



LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR NEWS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE COMMON WITNESS COALITION

- Affirmation Methodists for LGBTQ Concerns • Black Methodists for Church Renewal •
- Methodist Federation for Social Action •
- National Federation of Asian American United Methodists •
- Native American International Caucus • Reconciling Ministries Network •
- United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities •

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Volume 1, Issue 11

Bishop Talbert: A Call to Biblical Obedience

by Rev. Lois McCullen Parr

“When Moses confronted Pharaoh, sharing God’s word, saying ‘let my people go,’ Pharaoh hardened his heart,” said Bishop Melvin Talbert at the LYN Tabernacle. “In the case of this general church it has hardened its heart to GLBT people.

“I stand before you here this afternoon and I declare that God has already settled his matter: all human beings are created in the image of God. There are no exceptions, no exclusions. We belong to the family of God.

“At the same time, I declare to you that the derogatory language and restrictive laws in the Book of Discipline are immoral, and unjust and no longer deserve our loyalty and obedience.”

The LYN Tabernacle crowd rose to its feet, applauding and shouting “Amen!” and “Yes!” on this last day of General Conference, as the planned noontime event featured Talbert in an event to support United Methodist clergy who have signed a pledge to marriage equality for all couples.

Talbert said that the “time has come for those of us who are faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to do what is required of us.” The Retired Bishop went on to remind the LYN crowd of the old story of Jesus’ teaching to love God and neighbor, according to the Gospel of Luke.

As Jesus said to the young lawyer, “you have answered rightly: do this and live,” Talbert said to the gathered Coalition: “my brothers and sisters I declare to you that

same Gospel imperative: do this and live. In light of the actions taken by the General Conference, the time has come to act and to invite others to join what I’m calling an act of Biblical obedience.

“You see, we, too, have the good book on our side,” he said, “our Biblical marching orders.” Talbert was joined at the dais by Retired Bishops Judy Craig, Violet Fisher, Elias Galvan, Susan Hassinger, Don Ott, Sharon Rader, Roy Sano, and Jack Tuell; and active Bishops Warner Brown, Sally Dyck, Grant Hagiya, Bob Hoshibata, John Schol, and Mary Ann Swenson. “I call on the clergy who have signed the pledge to stand firm in their resolve to perform marriages among same-sex couples and to do so in the normal course of their pastoral duties,” he said. “Encourage your congregations to support you by taking actions to support you in your efforts to be faithful to the Gospel by taking action [to use] your local church facilities for such marriages.”

RMN Board Member Rev. David Meredith said about the event: “In the Tampa Tabernacle, the people of God encountered the Divine Presence today. Like the Tabernacle of scripture, a people wandering for 40 years in the wilderness of unjust law, immoral teaching, and dehumanizing actions toward LGBT persons experienced the presence of God.

“While the Westboro Baptists hated gays on the sidewalk outside using posters, bullhorns, and angry actions, inside

same-gender loving couples, leading laity and clergy of Reconciling Congregations, and prophetic activists for marriage equality created an opportunity for something more,” he said.

The tent was filled to capacity with people, music, clergy, and with Bishops – “all ready to apply the Gospel to ministry,” said RMN Executive Director Troy Plummer, who described how we were called to step out as pastors and congregations to serve all God’s people, so that our marriages are conducted by our pastors in our churches.

“As the last planned event in the Tabernacle, to end our time of these two weeks charts a course of hope,” said Plummer.

“Yesterday we experienced disorder,” said Rev. Marti Scott, Pastor of Euclid Ave.

United Methodist Church in Oak Park, Illinois and convener of the NIC RMN Task Force. “We are in ministry in the new order: ministry with ALL.”

Plummer said we were called to “go forth and do likewise.”

The event ended in song led by Foundry UMC, Mark Miller’s “Draw the Circle Wide,” and the traditional closing blessing used in marriage ceremonies, from the United Methodist Book of Worship: “...and now, may those to whom love is a stranger find in you generous friends.”

Amen.



Bishop Talbert addresses a crowd of over 200 General Conference delegates, volunteers, and guests. Photo by Tom Cullens.

Reconciling Ministries Network is Growing!

Rachel Harvey is ready to move beyond General Conference. Reconciling Ministries will be hiring regional organizers to add trainers so that by the end of 2013 RMN will have 300 people ready to resource congregations that are ready to welcome LGBT people. RMN just passed 500 congregations and has another 500 congregations in the wings that are involved in the reconciling process.

When asked for a word of hope for United Methodists, Rachel Harvey, Associ-

ate Director of Reconciling Ministries Network said,

“In my own personal life, I find hope in the life-giving relationships I have, and that is always the start of the reconciling process. And so I encourage you to reach out and get to know the person sitting next to you in the pew or the person giving you coffee in the coffee hours, and begin to talk about what it means to have gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people within our congregations. Are you proud of your con-

gregation? Do you want people to know that your congregation is a safe place?”

One example of the process is Minnetonka United Methodist Church. The Rev. Dave Nuckols, pastor of Minnetonka UMC, said, “The reconciling process is an exercise in ‘holy conversation’ within a single congregation. It is a discernment process for that group of believers to hear where God is leading them as they ask, what kind of congregation should we become?”

Members of the Minnetonka UMC spent a year in conversation about formally becoming a Reconciling Congregation. After studying the issue of homosexuality and voting to be open and welcoming to all persons, including people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, they adopted the following statement:

“The vision of Minnetonka United Methodist Church is to be caring, inclusive and spirit-filled in all that we do. Our commitment is to follow Christ’s example and, as a Reconciling Congregation, to welcome persons of all sexual identities and orientations into this faith community.”

Their reconciling journey did not “end” with the decision to become a Reconciling Congregation. As a Reconciling Congregation, they become members of the national Reconciling Ministries Network. They added reconciling language to their church website and bulletins. Their Reconciling Task Force continues to meet and to plan

future opportunities and events around issues involving welcoming and advocacy. New members are invited to participate on the Reconciling Task Force at any time. This is one way to discover more about God’s plan for us as a Reconciling Congregation.

There is no single “correct way” to do reconciling. It helps to consult with a good “lay coach” who has been through this process and is aware of the wide variety of ways that reconciling can be done successfully. The process needs to have legitimacy, ongoing support and a graceful conclusion. Be sure to engage lay leadership and garner support from the clergy. Pastors should be particularly attentive to the pastoral care needs of parishioners who may have special needs during the on-going discussion.

Every congregation is different. Some are urban, suburban, or rural and of different sizes. Cultural diversity and theological perspectives come into play along with different understandings of the scripture. Personal experiences of “coming out” and actions in the civic arena need to be assessed? All of these factors can be taken into account when planning a specific educational road map for your congregation.

There are now hundreds of Reconciling Congregations across the country. There is support from other reconciling congregations the national office and all across the country. If you haven’t started, call RMN at 773-736-5526.





Worship Coordinator Rev. DeLyn Celec and Nicholas Ruxton, a sophomore in the JustFaith program at Shenandoah University, provide music during the "Love Your Neighbor" worship service on Sunday, April 29. Photo by Ben Roe.

Thank You from DeLyn Celec

*Thanks to all who helped create a worship celebration that fed many.
You showed love for neighbors in many ways.*

*Thank you to all who arrived early, volunteering to do "whatever needs to be done."
Thank you for proceeding to do so, humbly and lovingly.*

Thank you to all who came to worship with us, some of whom coming from other worship services to support and receive support.

*Thank you to those who led worship in artful expressions of movement, music and word.
Thank you to those who crafted our worship-scape that embodied beauty. Thanks, also, to those who remained afterward to clean it.*

Thank you to those who applied the best principles of theater to our organization and presentation of the gathered body.

