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The Way Forward is just that, a path toward the future. For some this is an intensely important conversation. Others are less engaged, more focused on local matters; yet others, having drawn conclusions, are content to sit at the edges, being more interested in how the landscape will look once everything is sorted out.

If you are reading this, I trust that you have more than a passing interest. And so I want to make three requests:

- Consider the diverse voices in these pages, ones that have something to contribute to this conversation. This is important. The United Methodist Church does extraordinary ministry on four continents, in many languages, under the cross and flame. There is a great deal at stake here.
- As you read these essays, hold a posture of an open mind and heart. God has begun a good work in us, but God is not finished with any one of us. It is less about where we stand and more about whom we are walking with. There are multiple angles of vision, and I pray that the perspectives in these pages will deepen our understandings.
- This is important, because the church is not at closure in seeking a way forward. The work, begun by the Commission on a Way Forward in dialogue with the Council of Bishops, and in deep listening to the whole church, is now in the hands of the delegations from across the church to the Special Session of the General Conference. These laity and clergy, women and men, will listen for the movement of the Holy Spirit in casting a vision for the church in the next season of its life.

I have been drawn to the words of Ephesians 4:1-6 (CEB) and invite you to be guided by them as well:

"Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all."

May this edition of *Circuit Rider* serve as one of our efforts, among many, to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the peace that ties us together. Indeed, it is that same Spirit that we invoke at the Lord's Table to make us "one with Christ, one with each other, and one ministry to all the world."

This, the Spirit's leading, is our best way forward. Thank you for walking on this path with us!

Kenneth H. Carter Jr.
President, Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church



Publisher's Note: *Circuit Rider*, an online quarterly periodical, continues to appear at MinistryMatters.com. Print runs ceased in 2016. This special August 2018 edition is made available one time in print for United Methodist clergy and 2019 General Conference delegates.



by Kenneth H. Carter Jr.

The unity of the church is grounded in one God (Deut 6), which is affirmed by Jesus (Mark 12) and in the teachings of the apostles in Ephesians 4 (one Lord, one faith, one baptism). This unity is a gift of God (1 Cor 12) and is never a human achievement, right, or claim. The practical expression of unity is the love of God and neighbor (which is also the practical expression of holiness).

Our complacency with division indicates a lack of love and is a barrier to the mission of the gospel in the midst of unbelief. I pray we hear Jesus saying in John 17: that they will be one, so that the world will believe. Thus unity needs to be visible in our congregations and in our structures.

It is true we are connected with each other in the one body. When one suffers, all suffer. When one rejoices,

all rejoice. In The United Methodist Church, we have a term for this: the *connection*. It expresses our unity, our oneness. In The UMC, we might identify the instruments of our unity as the itineracy of preachers, the superintendency (which includes bishops), and Christian conferencing.

We are one. This unity is contested in our behaviors and in our rhetoric. Some are exhausted from the ties that have bound us and are ready for separation. Some are newer to life and ministry in our denomination and are eager remain united. Some have counted the cost of division, in terms of weakened witness and mission. And some have experienced the cost of ongoing conflict and seek new forms of church.

The presenting issue for this impasse is human sexuality, but many

acknowledge that the divisions are much deeper. And in the United States, they are not unrelated to the political fault lines that shape our everyday lives.

The One Church Plan, the plan most strongly affirmed by the Council of Bishops in their May 2018 meeting, places a great value on *context*. It recognizes that while we are a global church, we are not monolithic. It is very difficult to do ministry in exactly the same way in Monrovia, Liberia; Miami, Florida; Montgomery, Alabama; Washington, DC; Manila, Philippines; Los Angeles, California; and Berlin, Germany. These are sharply different missional contexts.

And so the One Church Plan allows for contextualization. It removes the 1972 language related to human sexuality, but it allows local churches to

Photo Credit: Getty Images

The One Church Plan, the plan most strongly affirmed by the Council of Bishops in their May 2018 meeting, places a great value on context. It recognizes that while we are a global church, we are not monolithic.

continue traditionalist values in their own wedding policies, clergy profiles, and covenants with bishops and boards of ordained ministry to determine whom they will ordain. It does not require votes in local churches that would divide members from one another. It would honor conscience and religious liberty, and yet it would provide a spiritual home, in many local United Methodist churches, for LGBTQ persons who are already living and serving among us.

A reductionistic critique of the One Church Plan asserts that it is a “local option,” and this phrase is used in a negative way. I would claim, in contrast, that vital missional churches understand and live into their contexts. The United Methodist Church already allows central conferences to adapt their *Books of Discipline* and allows clergy and local churches in the United States a remarkable spectrum of freedoms and “options”: from supporting non-United Methodist missionaries and seminaries, to adapting baptismal, communion, and membership liturgies, to minimizing the “United Methodist” name and logo.

