

WE CONFESS

Newsletter of the Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church



FALL / WINTER 2021

A NEW PODCAST FROM THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT

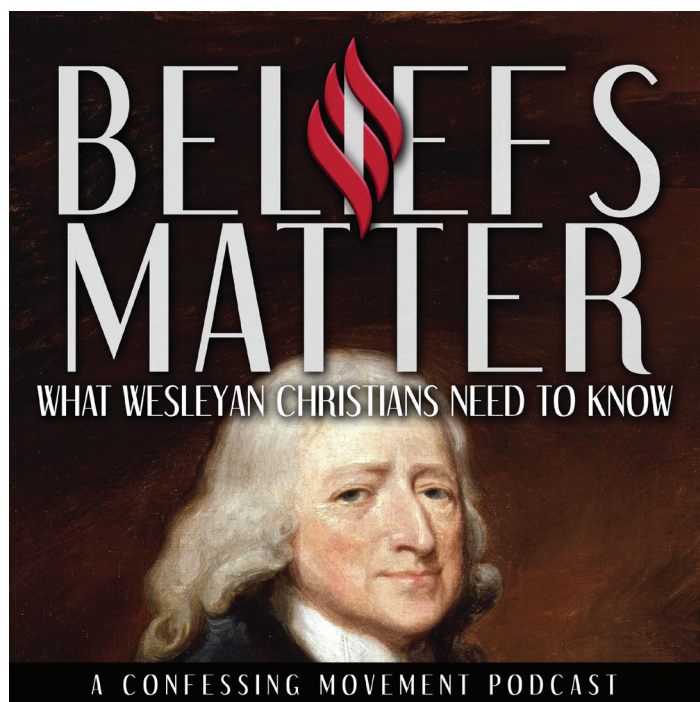
We are excited to announce a new podcast that will debut on January 7, 2022. The host will be Rev. Dr. Maxie Dunnam, Confessing Movement President and President Emeritus of Asbury Theological Seminary. You don't want to miss this!

Beliefs Matter focuses on what Wesleyan Christians in the Methodist tradition need to know. Exploring Christian orthodoxy and Wesleyan teaching and practice, we seek to empower believers for effective discipleship.

Beliefs DO Matter!

During each episode we will ask revealing questions about what we believe, why we believe, and how our beliefs make a difference. Beliefs shape how we live. They guide what we do for Jesus in ministry, in the church, and in the world. Our guests will help us dive deeper into the Word, our history, and who we are as Wesleyan Christians. They will include Biblical Scholars, theologians, key leaders in the church, and much more.

We pray for God's Spirit to unite believers as joyfully we proclaim Jesus Christ as God's Son, Savior, and Lord! ■



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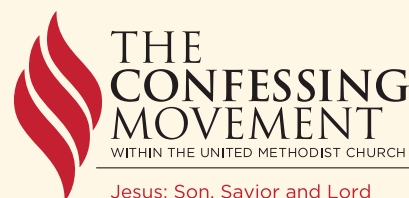
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WHEN IN LIMBO . . . WHAT TO DO?

BY PASTOR BRIAN L. WHITE

Most of us crave certainty, clarity, and a quick resolve to once again focus on the future. And yet, currently in the culture of United Methodism, we are experiencing the uncomfortable, uncertain, unclear, and not quickly resolved polarization within our own denomination.

It serves no purpose to pretend that we United Methodists as a denomination are one cohesive body. No — sadly we are not united about many critical issues! Our church unity as a body of believers must be based on a nucleus of central, universally accepted concepts about God, vision, mission and identity. But the reality is the United Methodist Church has been pulling in opposite directions within itself and has even intensified its opposing ideals in recent decades. Finally and yet tragically — a tipping point within Methodists has

resulted in a significant number of both clergy and laity coming to acknowledge this great divide and want to free each other to pursue a separation in order to move forward . . . even in very different directions.

So, our previously delayed General Conference is tasked with a weighty decision when they meet late August – September 2022 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A “Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation” is expected to be voted upon. If this passes, it will allow for each conference to determine whether as an annual conference body it will remain with the established denomination (keeping the name “United Methodist”) or if the conference will gracefully leave with property and financial resources intact — to join either a newly formed denomination — either a progressive one or a conservative body such as the Global Methodist Church. In the case of The Global Methodist Church, the local church will retain property and assets whereas in the present UMC the property and assets actually belong to the conference within which the congregation belongs.

