

# We Confess

NEWSLETTER OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT  
WITHIN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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## Doctrinal Reinvigoration

BY DR. MAXIE DUNNAM

There are seasons in our life and particular occasions that are stamped in our memories because they have such special meaning. An event in April 1994 is such a memory for me. It was a kind of pivotal occasion in a long season of debate, tension, dialogue, General Conference action and failure to act in our United Methodist Church. I was honored to be included with Bishop William R. Cannon and Dr. Thomas Oden in inviting a group to conference together about the future of our United Methodist Church.

We were concerned about the church's doctrinal failing and neglect. Dr. James Heidinger has brilliantly written about this in his *The Rise of Theological Liberalism and the Decline of American Methodism*. His book is a brilliant assessment, especially of the trivialization of doctrine and theology. The Re-Imagining Conference, held in Minneapolis November 4-7, 1993, with the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries as a primary sponsor and financial supporter, was a graphic witness of where we were in our disregard for and diminishing of classic, biblical, orthodox theology. The following statement by feminist theologian Delores Williams drew applause: "I don't think we need a theory of the atonement at all. I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff."

Radical, absurd teaching like that was the norm of the conference, a kind of climax to ongoing heretical teaching that forced us to respond. So we gathered in Atlanta to explore where we were and where we were going as a denomination. We issued the following statement: "In order to enact the Discipline's call to 'doctrinal reinvigoration,' and to avoid schism and prevent mass exodus, we intend to form a Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church." So The Confessing Movement was birthed.

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## [DUNNAM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

Fast forward 25 years to St. Louis, February 23-26, 2019. A special session of the General conference was called by our bishops to vote on A WAY FORWARD for our UMC. The Church was saved from implosion or explosion at the 2016 General Conference. At the insistence of the Conference, the bishops were charged with "saving" the church that was clearly divided and dysfunctional. The issues were both doctrine and discipline. The Confessing Movement had obviously not accomplished the mission of "doctrinal reinvigoration" and the church was in schism and on the edge of mass exodus.

So, where are we now?

Though we "won the vote" for the Traditional Plan which was the work of the renewal groups of which The Confessing Movement is a part, I left St. Louis spiritually and emotionally depleted. After the Traditional Plan was affirmed, the conference deteriorated into a shouting match of anger, hateful accusations, and clever debate and procedure to use the time and prevent the perfection of The Traditional Plan. I didn't ask with the Psalmist "Why": I knew why I was "downcast, O, my soul."

Fortunately, a week after St. Louis my wife and I, with three couples from our church, went to Cuba for a week to explore what I had been hearing about revival there. I had visited Cuba twice before and I knew revival was taking place, especially in the Methodist Church of Cuba. I was not prepared, however, for the robust power of the Holy Spirit demonstrated in the church. It was a redemptive, spiritual/emotional time of recovery in the wake of St. Louis. I write of that to set the stage for a picture of irony that is a challenging indication of where we are in the UMC.



**DR. MAXIE DUNNAM , VICE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT AND FORMER PRESIDENT AND CHANCELLOR OF ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, IS NOW SENIOR PASTOR EMERITUS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CCGLOBAL AT CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN MEMPHIS.**

The bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba, a dynamic Spirit-filled, Spirited-guided leader, normally would have attended our special General conference but he was needed at home that week in Cuba. The Communist government was pushing a legal, governmental redefinition of marriage from the existing Christian position to a one person/one person definition. It was exciting to hear their stories and see signs of their protest.

I had come from St. Louis where I and others had to oppose a highly emotionally charged effort by a part of our United Methodist Church to change our Biblically-grounded definition of marriage as the life-long covenant between one man and one woman. The bishop had stayed in his country to lead his church in opposing the government's redefinition of traditional marriage. I returned from Cuba more convinced than I was in 1994, that our church is in desperate need of doctrinal reinvigoration. That's the reason The Confessing Movement must make a new, fresh, and deep commitment to lead the church in recovering our theological/doctrinal perspective.

We need all the help we can get!

# Talk of Separation

BY PATRICIA MILLER

We praise the miraculous outcome of General Conference (GC) with the passing of the Traditional Plan. The division/chasm/schism within the United Methodist Church was never more obvious than at GC 2019. If that weren't clear enough, the actions and conduct following the gathering are even more egregious. There has been open and blatant declarations to violate the decision of GC 2019 with disobedience increasing.

As a result, I have initiated conversation with key leaders within the UMC. They represent those supporting the Traditional Plan and the One Church Plan. The conversations have gone exceedingly well, better than I would have expected. There continues to be more and more interest in some form of separation. Generally there are three options for the future of the UMC:

- 1 | Stay in the denomination and continue to "fight" it out at GC 2020 and beyond.
- 2 | Adopt some form of separation proposed in the Connectional Conference Plan (CCP) as described by the Commission On A Way Forward. There is a similar proposal to the CCP that would have less connection and be simpler.
- 3 | A complete separation forming two new denominations.

There is no perfect proposal. All of them have advantages and disadvantages. There is no agreed upon definition of separation.