Why do we allow for such profound contextualization? It does preserve our unity, but more deeply it helps us to be apostolic. We focus on the calling to share the grace of Jesus Christ

where we are, in the most effective and fruitful way possible!

The One Church Plan was and is deeply shaped by the mission, vision, and scope of the Commission on a Way Forward, which was authorized by the 2016 General Conference. These words in particular are crucial:

[We] will design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible. (“Mission, Vision and Scope,” Commission on a Way Forward)

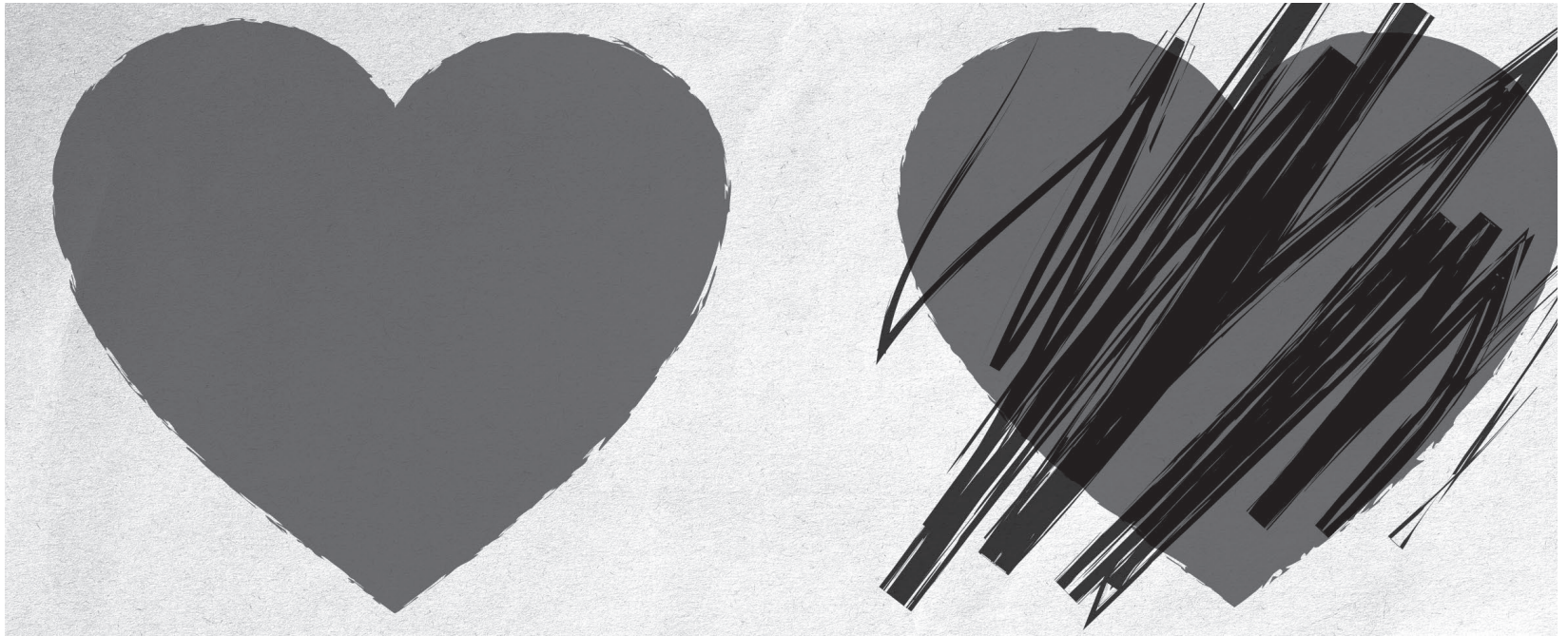
These words could shape our life together in every local church. We want to see as much witness as possible, under the cross and flame; we want as much contextual differentiation as possible, on four continents, in urban and rural settings, in many languages and cultures; and we want to experience as much unity as possible. This unity is the work we have to do together in the months and years to come. And yet it is the call and cost of discipleship, as we bear with each other in love (Eph 4:2) for the sake of the good news that is for all people.



Kenneth H. Carter Jr.