*Thank you to those who transported worship leaders, collected ordinary items to be used in extraordinary ways, and offered nourishment to people who were behind the scenes.
Thank you to all who spent time preparing us for that day, many of whom could not be present.*

Thank you to the proclaimer of God's strong word and the celebrants of a hopeful communion liturgy.

The handiwork of many was viewed, heard, and felt in our Worship Celebration of the Love Your Neighbor Coalition. Gratitude abounds!

My new life in a minority: One United Methodist's perspective

Excerpt of Blog Posts in GC2012Conversations

By Stephen Drachler

For the first time in my life in The United Methodist Church, I am in a minority on something that is very important. I am a minority in The United Methodist Church because I voted during the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, Fla., to bring gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people into full connection with our denomination.

That means I support ordaining gay and lesbian pastors. I support allowing our pastors to officiate over same-gender weddings and union ceremonies. I support opening every door, every window, and every nook and cranny in our church to any person who professes faith in Jesus Christ and strives to move toward perfection.

Until recent years, I voted for policies of exclusion. I voted not to allow self-avowed gays and lesbians to be ordained, and not to allow our churches to hold same gender weddings or union ceremonies. My votes added to the pain of those who were excluded, and, for that, I am truly sorry.

My views and my understanding of Scripture on these issues began to change as I listened to venerated United Methodist bishops like Jack Tuell, Joe Yeakel and William Boyd Grove reflect on similar struggles. I watched the church endure painful public trials of pastors who stepped forward in acts of conscience to reveal their true selves by coming out as lesbians. I paid close attention to the theological debates taking place in other Protestant denominations.

Most of all, I've prayed about this and have come to the conclusion that I am doing the right thing. This is a matter where interpretation of Scripture has changed over time. Remember, at one time, citing Scripture, the church barred women from our pulpits. Some said slavery was biblical. Some said the Bible tells us the eating of vegetables is a sign of weakness.

Early in the General Conference, Bishop James R. King Jr. of South Georgia preached from the Gospel of Mark, citing Jesus's call

to follow him. Without exception, Jesus welcomed the poor and the marginalized into the early church and its ministry.

"Hear this message... All means all," King declared.

If, for some reason, I am not right, I am ready to stand before God on my day of judgment. If I am wrong in my belief we should be open to all who profess their belief in Jesus Christ, our sense of Wesleyan mission and desire to serve him in ordained ministry, I will seek God's forgiveness. Frankly, I don't think I will have to do that.

Stephen Drachler is a lay delegate to General Conference from the Susquehanna Annual Conference.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Drachler was the delegate who challenged Bishop Coyner's announcement that the Thursday, May 3 afternoon session would be closed to visitors.



<http://www.gc2012conversations.com/2012/05/04/my-new-life-in-a-minority-one-united-methodists-perspective/>

gc12.org

#gc12love



A friendly Blackhawks/Red Wings hockey rivalry and an impromptu quote board kept Editors Jenn Peterson, left, and Erik Alsgaard, right, humming along through the hectic pace of putting together the Love Your Neighbor News. Photo by Ben Roe.

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Judicial Council Rules ‘Plan UMC’ Unconstitutional

By Linda Bloom
Reprinted courtesy of UMNS.

A compromise restructure plan for The United Methodist Church, adopted earlier this week by the 2012 General Conference, was declared “unconstitutional” May 4.

That unanimous ruling came from the nine-member United Methodist Judicial Council, which had been asked by General Conference to make a declaratory decision on the constitutionality of “Plan UMC.”

“Under the Constitution, the creation and establishment of general Church board and agencies, the fixing of their structure, the determination of their functions, duties and responsibilities, and the establishing of Church priorities are legislative functions reserved to the General Conference alone,” said Judicial Council Decision No. 1210. “These legislative functions may not be delegated.”

The establishment of a “General Council for Strategy and Oversight” under Plan UMC does not meet the test of constitutionality because it intrudes into the constitutional authority of the Council of Bishops for general oversight of the denomination, the court found, and “commingles” the role of the bishops and the strategy and oversight council.

“It creates an overlapping authority for which no constitutional authorization exists,” the decision said.

The plan also “unconstitutionally delegates” the General Conference’s authority for distributing funds to the General Council for Strategy and Oversight.

Adopted on May 2

As adopted on May 2, Plan UMC would have slightly re-aligned the denomination’s 13 general agencies.

The plan retained the General Council on Finance and Administration and four general program boards — Higher Educa-

tion, Global Ministries, Church and Society and Discipleship — but combined the commissions on the Status and Role of Women and Religion and Race into a “Committee on Inclusiveness.” The current Commission on Archives and History would become a committee of the finance agency.

Those groups would report to the 45-member oversight council, led by an elected executive general secretary who cannot be a bishop.

Five independent agencies would report directly to General Conference under Plan UMC. Those agencies are United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, the Board of Pension and Health Benefits, United Methodist Publishing House and United Methodist Communications.

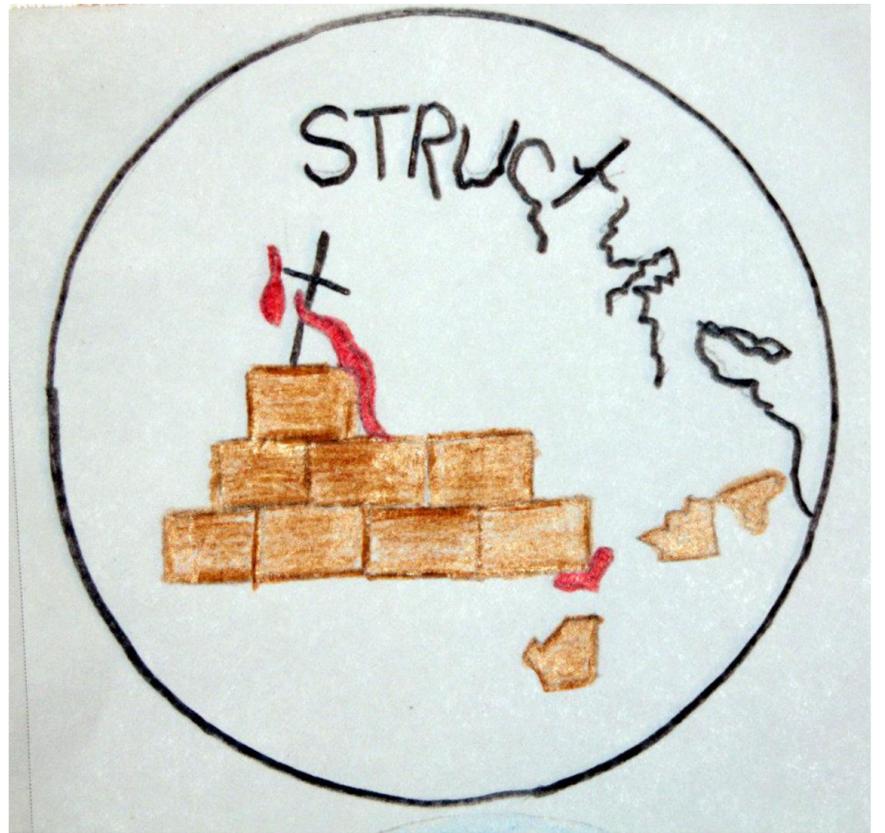
In its decision, the Judicial Council acknowledged the legislative authority of General Conference. “In reviewing acts of the General Conference for constitutionality, our first inclination is to save legislation, if at all possible, and not destroy,” the court said.