If any conference makes a decision that specific local churches differ with, those individual congregations will have the opportunity to depart and join with one of the departing groups without losing their assets or property . . . based on the “protocol” being approved as it is presently presented.

With COVID concerns and international travel restrictions, our “wait” to see how these things unfold has been lengthy and uncomfortable. Most United Methodist pastors and many laypersons are frustrated, impatient and feel that everything is “on hold.” Some congregations have already disaffiliated with the denomination at significant expense.

But I ask that during this time we pray, be patient, continue to serve locally, and love people — even people we disagree with. Also, intercede for decision-makers in conferences — bishops, conference superintendents, and those entrusted with plans for the upcoming General Conference. Also, remember our delegates in your prayers.

Jesus’ encouragement to his original disciples prior to his death is a promise of peace: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” ■

This article was written by Pastor Brian L. White for the newsletter of Greentown UMC, Greentown, IN and edited by Dr. Riley Case.





MY CONFESSING MOVEMENT FRIENDS,

I greet you as we celebrate Advent, looking forward to Christmas. For me, a big part of this season is celebrating memories.

Vivid now, because of his recent death, are wonderful memories of Billy Abraham. In recent years, few persons have contributed so much to our Methodist/Wesleyan understanding of the faith. I had a wonderful hour with him ten days before his death.



Dr. Maxie Dunnam

Remembering Billy connects with memories of The Confessing Movement. I remember vividly my excitement when I was invited to join Bishop William Canon and Dr. Thomas Oden to consider convening a group that resulted in founding The Confessing Movement. It's okay for you to credit it to my age, but that doesn't lessen my celebration of these three, and clergy persons like them — Ira Galloway, Bill Hinson, Jimmy Buskirk, Eddie Fox, John Ed Mathison, George Morris, and others — who invested so much in keeping the Christian faith and way alive and vital in our United Methodist Church.

Those who are no longer here would be shoulder to shoulder with us today as we continue the work of The Confessing Movement. And how we need them, *as we need you!* Separation in the UMC seems inevitable. We are praying that the General Conference, which will meet in August 2022, will pass *The Protocol*, which has been agreed upon by leaders representing differing interests and concerns of the denomination. This will make separation gracious and, I believe, will set the stage for renewal and revival.

We need your ongoing help . . . in prayer, in getting and sharing the message with your church friends, and your financial gifts. The next few months are going to demand expanded international travel and intensive personal and virtual communication efforts. Please consider an immediate generous contribution.

As I make this financial plea, again I am filled with joyful memories. When Paul was making his plea for a contribution (2 Cor. 8:1-7), he referred to the generosity of the Macedonians; he described them in this fashion, “first, they gave themselves to the Lord.” That's the way of the friends I mentioned above. They were generous with their time and talent in launching and supporting The Confessing Movement. But *first, they gave themselves to the Lord.*”

As I make my request for a financial gift, my earnest plea is that your on-going first gift is of yourself to the Lord. I thank you and pray for a meaningful Advent and Christmas for you and your family.

Joy and Peace, Dr. Maxie Dunnam

DONATE TODAY

1. Online at www.confessingumc.org
2. Make checks payable to:
The Confessing Movement
7995 East 21st Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46219
3. Call the office to make a credit card donation by phone at 317.356.9729.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH: HOW TO DO SOCIAL ETHICS

BY DR. RILEY CASE

At the Methodist-EUB merger (1968-72) the new United Methodist Church committed itself to a heavy top-down bureaucratic institutional structure that featured, among other things, four super-boards. One of these was the General Board of Church and Society. Whereas social ethics before this time had grown out of grass roots concerns (like concerns over alcohol and families and gambling) the church now had hired professionals to do a lot of its thinking for it.

So, for example, the 1968 Discipline sought to summarize both the Methodist and EUB concerns for social justice that each denomination brought to the union. The Methodist portion listed its Social Principles and Social Creed. This took up nine pages of the Discipline and, among other things, urged abstinence from alcohol and gambling and drug abuse. Two-thirds of a page was given to the family. Under “Sex in Christian Life,” Methodists spoke of fidelity in marriage and abstinence in singleness.

The EUB portion was covered in six pages, two of which were given to the importance of the family. It spoke of the importance of censoring inappropriate movies and warned against “salacious” literature which pollutes the mind and undermines character. It spoke against alcohol, narcotics, gambling, and the use of tobacco. It also spoke, as many Disciplines had spoken through the years, of the importance of observing the Lord’s Day.