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A Heart at Peace

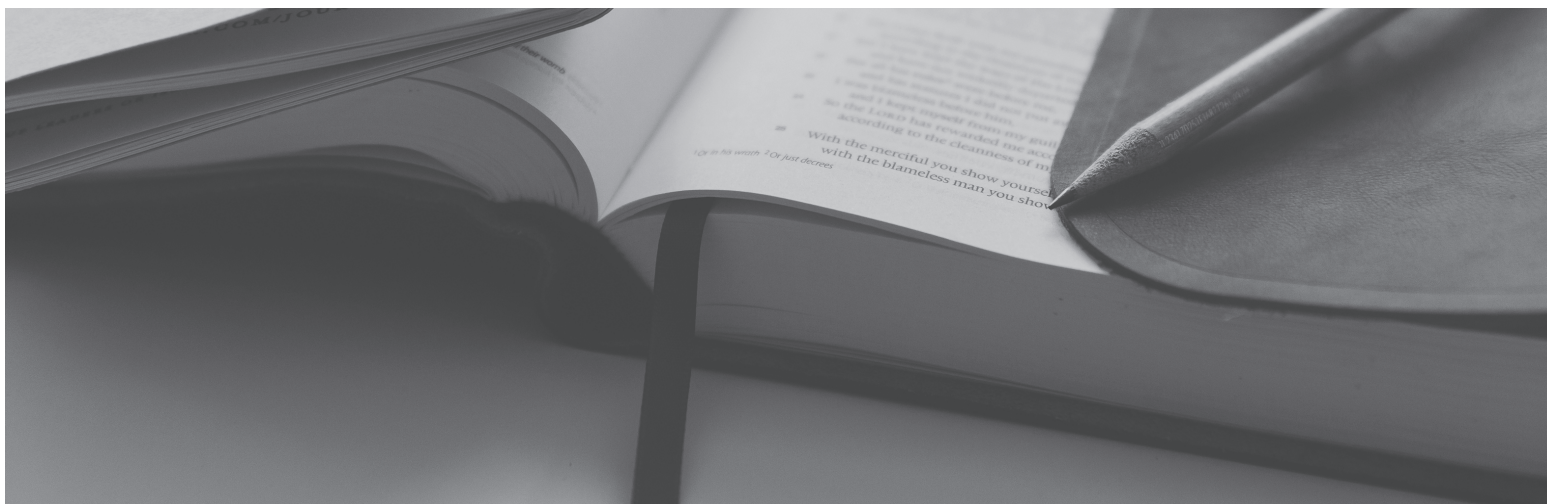
by Grant Hagiya

The Commission on a Way Forward (the group of thirty-two set apart to make recommendations about human sexuality by the General Conference in 2016) read together *The Anatomy of Peace* by the Arbinger Institute. The book had a powerful influence on our work of coming together as a community of very diverse and sometimes opposite points of view. Some of the concepts in *The Anatomy of Peace* are so important that we are recommending that every annual conference delegation read the book together in preparation for the Special Called Session of General Conference in February 2019.

In the midst of daily living, and especially during conflict, the book demonstrates how we are either functioning with “a heart at war” or with “a heart at peace.” A heart at war means that we are closed by our own position or beliefs, and we are not willing to compromise or listen to anything contrary. Our actions are to defend, protect, and conquer. A heart at war means that our souls are restless and unsettled, and we are willing to aggressively enforce our beliefs. When we have a heart at war, we see people as objects, and we treat them as vehicles that we use, obstacles that

we blame, and irrelevancies that we ignore.

In contrast, a heart at peace means that we know where we stand, but with a “convicted humility,” we are open to explore all sides of an issue in order to be open to where God is leading us. Our actions are to be curious, open-minded, and willing to say, “I might be wrong about this.” When we have a heart at peace, we see people as subjects, and we seek to know their needs, concerns, and challenges. We treat them with the love and compassion that we yearn to receive from others.



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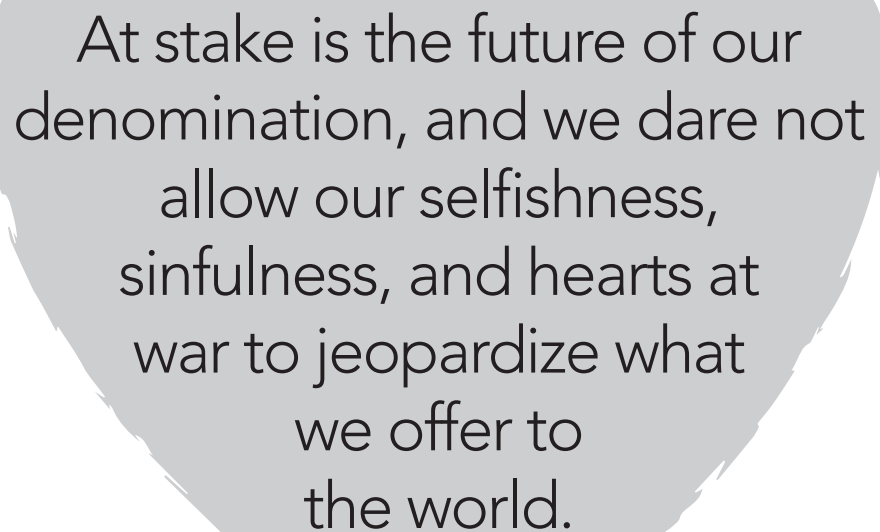
Our United Methodist General Conferences, for more than two decades, reflect an ethos sustaining a heart at war, especially over issues that clearly divide us, such as human sexuality. During my very first General Conference, as a young clergyperson, I was taught that I must be ready to defend my position and to fight for those concessions that would affect “our” point of view. There was no talk of what God’s will was, but rather the reinforcing of a select theological and political position in the church. I was taught to live with a heart at war!