“Although the adoption of Plan UMC by the General Conference came through a tortured course, and outside of the established legislative processes, we do not review those processes. Our review in this case is confined to constitutionality.

“We have reviewed the plan to determine whether any part, portion or all of Plan UMC can be saved and conclude that it cannot.”

Under the constitution, General Conference can only delegate the work of promotion and administration to the boards and agencies it creates, the Judicial Council said in its decision.

“Such boards and agencies as the General Conference establishes under its constitutional authority may not determine policies of the Church, nor may they determine their own functions except as such action is consistent with actions already taken by the General Conference.”



Mandala by Mittie Quinn.

Two other referrals

The Judicial Council decided to defer opinions on two other referrals from General Conference to its fall meeting.

On May 3, General Conference asked the council for a declaratory decision on the constitutionality of Calendar Item 20, which relates to the balance of clergy and laity at annual (regional) conference sessions.

On May 4, General Conference asked the council for a declaratory decision on the constitutionality of Calendar Item 355, which removes guaranteed appointments to clergy.

In both Memorandum 1209, on the clergy-laity matter, and Memorandum 1211, on the guaranteed appointment matter, issued May 4, Judicial Council said it “does not have sufficient time to process the case and render an opinion in response to this request before adjournment of the 2012 General Conference. This matter is deferred to the Fall 2012 Docket.”

“We Are Already Part of the Church”

Members of the Love Your Neighbor Coalition responded with grief to The United Methodist Church General Conference’s vote to continue its ban against gay and lesbian people. Efforts to exclude transgender people from membership in the denomination failed to make it out of committee.

Motions to remove the language that “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching” was defeated, as was a petition that would acknowledge the honesty that faithful United Methodists disagree on the place of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the church was defeated. No further motions related to human sexuality were considered. The United Methodist Church General Conference met in Tampa, Florida from April 24 until May 4.

Supporters of full inclusion sang and served communion to all. The presiding bishop, Michael Coyner of the Indiana Conference, cited the witness as a “security concern” and source of confusion. He dismissed the plenary session for lunch and announced that only delegates would be allowed back into the hall at the end of the lunch break. LGBT people and supporters remained in the plenary hall singing while the lights were shut off around them. It was then announced that all legislation would be postponed and referred to the Agenda and Calendar group. Leaders of the demonstration were told that the legislation was postponed to avoid more harm to LGBT people and their supporters.

Love Your Neighbor is a coalition of Affirmation: United Methodists, Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), Meth-

odist Federation for Social Action (MESA), the National Federation of Asian American United Methodists (NFAAUM), the Native American International Caucus of The United Methodist Church (NAIC), and Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) and the United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities (UMAMD). Together, the coalition works for a more inclusive church for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people—always in a broader context that strives for justice around issues of race, gender, global partnerships, peace, stewardship of creation and economic justice.

Full text of the statement is below:

Today The United Methodist Church voted to maintain its policy of exclusion and discrimination. This decision causes our hearts to grieve. We grieve for the young people who long for a church that speaks to them, their friends, and family. We grieve for the parents who are waiting to hear a word of hope from the pulpit. We grieve for the people around the world who fear for their lives. The United Methodist Church had an opportunity to offer love, grace, and hope. Sadly, we did not take that opportunity.

The Love Your Neighbor Coalition continues to see signs of progress, even in the midst of the disappointment of this General Conference. The conversation about the faith of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender people and allies has gone deeper and broader than ever before. We published regular communications in Swahili, French, Portuguese and Spanish. We held deep conversations with international delegates from Europe, Africa, and Asia. We have been listening, and we understand that the topic of human sexuality is a delicate and vital conversation, not just in the United States, but in every country.

The Holy Spirit is still moving, not just in The United Methodist Church, but in the world. At this General Conference, we pitched a tent near the Convention Center. The tent was a tabernacle, a place of rest, a community hub, and holy ground. And we can see that our tent is getting bigger. The push for full inclusion includes several coalition partners, with more being added. The tent will continue to grow over the next four years until we meet in General Conference again.

The church is more diverse than ever, and we celebrate the growing international presence in The United Methodist Church. The more diverse we become, the more important it will be to include our friends and family, no who they are, where they live, and who they love.

God’s love is for all, and we are made in the image of God. There is no keeping us out. We are already a part of this church. We are people who understand we are all children of God, working for racial justice, full inclusiveness, celebrating people of all gender identities, being global and connectional, peacefully pursuing self-determination and religious expression, stewardship of creation, and economic justice. We will move forward and become the church we know God is calling us to be.

Chaplains are here for you!

The Love Your Neighbor Coalition recognizes that General Conference can be a stressful and sensitive time for many.

Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns is providing a Chaplain hotline that will be staffed

24 hours a day until May 25th.

Call 813-200-8860.



Northern Illinois Conference delegates and volunteers at the “Altar For All” rally celebrating clergy who vow to minister to all couples regardless of gender. Photo by Tom Cullens.

A pastoral letter to the United Methodist Church:

My people are met with their people and all of those people are God's people. The United Methodist Church's General Conference was held this week in Tampa, FL and lay and clergy delegates of many stripes and persuasions engaged in "holy conferencing" – and of a lot of realpolitiking too.

This is the 5th General Conference that since I was ordained as a United Methodist pastor in 1996. I've spent the entirety of my young adult years hoping and yearning for the Church I love to truly be the most Christ-like and loving that it can be. At times it feels like I've been waiting in vain.

I'm what's known as a "straight ally" of the LGBTIQ community. But I wasn't always this way. I grew up in Minnesota with a fairly typical upbringing where my culture and society sadly taught that homosexuality was "wrong" and/or "evil." My peers reinforced this and I engaged in numerous games of "Smear the Queer," told my share of gay jokes, and even engaged in some teasing and bullying of gays (or persons thought to be gay).

I eventually outgrew and shed that homophobia. Jesus never spoke about it so it couldn't be a primary concern of God's. My increased awareness of Biblical scholarship which shows that the 6 verses in the Bible that have been said to "clearly oppose homosexuality" do not clearly do that at all. Yet, more than reading the insights of Bible scholars was the profound impact of actually getting to know actual living, breathing gays and lesbians. I met several gay people during my college years and they seemed, well, more like ordinary college students than not. And then after college I shared a house with several male housemates for a couple of years. Several of them happened to be gay. Actually sharing space and living life with my friends firmly showed me that they indeed are more like me than not — with some of them being tidier than me and, to my amazement, some of them were even more likely than me to leave socks laying on the floor or forget to wash the dishes!

Then I went to seminary, read even more Biblical scholarship debunking the typical ways of understanding those "clobber verses," and met even more gay and lesbian people. It seemed obvious that my generation ("GenX") was increasingly tolerant, accepting, and even affirming of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. I was aware that most of many of my peers were leaving the Church because they felt that it was too exclusive, judgmental, and, well, mean.

I, however, felt a profound sense that the UMC would eventually come to its senses and join the growing number of mainline denominations that were also shifting toward full inclusion of gays and lesbians. I sensed that it's not a matter of whether or not the UMC will become gay-friendly, but when.

With that confidence in mind, I was ordained, appointed to my first church, and have pastored several churches. I've performed some 50 weddings for couples in love. All but two of those couples were couples that were living together before they married. I never feel a need to instruct them to not live together before I would agree to marry them. Instead, I did as we United Methodists tend to do — err on the side of grace. We'd rather celebrate a couple's love and offer an open door to the Church than to be legalistic and close the door on them.

Other mainline Protestant denominations have now each repealed their formerly restrictive prohibitions and have become officially gay-friendly, reconciling, welcoming and affirming denominations. The Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and United Church of Christ, have dropped prohibitions against LGBT people.

