLINE AND MAKES WEIRD REQUEST OF CONNECTIONAL TABLE.

On June 25 the Pacific Northwest Conference passed a resolution of non-conformity with the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. The conference declared it would not conform or comply with the provisions of the Discipline which discriminates against LGBTQIA plus persons.

But then in an action that defies logic, and would appear to reduce Christianity to politically-correct platitudes, the conference also took action to request the Connectional Table lead and fund efforts in cultural competency, anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-ageism, anti-homophobic, and anti-oppression training at the conference and district levels as well as advocacy and implementation efforts related to the same.

The Confessing Movement
within The United Methodist Church

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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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