Tragically, I was not the only one schooled in this way. It is too ironic, because we are not a military, a for-profit corporation, or a political institution whose mission is to win, overpower, and conquer the competition.

We are part of the church of Jesus Christ, whose main purpose is to love God and our neighbor the same way we love ourselves. We should be taught not to win but to sacrifice, not to overpower but to love, not to conquer but to show compassion, not to lecture but to listen. In short, we should be taught to have a heart at peace, not at war.

At the deeper levels of the Arbibinger principles, they teach that organizations have been going about reaching their desired outcomes with the wrong motives. Most organizations try to shape the behavior of their workers in order to get to desired results. Examples are: “sell more,” “recruit more,” or “produce more.” We do this in the church also: “attract more people,” “raise more money,” and “recruit younger people.” By focusing on these behaviors, organizations believe that they will achieve the desired outcomes.

However, cajoling coworkers to drive harder seldom works. It is extremely



At stake is the future of our denomination, and we dare not allow our selfishness, sinfulness, and hearts at war to jeopardize what we offer to the world.

difficult to change or alter people’s behaviors, because behaviors alone do not deliver success, vitality, or health. A classic example of this resistance to adapt is the American Medical Association’s research, in which people with chronic heart disease were told directly that unless they changed their lifestyle, they would soon die. Only one in seven were able to change their behaviors or lifestyle, even when told they would die as the consequence.

Unless we change our mindsets or attitudes, as well as our hearts (our emotions), we will not be able to achieve the desired results. The holistic internal reference of individuals must change for the cultural shift to take place. We are describing *metanoia* (translated in the Common English Bible as “changed hearts and lives”), which is a 180-degree shift in

our internal reference. This is how we become “part of the new creation” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5: 17).

The United Methodist Church’s General Conference falls into this same trap each quadrennium. We try to control delegates’ behavior through the organizational rules and regulations that are set for the conference. Parliamentary procedure, legislative processes, and the long-standing cultural norms of General Conference, such as sitting in order of delegate election, rule the day.

We pay very little attention to developing the minds and hearts of delegates in a positive and constructive way. In fact, we harden the minds and hearts of our delegates by preparing them for conflict, war, and winning others to “our” side. This kind of

power has led to the current impasse concerning LGBTQ inclusion. We have hardened our stances vis-à-vis the other side and are not willing to be open to where God is leading us.

What if we prepared for the Special Called Session of General Conference and future General Conferences differently? What if we worked toward a heart at peace instead of a heart at war? What if we came together with the desired outcomes of the whole church as our main priorities: mission, outreach, compassion, justice, and the "Making of Disciples for the Transformation of the World"?

So, as we prepare for the Special Called Session, what does it mean to have a heart at peace? The theological statement that the Commission on a

Way Forward uses is "convicted humility." As it is described in our Commission's theological framework:

This is an attitude which combines honesty about the differing convictions which divide us with humility about the way in which each of our views may stand in need of correction. It also involves humble repentance for the ways in which we have spoken and acted as those seeking to win a fight rather than those called to discern the shape of faithfulness together. In that spirit, we wish to lift up the shared core commitments which define the Wesleyan movement, and ground our search for wisdom and holiness.

If the majority of our delegates can come with this "convicted humility" as an expression of a heart at peace, we will have a chance to shape The United Methodist Church in a whole new and fresh way. At stake is the future of our denomination, and we dare not allow our selfishness, sinfulness, and hearts at war to jeopardize what we offer to the world. A heart at peace is the answer, and one that must not falter.

Grant Hagiya

Grant Hagiya is currently serving as the bishop for the California-Pacific area of the United States. He completed divinity studies at Claremont School of Theology and the EdD in organizational leadership from Pepperdine University. He is the author of *Spiritual Kaizen: How to Become a Better Church Leader*, published by Abingdon Press.