The United Methodist Church is the nation's 2nd largest Protestant denomination and we're by far the largest mainline Protestant denomination. Those other brave mainline Churches have stepped forward in faith and have taken the measures needed to allow today's people to hear the good news of the Gospel. It's time for us to do as well. Our children and our grandchildren are counting on us—but I wonder when it will happen.

In Christian love,
Rev. Roger Wolsey
Director, Wesley Foundation, University of Colorado-Boulder
Author, "Kissing Fish: christianity for people who don't like christianity"

Can we be like drops of water falling on the stone
Splashing, breaking, dispersing in air
Weaker than the stone by far but be aware
That as time goes by the rock will wear away
And the water comes again

- Holly Near

Believers are obligated to hope.

-Bishop Yvette Flunder



"Why Do You Do This?"

by Mittie Quinn

Here is what people say to my face because I am a straight ally: "Why are YOU doing this? Are you gay? Do you have a gay child? Is your partner gay? NO? Then YOU are ruining our church! Why don't you just go somewhere else?"

Well, I guess it's because I'm a United Methodist through and through. The baptismal font in the First Methodist Church of Potsdam, NY, where I grew up, was donated in memory of my grandparents. "Jesus Loves Me" is deep in my soul. I was on a first name basis with all the "pillar people:" the church treasurer, the chair of trustees, the president of the UMW, even though I was a 7-year-old kid. I was a member of the choir, a member of the MYF, on the Conference Youth Council. I was elected as an equalizing member to Annual Conference as a teen. As a young adult, I learned about Methodism and John Wesley's Quadrilateral. The Bible made sense. I read about Jesus Christ, a man, who taught about God's Love and spoke about the importance of that Love being more important than the laws of the Old Testament. This is my church too!

But I'm having trouble finding that church in the proceedings that are going on at GC. It's as if no one knows who Wesley is anymore. Yesterday, someone in the plenary stood up and quoted scripture to defend his position on supporting Israel in their hostility towards Palestine, because our friendship with Israel is Biblical. This morning, a TRANSLATOR apologized for what he had to say in translating for a Central Conference Delegate who was using

slandorous words against LGBT people. It is a sad sad day.

It's a sad day when we argue that it's important to hold our stock in Caterpillar, Hewlett Packard and Motorola because it allows us to have a voice in what they do (regardless of the fact that they make weapons that kill Palestinians); but we will not "hold our stock" in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, although doing so would allow us the same participation in that organization.

It is sad that some of my UM brothers and sisters insist that same gender love is a sin because it says so in the Bible; but those same brothers and sisters eat shrimp and don't stone their children if they are disrespectful. How can you follow some laws and not others?

I have known for some time that we don't agree on scripture; I have known for some time that we don't agree about the science of sexuality and gender identity; I have known for some time that we don't agree about how much weight each pillar on the quadrilateral gets; BUT I didn't know that we don't agree on God's ubiquitous, unbounded love. I feel very, very sad for those who don't know that God Loves us ALL.

Mittie Quinn is a laymember of Dumbarton UMC in Washington, D.C. and Education Coordinator for the Baltimore Washington Area Reconciling United Methodists (BWARM.)



Hope of the World

Georgia E. Harkness

Hope of the world, O Christ of great compassion:
speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.
Save us, your people, from consuming passion,
who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.

Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,
bringing to hungry souls the bread of life:
still let your Spirit unto us be given
to heal earth's wounds and end our bitter strife.

Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,
showing to wandering souls the path of light:
walk now beside us lest the tempting byways
lure us away from you to endless night.

Hope of the world, who by your cross did save us
from death and dark despair, from sin and guilt:
we render back the love your mercy gave us;
take now our lives and use them as you will.

Hope of the world, O Christ, o'er death victorious,
who by this sign did conquer grief and pain:
we would be faithful to your gospel glorious;
you are our Lord, and you forever reign!

Bishop Wenner Feels Pain, Pleads for Love and Compassion

My sisters and brothers in Christ, I stand before you on behalf of the bishop, called by The [Book of] Discipline to be the shepherd of the whole flock and thereby provide leadership with the goal of understanding, reconciliation, and unity within the church. All people, all persons are individuals of sacred worth, all people are God's beloved children. This is our

of you in the of Jesus Christ, and we are here committed to stay in holy conferencing with all of you who are in this room, in these days at General Conference and into the future. We ask you gathered here to join us in that commitment to holy conferencing and to steps towards unity which help to recognize the division we are in, knowing at the same time that God, the God who

another. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves, instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus, may Christ Jesus the resurrected Lord guide us in his attitude of love, compassion, grace as we move on. God bless us all in this holy conferencing at the general conference. Amen.

be your people in this place, convinced and convicted to do your will, to share your love, so that we might go forth to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Heal us, good God, heal us. Fill us with Spirit, fill us with courage to do what is right.

We pray this in the name of Jesus who saves us and who always holds us. Amen.



Rosemarie Wenner, Bishop of the Germany Episcopal Area, speaks before the plenary of the 2012 General Conference, Thursday afternoon, May 3. Photo courtesy UMNS.

deep conviction. With deep pain, we stay on your side: delegates, visitors, members of The United Methodist Church, and followers of Jesus Christ. We are your bishops, dear sisters and brothers who are gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual people. You have been hurt by actions of the General Conference and by the polity of The United Methodist Church. I feel your pain. We see your pain.

We stand at the side of all of you delegates called to represent the annual conference you come from, called to holy conferencing, to find ways how we live as one church in our deep disagreement we are in on the question and the concerns how we are faithful disciples in our disagreements. I urge to all of us that we stay to the commitment of holy conferencing, that we look in one another's eyes and see the face of Jesus Christ in the eye, in the face of the other. That we respect, that all of us are called by God and loved by God. We the bishops are called to offer grace upon grace on all

is with us in Jesus Christ, guide us through the Holy Spirit, will guide us through these deep difficulties we are in, so that we really are enabled and guided to do what we are called to do, in making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Join me in that prayer as we continue our conferencing in the deep spirit of respect, in the spirit of engaging with each other in a spirit of love and most of all in a spirit of compassion towards all those who are hurt by the actions we are taking and by the polity of our church, respecting each other in finding ways to minister to all God's people and to reach out to all God's people throughout the world.

Let me close with a scripture reading from Philippians 2:1-5, before I ask our brother Frank Wulf to lead us in a prayer. "Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united and agreeing with each

I feel your pain. We see your pain.

-Bishop Rosemarie Wenner

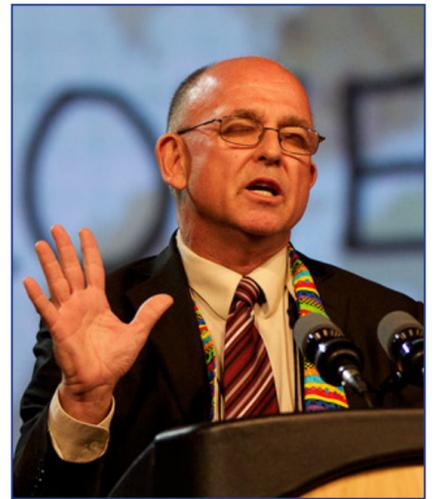
May I ask our brother Frank Wulf to lead us?

Bishops, members of the General Conference, friends and colleagues, let us pray.

Almighty and gracious God, we pray that your spirit will come down upon this broken community. Those of us who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, those of us who are appointed clergy and those of us who are lay, we pray to you, almighty God, that you will help us to find our voice, a voice that promotes healing and hope. We pray that you will help the General Conference to hear the words that we speak.