Both statements covered matters also of racism, labor relations, world peace, and world order (the EUBs asserted that war was not compatible with the gospel and the spirit of Christ). Both statements were addressed primarily to the church and not to things the government should be doing to bring about a just order.

The Board of Church and Society of the new United Methodist Church had a much bigger agenda. It began to address all kinds of societal problems including exceedingly complex problems that the church, that is the General

Board of Church and Society, was willing to advise on. The Discipline could not contain all the material so these were gathered in a new volume, the Book of Resolutions. As of the last printed Discipline, 2016, we now have hundreds and hundreds of these petitions which now take up 873 pages. So that we can address these issues from many sides we have 26 different resolutions on racism, 20 resolutions on HIV/AIDS, and 18 on Native Americans. In case persons want to know how the church stands on other things we have resolutions on the Island of Visques, on organizing a Peace March on the demilitarized zone between the Koreans, on supporting the UN Democracy Fund. There are no resolutions, however, on the observance of the Lord’s Day. There are also 21 resolutions on human rights which list at great length all the people and groups needing rights. Except, that is, for unborn babies. Numbers of petitions have been sent to General Conferences through the years (obviously not from Church and Society) asking that the church declare the sacredness of human life in the womb and this life has the right to be born, but these have always been rejected.

In addition to the Book of Resolutions, the Board of Church and Society makes continuous statements on various issues. Currently the program priorities are Climate, Health, Immigration, Peace, and Poverty. In almost every situation the board has legislative suggestions as to how these problems can be addressed. For some of us the solutions do not get to the root of the problem. Take poverty for example. Statistics show that fewer than 10% of those under the poverty line are part of an intact two parent family. Therefore the approach to many problems should start with addressing the importance of the family. Oh yes, there is also the matter of sin.

The new proposed Global Methodist Church will address social issues in a much different way. It will not have a General Board of Church and Society. Much more attention will be given to the input and the programs of local churches. Stay tuned because these issues will be discussed more fully in days to come. ■



GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH

A photograph showing several hands of different skin tones gently holding and planting a small green seedling into dark, rich soil. The hands are positioned around the seedling, with some holding the soil and others supporting the plant. The background is a close-up of the soil and the hands.

PREPARING THE GROUND FOR A NEW METHODISM

BY GREGORY STOVER

Regardless of the name on the deed, land will not produce a good crop unless the ground is properly prepared. The ground must be plowed up and cultivated. Balanced amounts of fertilizer and herbicides need to be applied. Quality seed must be planted. Rain must fall. The crop must be harvested, stored, and protected from rot, mold, and pests.

Countless United Methodists wait anxiously for the launch of a new expression of Methodism, the Global Methodist Church. We repeatedly hear or raise questions like these:

What happens IF the General Conference meets and does (or doesn't) pass the Protocol? What will be the mechanism for congregations who wish to join the new denomination? How will clergy (those ordained and local pastors) or students in process toward ordination make the transition? How long must we wait to be freed from the seemingly boundary-less theological pluralism of the UMC and its controversies around human sexuality? What should we do while we wait in limbo?

These are not meaningless or unnecessary questions. Yet, notice that all of them focus either on what we long to leave behind, or how we will be able to change the name on the title and door of the church. Here is where the metaphor of preparing the ground speaks clearly. A new Methodism will NOT produce a crop that honors and glorifies Jesus Christ simply by getting a new name on the deed or door. The ground in the heart of every lay person, pastor, and congregation needs to be prepared for the vision of the GMC: *"to join God in a journey of bringing new life, reconciliation,*

and the presence of Christ to all people, and to helping each person reflect the character of Christ."

What should we be doing as we wait?

Engage in ministry and prepare the ground!

Extensive work has been done through The Confessing Movement and other renewal groups including the WCA to outline a number of strategic directions and emphases many believe the Holy Spirit will use to prepare the ground for spiritual and missional fruitfulness. A few questions will give a hint of the kind of preparation needed.

- Does your church have a robust ministry of groups for accountable discipleship?
- Has your congregation surveyed your community to discover the people and needs there?
- Do you have an intentional plan to respond to the needs of marginalized people near you?
- Does your church have mission partnerships? Locally? Nationally? Globally?
- Does your congregation have a vital prayer ministry?

The launch of a new Methodism will come in God's time. As we prepare the ground in our hearts and in our congregations, the Holy Spirit will work to bring forth the crop. We have more than enough to do while we wait! ■



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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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