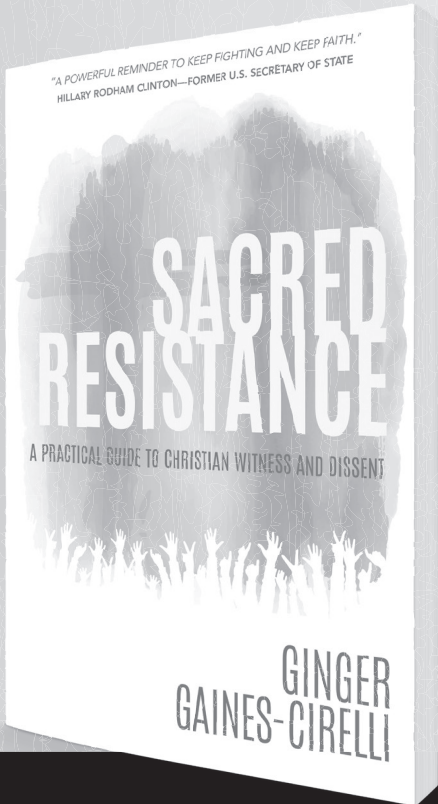
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—**Serene Jones**, President, Union Theological Seminary

Author **Ginger Gaines-Cirelli** pastors a church in the heart of Washington DC, adjacent to the White House, which actively works to bring justice and help for marginalized communities, and the endangered earth.



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The Playing Field: Scripture and the Traditional Faith of the Church

by Jessica LaGrone

During my first mission trip, I left the US for the mountains of Costa Rica. We were there to build houses with an international chapter of Habitat for Humanity, but my best work was building relationships with the children, who laughed at my toddler-level Spanish and taught me games on the rocky hillside. One day a group of them shyly pulled me by the hand and told me they were going to show me the most beautiful place on their mountain, a claim that piqued my interest since this was already the most beautiful place I had ever seen.

After a long, breathless hike, we turned a corner where I saw, in the middle of all the rugged mountainous glory . . . a lawn. A simple, flat lawn, rockless and sprawling, just like thousands of suburban landscapes back home. To

put it bluntly, I was underwhelmed. Just then, one of the boys pulled out a ball, and they began running and kicking it with glee. This space, while it looked ordinary to me, was their soccer field—the only one for miles. To them it was holy ground. As they began to run and play (many of them barefoot), I recognized that they were right. In the freedom and joy of these children of God, I found the most beautiful sight I would encounter on that mountain.

G. K. Chesterton's assessment of the discipline and order found in the Christian scriptures was that "the more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild."¹

The playing field God provides for us in scripture exists not to constrain God's creation or cramp our style but to provide the "room" Chesterton celebrates: a clear and free space for human flourishing, the restoration of God's image in us and God's glory in creation, and a place for goodness to run wild in our communion together.

Unfortunately, The United Methodist Church has been overtaken by chaos that continues to grow and envelop our life together, muting our hopes for world-changing ministry and damaging our witness. While the headlines and arguments center around the church's stance on same-sex practice, our core disagreements have their roots in differing views of scripture.

We read and understand scripture very differently.² We should not be

Photo Credit: Getty Images

surprised that this leads to opposing goals for the doctrine and discipline of the church that we share.

As a member of the Commission on a Way Forward, I spent eighteen months having hard conversations with people who love our church deeply, many of whom are now dear friends. We discussed the church's deep division and our best hopes for her future. As we talked about our differing views on sexuality, it was clear that they were rooted in the different ways we read scripture. We were repeatedly asked to find ways to express what unites us as United Methodist Christians, but even when we articulated our rich heritage and common goals, we encountered roadblocks over the simplest words because of our reading of God's word.

What does *unity* look like when we can't agree on the goal of God's work in human hearts or the nature and

pursuit of holiness? How can we press on to *make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world* when we can't agree on the nature of disciples, how they are to live differently from the world around them, and what kind of transformation we are hoping to effect?

With each of our nine meetings, we as a Commission grew deeper in relationship with each other, but we didn't mistake our growing love for each other as a concession that our opposing views on scripture, holiness, and sexuality mattered any less. In fact, some who most vehemently disagreed on scriptural interpretation and theology could find common ground in the fact that we would never be in agreement on core beliefs, and that we wanted to stop fighting so that the work of the church could continue unfettered.

As we approach the called 2019 General Conference, the divisions in the church have only deepened. Bishops, annual conferences, boards of ordained ministry, and jurisdictional conferences have not only committed acts of ecclesial disobedience but called publicly for others to do so as well. Decisions of the judicial council have been ignored outright. Rather than anticipating schism, these actions signal we are already in schism. We are not just bending the rules. We are playing on entirely different fields.