We pray that you will help the General Conference to know our hearts and to know that our spirits, our spirits that have been given wholly to you and to the work of your ministry to which Jesus has called us through your spirit. So let your spirit pour forth upon all of these people that are gathered here, those on the stage, those in the bleachers, those who are sitting around the tables and help us not to seek our own personal agendas but o God help us to seek your will which is always and everywhere love, to seek your will which is always and everywhere to draw in and to include, to seek your will which brings that peace which is real peace, and does not settle for any false peace.

O God, rest upon this general conference. Give us wisdom to understand and to interpret, to know each other, but most of all, God, give us hope for the future, hope that the good news of your Gospel may break forth among us, that we may truly



The Rev. Frank Wulf prays. Photo by Patrick Scriven.

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner is President of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church.

Rev. Frank Wulf is pastor of United University Church, a Presbyterian and United Methodist Congregation on the campus of USC in Los Angeles.

Hope for Tomorrow

Rev. John Oda

Hundreds of people worked very hard in the months and in fact years leading up this General Conference. But as the General Conference unfolded my hope dwindled. My optimism grew as



John Oda speaks at a gathering at the Love Your Neighbor Tabernacle. Photo by Ben Roe.

a proposal from Rev. Adam Hamilton, the pastor of the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas, was brought forth. His proposal acknowledged "our disagreement on a huge issue that is separating churches in North America today."

I and others took to the floor of the General Conference. We broke the bar and essentially shut the General Conference down. As I stood at the communion table, I closed my eyes and wept. In my mind I pictured all of my friends who were gay and lesbian, many of whom were standing next to me. I imagined all of the young people, especially the young LGBT people, who had been watching the actions of the General Conference online. The church had failed them. My hope was shattered; my hope smashed, my hope was gone.

I was ready to leave the United Methodist Church. They could keep their bloody anti-gay and dying church. Why should I stay in a homophobic church? Why should I continue to support a church that actually took a vote on whether or not God's uncon-

ditional love reaches everyone—and only passed it by 56%? I kept saying to myself, "This isn't the United Methodist Church that I know and love!"

And then I realized, this is precisely one of the reasons why I must stay. This is NOT the United Methodist Church back home that I know and love. This is precisely one of the reasons I now have hope for tomorrow.

Bonnie Beckonchrist, the Chair of the RMN, said to me later that afternoon "My hope is not in the larger UMC, it is in my church back home."

My own church, Lake Park UMC, is full of loving people who don't care whether you are gay or straight. We affirm the LGBT community. In fact our church is getting ready to launch an LGBT Bible Study this month.

I remain hopeful for tomorrow not because I agree with nor will I uphold the Book of Discipline but because I know back home the reality is a much different story. I will also remain hopeful because of

the Reconciling Ministries Network which brings hope to thousands and thousands of people, including myself. I will remain hopeful because of people like Jan Olson, Board Member of Affirmation, who told me, "I stay because if I don't who is going to continue the fight?" I too will stay to fight another day.

It was Martin Luther King Jr. who said, "We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope." And from Romans 12:12 "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

My sincere prayer for all of us is that we will continue to be the all inclusive church for today and tomorrow even if the United Methodist Church is one step behind us. And I hope to see you all at the Reconciling Ministries Network Convocation in 2013!

John Oda is a past Chair of Reconciling Ministries Network, current Board Member and Chair of the Grassroots Committee. He is the pastor of Lake Park United Methodist Church in Oakland California.

I Am Your Neighbor

by David Weekley

My name is David Weekley. I am a husband, a parent, and a grandparent.

I am an ordained United Methodist clergy and I will celebrate thirty years of ordained ministry next month despite any abusive language or actions happening across the street at our General Conference.

I am also an author. In February of 2011 I published my spiritual memoir, "In from the Wilderness: Sherman, she-r-man."

I wrote and published my book primarily for my sisters and brothers in The United Methodist Church.

I wrote it because I am also a transgender man, and I want you to understand who I am, just as we all long for others to understand as fully as possible who we are in our authenticity as human beings, as people of faith, and as children of God.

My book begins with a quote from a favorite psalm; one that has helped to strengthen and sustain me through many decades of life:

"O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways...Where could I go from your Spirit; how could I hide from your eyes? For it was you who knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" –Psalm 139:1-3, 13-14.

From my very earliest memories I knew two things to be fundamental truths: 1. God loves me 2. I was created transgender.

Of course, as a child I did not know the words "transgender" or gender identity. But from my earliest memories I could tell you I was a boy; and by the age of six, when I began kindergarten, I knew I was somehow different from other little boys.

For years I, and those who knew me, including my family, my teachers, neighbors, and friends, struggled to understand my transgender identity.

Some did this by trying to ignore the issue.

Many tried to engage it compassionately, others condemningly, and too many, cruelly; although we did not talk much about bullying back then.

Through it all I tried to understand myself, and my experience, in terms of my relationship with God.

From a young age I turned to stories about Jesus, and later to the gospel for strength, comfort, and guidance in life.

While I did not grow-up in the church, in my prayer life, in my daily conversations with people of faith, and in reading the Bible I experienced a loving and sustaining relationship with God.

I was very fortunate. I never believed God did not love me and value me, no matter what anybody said!

Along my journey I discovered many supportive adults in my adolescent years, including a physician who eventually connected me with a gender identity clinic in Cleveland, Ohio.

From the age of twenty-one through age twenty-four I worked with this team of professionals who helped me become the person I always knew myself to be—the man who stands before you today.

At the time I transitioned transgender people were encouraged not to tell anyone about their past.

I was told to fabricate a past, and only disclose my history if it was absolutely necessary.

This is what I did for thirty-three years. During those thirty-three years I accomplished many things I never dreamed would be possible for me in life.

I graduated with honors from college. I worked as a counselor in a mental health hospital.

I enrolled in graduate school and served as a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of Religion at Miami University.

And eventually I answered the call to ministry that had long been tugging on my heart and soul.

I hoped seminary might be the place where I could share my whole self and for the first time live authentically and openly as a transgender man and Christian.

But even in seminary, at that time it was not safe to reveal that part of my identity.

So I graduated from seminary and was

Our process of discernment led us to August 30, 2009 when, on a Sunday morning during worship, I shared my history as a transgender man with my congregation, with The United Methodist Church, and with the world.

We were very nervous, not knowing what to expect, but we knew it was the right thing to do.

Many things have happened since that Sabbath morning.

Many people have stood by us, offering support, practical advice, and hope.

(i.e. not transgender).

I believe Jesus informs us that how we are created by our diverse and wonderfully creative God is something to celebrate, not judge or condemn.

And I fully embrace Jesus' mandate for us to love one another, and to view one another as neighbor.

And of all the things I am, husband, parent, grandparent, clergy, author, transgender man, in the most authentic place of all that I am and of all God calls me to be, I am your neighbor.



Rev. David Weekley speaks at the Love Your Neighbor luncheon speaker series. Photo by Ben Roe.

ordained in The United Methodist Church in 1982 without anyone knowing this part of who I am.

I served several congregations.

I offered leadership in my annual conference, serving as dean of many camps and age groups.

I served on my Annual Conference Board of Church and Society.

I was a supervising elder and later a mentor to many candidates for the ordained ministry.

In my congregations I led weekly worship services, celebrated the sacraments, led Confirmation classes, taught Bible studies for many years leading Disciple Bible study groups.

I baptized and married many people.

I planned and led mission trips and engaged in outreach ministries in the communities in which I lived.

I officiated at the funerals and Celebrations of Life for many beloved church members and friends.

I enjoyed all these blessings for twenty-eight years.