Everyone with whom I have spoken agrees no one wants another General Conference like we just had in St. Louis. "Not another St. Louis." Many agree that some sort of separation is the only option but most want a worldwide church. The UMC is already two churches trying to live together as one. Individuals who have always supported unity, people I would never imagine could support separation, are now talking about separation and being convinced the UMC cannot continue as it has since 1972 when the debate over homosexuality began. Some are saying we should have separated several years ago. Thus the in-depth conversations with key leaders will consider options including a new form of unity and a form of separation. A new structure agreement needs to be reached before GC 2020.

Most new talk is centered around 2 denominations. If a plan of separation is to pass, agreement between the supporters of the One Church Plan and the Traditional Plan needs to be reached. The Confessing Movement and other renewal groups are working together toward this end.

Time is short. Petitions need to be drafted no later than August 2019 and filed by the middle of September if they are to be considered at the 2020 GC.

*Please continue to pray for the UMC and the election of Delegates to GC2020.*



*The Confessing Movement is committed to the authority of Scripture and will "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints."*





BY DR. RILEY CASE

## DID GC 2019 PROVIDE US

# A Way Forward?

Those of us who breathe United Methodism are very much aware of what has been happening in the denomination the past two months. The General Conference (GC) was held in St. Louis February 23-26. After two and a half years of preparation and planning it was hoped the conference would determine a “Way Forward” for UMs so that we might have unity as we seek to live out Christ’s mission for the church. There needed to be some agreement as to how the church understood marriage (as between a man and a woman or between any two persons) and how it understood the practice of homosexuality (incompatible with Christian teaching or a blessing from God to be used in Christian service). The two viable options were the *One Church Plan* which called for deleting any reference to marriage as between a man and a woman and all negative language in the Book of Discipline in regard to homosexual practice, or the *Traditional Plan* which would uphold the historic stance of the Bible and the Church that marriage is between a man and a woman and that Christians are called in sexual relationships to be faithful in marriage and celibate in singleness. The Traditional Plan also called for more accountability in the church since pockets of United Methodism are openly defying United Methodist doctrine on matters of sexuality. In the western jurisdiction a “married” lesbian woman, Karen Oliveto, was even elected bishop.

The Conference voted to support the Traditional Plan. Many of us hoped that with this decision the church would accept the actions of the GC as God’s will for our church’s Way Forward and would commit itself to service to the world under the

guidance of the Discipline. Unfortunately, the exact opposite is taking place. A sizable number of bishops, who had assumed that the GC would support the One Church Plan, indicated they would not accept the actions of the GC. As one bishop put it: “we will not be beholden to the actions of the 2019 General Conference.” Clergy groups in a number of cities took out ads in newspapers apologizing to the LGBTQ community for the “hateful” actions of their fellow UMs.

Whole conferences announced their intention to operate in direct defiance to the actions of the highest legislative body in the church.

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Thus, the church is in crisis. The center is not holding. That which is supposed to unite us, core beliefs and values as summarized in the church’s constitution, is being opposed. What is discouraging is that opposition is not just coming from people on the fringe but from many persons in leadership: bishops, some pastors of large churches, seminary presidents, boards and agency personnel. As a result, persons and churches are talking about leaving the denomination, some on the progressive side who say they cannot live in such a hateful and judgmental denomination and some on the evangelical side who feel they have been bullied and openly attacked by their own leadership for affirming that which the church has upheld ever since 1784 (when Methodism was first organized in America).

But maybe, just maybe, there is reason for hope.

# Reasons for ENCOURAGEMENT as the Result of CG 2019

BY DR. RILEY CASE

- .... For one, the General Conference has affirmed the historic stance of the church in regard to homosexual practice.
- .... We are truly becoming a global church. Delegates from Africa, the Philippines and northern Europe are claiming their rightful place as movers and decision-makers in the church. We will see more of this in the future.
- .... Evangelical and traditionalist leaders are in serious discussions about where the church should move next. To this point the progressive establishment institutionalists, namely some of the bishops, the seminaries and the boards and agencies, have operated with no respect for those who hold to historic Christianity (evangelicals). Evangelicals have spoken about amicable separation before but were always accused of being divisive and narrow. Now others are speaking about some sort of separation.
- .... Evangelical churches appear to be growing or holding their own on their American scene. Outside of America the church is thriving, especially in Africa. Since the 1968 merger the overseas conferences of the United Methodist Church have seen something like a 5 million membership increase even as the U.S. church has declined by 4 million members.
- .... Some of our people who have recently expressed discouragement and unhappiness over the direction of the United Methodist church are suddenly more hopeful.



## HOW DOES BEING A WORLD-WIDE DENOMINATION AFFECT GENERAL CONFERENCE 2020?

At a breakfast gathering in St. Louis during General Conference 2019, Dr. Jerry Kulah, Dean of the Graduate School of Theology, United Methodist University in Liberia, shared the following words:

“Please understand me when I say that the vast majority of African United Methodists will never, ever trade Jesus and the truth of the Bible for money. We will walk alone if necessary, and yet we are confident the ties of Christian fellowship we have with friends here in U.S. will not be severed even if they too must walk apart from a church that would adopt the One Church Plan. “

The African votes were vital to the passing of the Traditional Plan in 2019. All new delegates will be elected for 2020 and 2024 and, due to changes in membership, Africa will gain an additional 18 delegates. The U.S. delegation will lose 22. As a result, the voices of our bold and faithful African brothers and sisters will be even stronger.