Those who have been paying attention during decades of General Conferences should not be surprised that delegates who have supported the language concerning sexuality in the *Book of Discipline* will continue to do so. It seems almost surreal when those who support the paragraphs of the *Discipline* we most argue over are considered divisive or schismatic. The

A FIELD GUIDE TO WHITE ANGER AND PAIN.

Scape-goated for all things racist and identified as the voting block that gave the country its most divisive leader in a generation, white working-class people are not what they seem: so much more than common xenophobes and red-hat wearing nostalgics for a lost time of white supremacy, this group begs for a richer, more nuanced portrait if they are to be loved and impacted by Christian faith and the Gospel of Jesus.

Tex Sample is a specialist in church and society and Professor Emeritus at The Saint Paul School of Theology.



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UMC's position on marriage has been a matter of public record since 1972, and those of us who vowed to uphold its doctrine were well aware of the nature of the covenant to which we were committing.

A plan will certainly be submitted to the 2019 General Conference that will affirm our current ordination standards and language defining Christian marriage. This plan will likely also add measures of accountability and strengthen enforcement of that language. Critics will characterize this plan as punitive and severe, but it simply strengthens the position supported by every General Conference since the language was introduced. Indeed, those who hold to a traditional reading of scripture around the ethics of sexuality seem to be a growing majority in General Conference, though they are consistently underrepresented in bodies like the Commission on a Way Forward and publications like this one.

Those who support a plan that would push decisions on marriage and ordination to a local level significantly miss the importance of the connectional church and conciliar discernment at the heart of historic Methodism over and against a congregational polity. To say that our beliefs on sexuality are not important enough to decide on corporately, or that what we do with our bodies is nobody's business but our own, is contrary to scripture and Wesley's understanding of holiness as worked out together in community. To play with different rules from one context to the next will not increase our unity as "one church" or expand our ministry but will only intensify our chaos and division.

On a soccer field, it's not much fun to quibble over the boundaries of the field or debate the rules of the game. All of us would much rather play. This, of course, is a light metaphor for a very heavy subject. This is no game. This is Christ's

church. There are souls to be saved and incredible needs in the world for justice and mercy to be offered freely, unfettered by internal conflict, and with the wild abandon of grace.

1. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1908), 175–76.
2. For an excellent treatment of the Wesleyan reading of scripture that goes deeper than the space available here, see *Scripture and the Life of God: Why the Bible Matters Today More Than Ever* by David F. Watson.

Jessica LaGrone

Jessica LaGrone is Dean of the Chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary, where she earned an MDiv degree. Previously she served as one of the pastors at The Woodlands UMC in Houston, Texas. She is an ordained elder in the Texas Annual Conference and is the author of *The Miracles of Jesus, Namesake, and Broken and Blessed*.

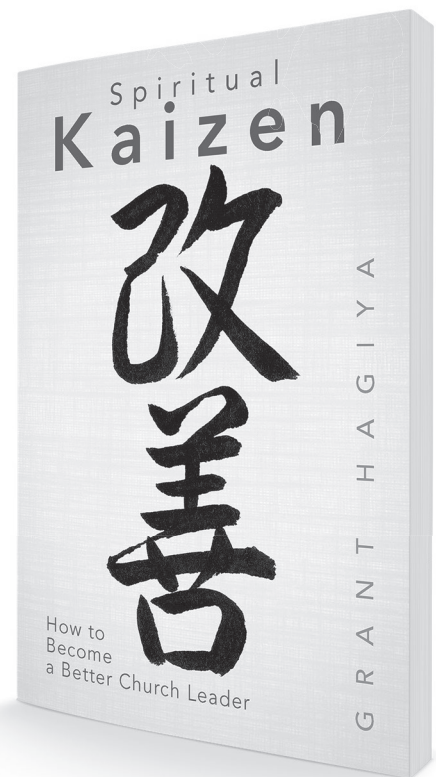


LEADERS AREN'T BORN. THEY'RE MADE, ONE STEP AT A TIME.

"Kaizen" is a Japanese word that translates roughly, "to change or correct for the better." What are the traits, qualities and characteristics of effective clergy? Is it possible to transform an average local church pastor into a highly effective and growth-oriented pastor? Leadership is not defined at birth. All of us can grow and develop into more effective leaders and we can do this at any time during our careers.

"This book should be required reading for all wishing to be spiritual leaders." —**Adam Hamilton**

Bishop Grant Hagiya is the Resident Bishop of the new "Greater Northwest Area" of The United Methodist Church.



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How to Love Through **Resistance**

by Ginger Gaines-Cirelli

The language of “resistance” has a long history. For many it will call to mind those who’ve marched, stood on picket lines, participated in sit-ins, and put their bodies between trucks, tanks, and other people or cherished land. Used as a political term, *resistance* is generally understood as a

kind of collective civil disobedience, focused on justice and human rights, and embodied in public actions like those just mentioned.