Yet throughout these wonderful years I knew the day would come when God would lead me to tell my story to you, and to The United Methodist Church.

I prayed and believed this revelation would be positive and helpful.

I never knew when this time might be; I trusted in "Kairos"- in God's time.

Throughout these years I listened, and I observed my beloved denomination growing increasingly divided and conflicted first about sexual orientation; and more recently, about gender identity.

I knew the time was drawing closer, and in 2006 I began writing "In from the Wilderness" as one way to share my life with you.

Together, my wife, family, and I sought discernment for how, and when to tell our story.

Some have rejected me; some colleagues have questioned my ordination: some delegates at this General Conference deny my suitability for ordained ministry, and even my right to exist at all.

As legislative petitions at this General Conference illustrate, there are still those who want to deny the call of transgender persons into the ordained ministry of our denomination.

Because I had read petitions from the 2008 General Conference, and because of what I have personally experienced since 2009,

I petitioned our General Conference to begin a denominational study about transgender persons and issues; including faith and life in the United Methodist Church through baptism, membership, Holy Communion, marriage and ordination.

My petition was soundly rejected, and even my allies do not want to revisit it for fear that bringing it up on the floor could lead to worse consequences for transgender United Methodists.

Former and current anti-transgender petitions reveal the level of misunderstanding and sheer lack of knowledge concerning gender identity among United Methodists.

In recent years scores of ongoing scientific research illustrate the genetic and biological origins of gender identity.

It is historically validated that Intersex and transgender people have existed since the beginning of recorded history; this is not a current "choice" or cultural "fad" as some suggest.

There is no such thing as being, "so-called transgender."

One thing we do all appear to agree on is that God does not make mistakes.

My transgender brothers and sisters and I are not mistakes.

I am created transgender, just as some of my sisters and brothers in The United Methodist Church are created cis-gendered

So I will close today by sharing words from a favorite song of mine, written by a beloved, well-known Presbyterian clergyman from my childhood:

Won't You Be My Neighbor? by Fred M. Rogers (1967)

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,
A Beautiful Day for a neighbor.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood,
A neighborly day for beauty.
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

I've always wanted to have a neighbor
just like you.
I've always wanted to live in a
neighborhood with you.

So, let's make the most of
this beautiful day.

Since we're together we might as well say:

Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?
Won't you be my neighbor?
Won't you be my neighbor?
Won't you please,
Won't you please?
Please won't you be my neighbor?

Rev. David Weekley pastors Sellwood and Capitol Hill United Methodist Churches in Portland, Oregon; his blog reaches out to LGBTQ persons and their allies who have felt rejected in the church – follow him at www.shermanswilderness.org. He is on the Transgender Extension Ministry of RMN, and the newest Board member for Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Queer Concerns.

CLICK!

By Carol Waymack, MD

As a parent of a GLBT child, I did not always have an attitude of love and acceptance for GLTB people. For that, God had to get my attention first.

My husband, our 3 year old twins and I were attending Wallingford UMC, in Seattle. After church, small groups were gathered in conversation about whether Wallingford UMC should join the new Reconciling Congregations movement. At the table was Cecil, a silver-haired jack of all trades, chair of Trustees. There was Deb, mother of a young son newly diagnosed with muscular dystrophy. There was Chuck, our children's Sunday school teacher and one who shared with my husband great outings for children and dads. And there was Jeff and me. I was quite skeptical about this business of Reconciling Congregations. When the question was posed "Would you allow a gay or lesbian person be your children's Sunday school teacher?" I was pretty sure that was not a good idea. Then Chuck turned to me and said, "But I'm gay." On the short drive home, Jeff and I shared our embarrassment, our admiration for Chuck's courage and the sense that we had just experienced something totally new. CLICK!

In 1993, early in my career as a family physician, a man in drag came in for hypertension. He was dressed in women's clothing and had carefully applied make-up. Over several visits, I learned about his fascinating life as a musician, a financial planner and a mountaineer. At a subsequent visit, he requested a prescription for female hormones and a referral for facial electrolysis. This was not a man in drag. This was a woman in transition into the woman she knew herself to be. Another "totally new" experience. CLICK!

In 1998, my daughter revealed to me that she was lesbian. Though she had told me about 4 months earlier, my husband did not learn this information until a phone call from Paraguay early one Sunday morning, where she was as an exchange student. Her Mormon host family wanted her to return home immediately for counseling. What a shock for Jeff! We found our own counsel by turning to a lesbian couple in church. We suddenly realized we would have to fight these battles for our child. CLICK!

We kept our daughter's secret a secret from almost everyone, but I needed to talk. A small notice in our church bulletin asked any parent of a gay or Lesbian child wishing to speak with a pastor to call Larry Fox to find out if their pastor was "safe". I didn't know Larry, but I made that call anyway. I found out our pastor was considered "safe" and my daughter and I went to see him. He provided great assurance that God loved my daughter wholly and completely and that I had not failed as a mother. We felt much better. Then, at Annual Conference,

our pastor requested a moment of personal privilege. From the podium, he revealed that he was a gay man and could no longer live in silence. CLICK!

In 2002, I met Max, a grey haired, fully bearded man with debilitating osteoarthritis. Badly needing orthopedic surgery, he was quite hesitant to see an orthopedic surgeon. I tried to reassure him that I knew several excellent surgeons. Finally he revealed that he was born a woman, ran away from home at age 16, and lived as a man ever since. His great fear of seeing another doctor and especially a surgeon was wondering what the surgeon and OR staff would say about him when he was asleep in surgery or later in the hospital. With his poor education, he had had to work hard as a cabinet maker, a job he could no longer do without severe pain. I would have to choose the surgeon very carefully. CLICK!

In 2008, our lesbian daughter was to be married to the love of her life. Before the wedding, I accompanied both brides in the search for wedding attire, but my daughter was adamant that she was not going to wear a wedding dress. She chose a beautiful white pant suit instead. It was a beautiful ceremony at Point Defiance Park, overlooking Puget Sound waterway and presided over by her cousin, a United Methodist, seminary trained, UCC pastor. About 6 months later, this same child revealed that he had begun making preparations to transition to being a man. CLICK!

Unrelated stories? I don't think so. God's amazing spirit of love kept sending CLICKS to me with reminders that God loves every single person and I could too.



Carol Waymack, MD, is a Family Medicine physician in Seattle. She has been Chief of Staff at Swedish Medical Center/ Ballard Campus and is a recipient of the Outstanding Physician Award.

Happy 4th Anniversary Sue and Julie!

Thank you for your courage,
your witness, and your commitment.

Blessings for many more years together!



'Father Tom' and Ministry To Gay Men

By Tom Martin

A year after my retirement, I went to a gay bar in Tacoma, Washington.

The guys—because the bar was mostly guys—were very welcoming. When someone asked what do I do, I said I was a retired United Methodist pastor.

No shock, no looks of suspicion, no rejection.

After several visits, someone crowned me "Father Tom."

I am not a father in the ecclesiastical sense, but I am a father of two wonderful daughters. But the moniker of "Father Tom" stuck with me. In a sense I have become their pastor.

When they are struggling with a relationship, when they need to vent their anger at the church, when their partner dies, I'm most often the one they call.

A good friend at the bar died and his service was conducted at a church of his home parish. His family was treated to the usual Christian burial service.

One of the guys, after the service, approached me and told me that his mother was wounded deeply by the words of the minister and they wanted me to have a service at a park in Tacoma, and would I preside over it.

They knew the answer before they asked.

Fifty people gathered at a park down below the gay bar. The father and mother stood by me and I spoke of the all-encompassing love of God for Scott.