I’m not a political theorist or activist; I’m a pastor-theologian and a follower of Jesus. Thus, the language of “resis-

tance” for Christians evolves through prayer, conversation, and practice in a different way.

Sacred resistance is a movement, not a moment. While that phrase is certainly a rallying cry to stay engaged in the critical conversations and issues of

our time, it also conveys a substantive claim. *Sacred resistance* is a stance, a way of being in the world, and an ongoing orientation to the world. As followers of Jesus, sacred resistance is at the heart of our *being*, not just our *doing*.

This does not mean that we go around *being* defensive all the time. It doesn't mean that we will always be angry and argumentative. Rather it means that, as those formed in and by relationship with Christ, our very being is turned toward God and attuned to God's wisdom and way. Therefore, our inward posture centers on God and resists all that is *not* God, resists all that is counter to the ways of God revealed through Jesus.

Of course, we get turned around and find ourselves upside down all the time. The point is not that we claim to get it right. The point is that, as those who are in Christ, our call is to be deeply, profoundly *with*—with God, with other people, and with all the creatures of the world. As followers of the God whose life is poured out *for* others to bring about wholeness, our call is to find meaning and purpose in doing the same.

This, then, is our way of being in the world: to be with and for God and others and to participate in God's life of love, justice, and mending. In the traditional language, life is found in the biblical requirement to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27 CEB).

When we gather for the called General Conference in 2019, my deep prayer is that those like myself who are honored with the responsibility to speak and vote as delegates will come with-

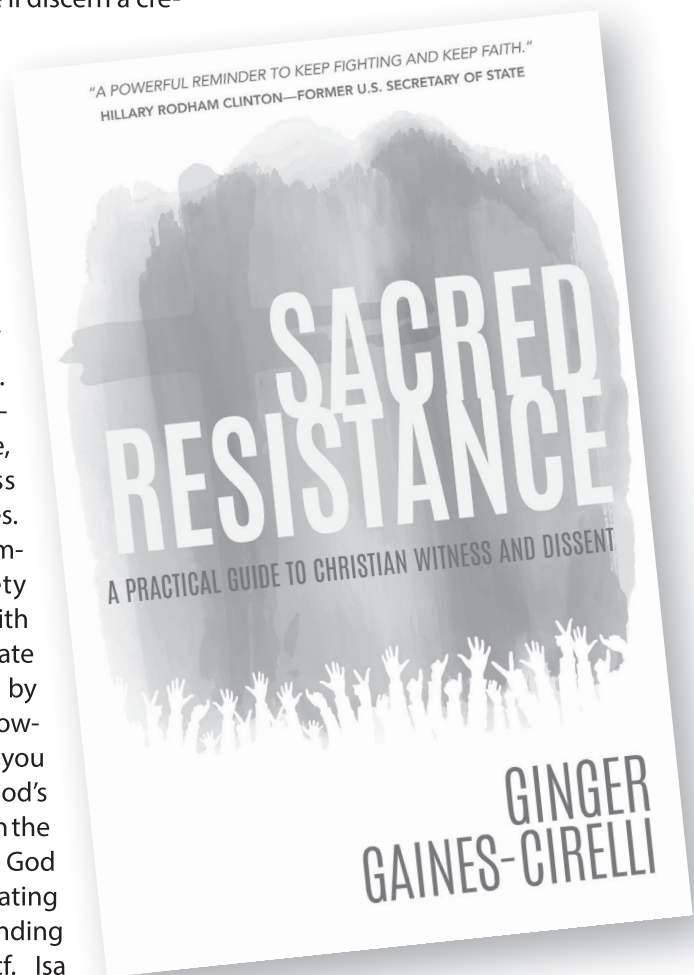
out defensive resistance toward other people, a resistance fueled by preconceived or hardened opinions of one another. Instead, I hope we will arrive committed to "sacred resistance" toward the destructive energies that seek to terminate our communion and to harm those most vulnerable among us. I pray we will arrive energized and fueled by love of God and love of all our neighbors. I firmly believe this is possible—because with God all things are possible!—and that this is the only way we'll discern a creative way forward that is truly aligned with God's vision.

Sacred resistance is ultimately creative. To resist hatred and violence is to make a positive, creative choice for the sake of love and tenderness. Where hatred and violence are consumptive, love and tenderness are generative qualities. In choosing to risk comfort, status, or safety to be in solidarity with another, you participate in God's way, guided by God's wisdom, empowered by God's grace. If you are participating in God's way, you have a share in the creative work because God is always at work creating and re-creating, mending and making new (cf. Isa 43:19; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17)!