His mother started crying and grabbed my hand. His father, whom Scott had described as unemotional and who had never cried in front of him, also cried and shared his own pain at not having communicated to him his love for Scott.

After we left the park, we went to the home of a gay friend near the park. It is in the bars that I have more meaningful conversations about God, faith, and rejection of the church than I ever had in many of my parishes.

Their knowledge of the scriptures is amazing, because many of them have grown up in our Sunday Schools, MYE, UMY.

When they hear the laws of the church over the love of the God about which they have been taught, they left and vowed to me

that they would never return. This is not the "Jesus loves me concept" they had had when sung about in Sunday School, nor the kind of finger-pointing found in the book of Job.

The United Methodist Church is two blocks away from the bar, and some of them have begun to go into the services there and have contributed to the worship of the church.

I remember one man was an evangelistic piano player who had left the church. When he got up to First Church, his talent just glowed like an evangelical piano player should.

Easter Sunday, some of the churches had gotten together down by Puget Sound in a park for a Sunrise Service.

After the service was over, I turned around and started out of the entrance. Standing there was one of the transgendered women that I knew in the bar. We had not talked religion at all; I just wasn't sure how to approach her on it.

But she was there and I went over and gave her a big hug. She explained, "Well, I happened to be walking my dog down here by the park, and I heard the singing and the music so I decided to stop and listen."

That Easter Sunday morning when I went into the church, she was there and has been ever since. A friend of hers also became active in the church because she found a spiritual home here.

The bar doesn't provide that.

The bar provides a welcoming, inclusive sense of fellowship; non-judgmental. But there are some issues that they do not spend a lot of time on, and that is what is going on inside of their spiritual life.

I think about the road to Jericho. I don't see myself as being a Good Samaritan; I think there are a lot of Good Samaritans out there, meeting wounded damaged people as a result of the church's judgment instead of the love.

Rev. Tom Martin is a retired UM clergyman living in Tacoma, Washington.



Rev. Pamela Lightsey. Photo by Rev. Lois McCullen Parr.

A Statement from the Council of Bishops as We Embark on a Journey Toward Healing Relationships with Indigenous Peoples

Preamble

Today, as the Council of Bishops on behalf of The United Methodist Church, we stop to listen to our own hearts and our own voices. History is not only a body of information stored in archives for reference and study waiting to be mined by scholars and researchers. It is a living, breathing phenomenon that resides in us and among us framing our understanding of ourselves and each other. The history we recall in this moment continues to weigh upon all of us. Together we grieve the history which still weighs upon indigenous people around the world and Native Americans in the United States.

This is not a romance of discovery and the struggle of pioneer life, settlement and tragedy. This is about the violent history of peoples whose families, communities and sovereign nations were destroyed by aggressive powers lusting for their lands, riches and seeking domination at the expense of their own existence. This is a story about the church's role in cooperating with and entering into collusive relationships with political forces resulting in the killing of Native women, children and men, the removal of Native nations from their homes, forcing them to march long death-defying distances to live on lands unsuitable for



Delegates pray in the center aisle during the Act of Repentance Toward Healing Relationships with Indigenous Peoples on Friday April 27. UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffrey.

habitation, destroying peaceful villages, massacring helpless innocents, stealing tribal lands and resources, breaking sacred treaty agreements, removing children from their homes to imprison them in schools that would steal their heritage to make them "civilized," and in tragic intentional and inadvertent ways, sharing in and implementing the goals of Native extermination resulting in genocidal policies, programs and actions designed to vanquish, forever, whole Native and indigenous nations and peoples, communities and families from the earth.

Scripture

"For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (Matthew 9:13)

"Therefore I will judge you Oh house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (Ezekiel 18:30-31)

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 4:17)

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven;

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

But 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 into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (Ephesians 2:13-14)

Native Quotes

When one sits in the Hoop of the People, one must be responsible because all of creation is related. And the hurt of one is the hurt of all. And the honor of one is the honor of all. And whatever we do affects everything in the universe.

(Modern version from the Lakota White Buffalo Calf Woman)

"I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream...the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell, and I understood more than I was, for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being." (Black Elk, Lakota)

"There are many things to be shared with the Four Colors of humanity in our common destiny as one with our Mother the Earth. It is this sharing that must be considered with great care by the Elders and the medicine people who carry the Sacred Trusts, so that no harm may come to people through ignorance and misuse of these powerful forces."

(Resolution of the Fifth Annual Meetings of the Traditional Elders Circle, 1980)

"How smooth must be the language of the whites, when they can make right look like wrong, and wrong like right."

(Black Hawk, Sauk)

"I live in sorrow imprisoned, You are my Light, Your glory, my support. Behold not with malevolence the sins of man but forgive and cleanse; and so, O Lord, protect us beneath Your wings and let peace be out portion now and forever more. Amen."

(Queen Lili'uokalani, the last monarch of the Kingdom of Hawaii, composed as a prayer, March 22, 1895, while she was under house arrest in her palace in Honolulu.)

Statement of Repentance

As the Council of Bishops, we are here to repent and express remorse for the church's past conduct in its relationships with Native and indigenous peoples in all the places where we have extended the mission of the church for over two hundred years. We are

here to commit ourselves to addressing the wrong and asking for the forgiveness of those who have been wronged by failing them so profoundly. We confess to God, acknowledging our guilt, resolving to cease the harm, pledging ourselves to live differently, reversing the damage that has been

forgiveness, and work towards healing.

The Future

The Council of Bishops will:

- Affirm commitment to empowering the presence of Native and indigenous people in the life of the denomination.



A delegate touches a stone during the Act of Repentance. A UMNS Photo by Paul Jeffrey.

done through our participation in violence, maltreatment and neglect of Native and indigenous peoples so that we may bring about healing and restoration to all.

It is time to free captive Native and indigenous peoples from institutional church oppression and learn from them spiritual values that will see us through our own current spiritual emergencies, save our embattled earth and enable humankind to live as one with creation and all living creatures within it—including ourselves. The question is whether the church is strong enough to bring about change in the United States and around the world where indigenous peoples have been decimated, assimilated, abused, and left victims of dominant Western economies and the imposition of oppressive materialistic cultural values. Our work in healing broken relationships must be specific, actionable and accountable. Morally, it must be part of our denomination's discourse, programming and policies.

To our Native and indigenous brothers and sisters we say: We have destroyed your way of life, dehumanized your people and degraded your cultures, along with your dreams, your peace and your great love for the land. We acknowledge the pain of your nation peoples and our sinful behavior in these events. We know that past history has been filled with violence against you. We have confiscated your land. We have recklessly destroyed your cultures. Today we acknowledge that all this is not in the past. Assaults continue on your cultures, continuing the historic patterns of abuse, the demeaning of your spirituality, the questioning of your leadership, the neglecting of the critical issues of hunger, health, employment, and sovereignty. We must not yield to historical amnesia. We pray to God to give us a new heart and a new spirit through Jesus Christ, who breaks down the dividing walls of hostility, so that we may truly repent of our grave sins, petition for

- Support Native American Ministries Sunday in U.S. annual conferences.

- Strengthen Committees on Native American Ministries (CONAM) in the U.S. and Native ministries in the central conferences.

- Support General Advances and church-wide funding for Native ministries.

- Commit ourselves to the development of new Native and indigenous ministries and strengthen our support for existing community entities.

- Create a theological statement that demonstrates a respect for the diversity of theology and ecclesiology that is found in the context of Native and Indigenous ministries.

- Commit to host Acts of Repentance in annual conferences.

- Commit to developing relationships of mutuality with Native peoples in local contexts.

- Initiate programs of education for non-Native people about why the Act of Repentance is important.

In partnership with Native ministry leaders and resource people throughout the Connection, the Council of Bishops will support:

- Developing new Native and indigenous leaders across the Connection including an increased number of people nurtured for service in congregational, annual conference, jurisdictional and central conference, and general church ministries, including the episcopacy.

- Initiating a plan of advocacy related to land and treaty rights, support for tribal sovereignty and cultural preservation; better health care and education for Native people and the safety of Native and indigenous women and children.



Deborah Wilkins, Rev. Cheryl Toothe, and Vicki Swartz listen during the Act of Repentance. A UMNS Photo by Kathleen Barry.

“Imagine All the Lives You Could be Saving”

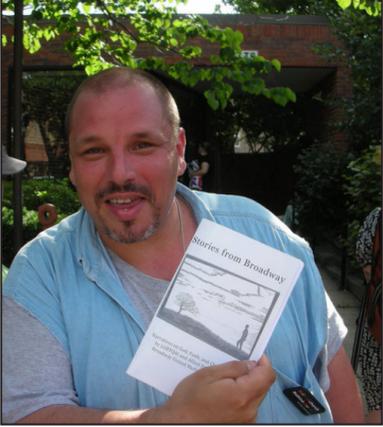
by John Donaldson

This is the last week of the General Conference. I'm not there but my pastor and some other members of the church are all there fighting alongside others for the church to finally put archaic teachings behind us. The General Conference could decide that I would have the same rights in the whole church as I have at my church.

The United Methodist Church I attend is a Reconciling Congregation where ALL are welcome. The church I attend saved my life.

I was clamoring for a relationship with God. But even though before every service, when the pastor said all are welcome, I didn't believe it. I had felt God didn't want anything to do with me because of being gay. For years I attended a church that taught me that you can pray the gay away. After years of trying, I realized it wasn't going to happen. When I told them, I was excommunicated.

That was it for me. I felt useless in God's



eyes so for a while after that I went back to my old ways thinking “If I'm going to hell, than I might as well do it up” because I did believe I was destined for hell. It led me to deep depression. Tears are in my eyes while I'm writing this because it had hurt so much. I'm still very scarred from this experience. At this pivotal point I threw myself on God's mercy and just told myself and God “even though you're still sending me to hell, I'm still gonna have my relationship with you...I need you that much.”

Now, I attend Broadway United Methodist Church, a Reconciling Church that is innovative, brave, bold and really big on social justice for all races, economic backgrounds and sexual orientations. Several times I tried to quit because I couldn't wrap my head around the fact that I was welcome there and God wanted me, but something kept pulling me back--it was God. That is where the church saved me. Little by little, I started to believe and to trust. I still have a ways to go. Years of being beat with the Bible really did a number on me. I had lost so much self worth and confidence.

During this time I went through cancer and a leg amputation. My friends and church stood by me and kept me strong. I was thinking “well...here is my punishment” Then I thought well maybe its a test. Here I am...with God. Maybe he wants to see how committed I am to HIM. In the end, I made it through, thankful for my family, friends and the church--a church that may have not been there if it wasn't a reconciling ministry.

I like to think that I would have made

it through this storm with my family and God but I truly believe my faith wouldn't have been this strong because I would have lost faith. I would have lost my faith in God because that faux congregation would have lost their faith in me.

I don't know much about this conference but if I was there, I would tell these people who make these decisions my story. I would tell them of the possible not so good outcome. Then I would tell them that I'm not the only one that goes through this kind of life. There are many others out there struggling with their relationship with God and their self worth. Then I would tell them, “Imagine all the lives you could be saving. Imagine all the people you could be directing to God. Isn't that all worth it?”

To my dear Pastor Lois and my friends from Broadway United Methodist Church who are there at the conference, thanks for fighting in our names and most importantly the names of the unknowns who don't even have a church like Broadway.

The Rev. Lois McCullen Parr shared that John Donaldson, who awaits a prosthesis, is a witness for justice and the power of a praying community within their congregation as he regularly thanks the family of faith for surrounding him with love and support. Donaldson helps with Broadway's Lakeview Food Pantry collection, is an usher, and is a regular volunteer for Broadway's special events like community meals and the annual parking lot sale.

The Church Will Change or the Church Will Die

By A Man in Texas

Thursday morning's debate on the floor was by turns uplifting and depressing. At the point of voting for the current hurtful language about gay and lesbian people in The Book of Discipline, members of the Love Your Neighbor coalition began serving communion on the floor. In response, the presiding bishop called an immediate recess, and said that no visitors

accepting view of gender identity and sexual orientation is going to want to join The UMC with its current official stand? If I were picking a church today, I certainly wouldn't. There are now better, more accepting choices.

What of the people in our church who have hoped for change for 40 years? Might they just get a bit tired of it and leave? In

Do you want to revive the church? Do you want to increase membership? Forget the Call to Action, Plan B and Plan UMC. Make this church feel fresh and new by getting rid of old outdated stances on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Then there's people like me. My mother and father didn't raise me to be a quitter. I won't leave The United Methodist Church. You can talk ugly to me and about me all you want. I'm a bullying survivor. You can't hurt me, but you will certainly disappoint me. You can think you're hurting me, if you like, or if it makes you feel good to disparage me and my “Godless heathen friends,” or if it makes you think you're upholding the Bible, or that you're (heaven help us) trying to save me. I know you for who you really are. It's my job to stay and make you want to open your minds. And I don't need to be saved. Been there, done that. Too late. It's not yours to take away.

Anything you try to prove with a Biblical quotation can often be countered with a quotation that says the exact opposite. The Bible has been used for good and evil, including (but certainly not limited to) the justification of slavery and the abolition of slavery. Instead, listen with an open heart for new teaching by the holy spirit.

Hearts and minds need to start changing soon. The UMC is headed toward extinction.



would be allowed in after lunch. This was challenged and later changed.

Is it any wonder the church is disappearing. We need to keep the young people we have, and bring in new, un-churched young people. What young person who has an ac-

fact, I know many will. It happens after each General Conference. They give up hope of ever seeing change in their lifetimes, and for the sake of their own sanity, will go elsewhere. This leads to more membership decline.

Love Your Neighbor Coalition Pledge

WE PLEDGE TO make a just church our reality by:

Working for racial justice and resisting exploitive systems that teach racial/ethnic superiority and inferiority.

Building public expressions of inclusiveness and affirmations of diversity in our church and societies.

Welcoming gender diversity and establishing policies and practices that share power across gender lines.

Including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender person in our membership and ministry.

Supporting seminaries, mission institutions and global partners in providing inclusive and shared leadership.

Supporting the work with women, children, and youth by United Methodist Women and the Women's Division.

Seeking to honor and reconcile our differences, speaking respectfully with one another in love.

Grounding our ministries in a broad understanding of church, community, environment, and world.

Acting on reducing carbon, radiation, and other pollutants while refusing to give in to cynical despair.

Documenting and announcing specific actions toward these commitments to encourage others.

Living our Wesleyan tradition as people of the warmed heart, enlightened mind, and extended hand.

Being United Methodists who embrace our unity in Christ, even in the midst of diverse opinions.

Shaping our lives according to the good news of Jesus Christ, the Word of God made visible in our midst.



The Media Team of the Common Witness Coalition



*Back, L-R: Tom Cullens, Marisa Villarreal, Russell Leavitt,
Ross Murray, Ann Craig, Ed Hoar.*

*Front, L-R: David Braden, Jenn Peterson, Dave Goss,
Lois McCullen Parr, Ben Roe.*

**We have worked side by side through long hours and
tight deadlines to bring the General Conference and
our common witness to the world.**

Teamwork made a family!