This way of thinking about sacred resistance is a way of being, grounded in the grace of God, which tunes our hearts and minds to the beauty and brokenness of the world—to the beauty of The UMC and its brokenness. Sacred resistance is a way of

dwelling in God that provides both a vision to work toward and the traveling mercies to get there. Sacred resistance moves us to action and holds us in the promise of God's steadfast presence and love as we take risks in solidarity with others.

What would it look like for the United Methodist General Conference of 2019 to collectively trust God in such a prophetic, countercultural way?



If we truly try to follow Jesus, we'll understand that God's creative, mending, saving love is extended to the whole world and is particularly focused on the vulnerable and those experiencing pain or injustice. Even a cursory review of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's life reveals that he spent

most of his energy in the margins, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, confronting injustice, restoring life and dignity to those for whom these gifts had been denied. There are innumerable persons around the world who suffer the indignities of poverty, violence, injustice, and prejudice. Thanks be to God that our denomination is in solidarity and service with so many people across the spectrum of human affliction.

Yet The UMC singles out LGBTQ persons—who daily face stigma and rejection—and labels these human beings “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Among us are persons of deep and thoughtful faith who are unable to reconcile their reading of scripture with the claim that LGBTQ people are *just like them* except for sexual orientation or gender identity. There are amazing, faithful, Jesus-following LGBTQ leaders and participants across our church at every level. Many of these persons have great compassion for those who struggle with the scriptures, because they have done the same! There are LGBTQ persons called by God to serve in ordained ministry. There are children in our pews soaking up what they see, hear, and feel, and some of them are LGBTQ. And there are countless LGBTQ persons who left the church or will never enter our blessed communion because they know they will not be received as God’s dearly loved children.

In his first letter to the Corinthian churches, Paul described life together: “Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. . . . If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it” (1 Cor 12:12, 26 CEB). Many years

ago, the deep truth of these words pierced my heart. The preacher said

My earnest prayer
for General
Conference 2019
is that we will
participate in God’s
mending of the
body of Christ,
rather than choose
to do further harm;
that we will see one
another as fellow
human travelers on
the way of Christ,
and love all
our neighbors
as ourselves.

simply, “The body of Christ has AIDS.” It struck me as never before: *my body* has AIDS because the bodies of others suffer from this disease. What affects

one, affects all. This is one reason why Jesus said to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

To love our neighbors as ourselves will require that we see the other people as human beings, not as walking stereotypes or abbreviations or “issues.” A wise mentor recently reminded me that as soon as a stereotype gets activated, there is no more “personal” connection. The person or group loses any sense of personhood and becomes like an object, a faceless thing without history, dignity, or heart. In our focus on “issues,” people often get “lumped into” a stereotyped identity or perspective. People become faceless blobs in an amorphous, ideological “issue.” I can’t count the number of times a lesbian or gay friend has said, “I am not an ‘issue!’”

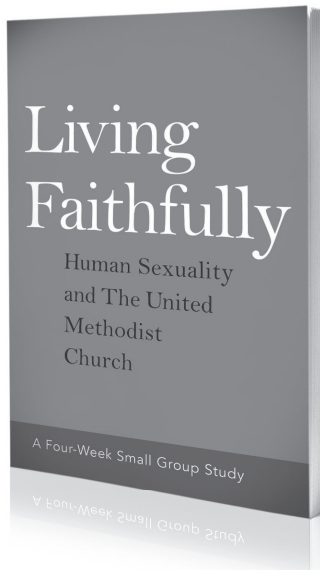
My earnest prayer for General Conference 2019 is that we will participate in God’s mending of the body of Christ, rather than choose to do further harm; that we will see one another as fellow human travelers on the way of Christ, and love all our neighbors as ourselves. Even in this difficult moment I am a person of deep hope. I resist because my hope is in God. And, thanks be to God, my resistance draws me near to evidences that hope is not in vain.

Ginger Gaines-Cirelli

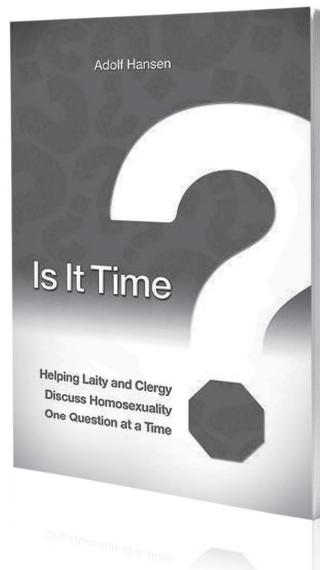
Ginger Gaines-Cirelli, author of *Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent*, is the senior pastor at Foundry United Methodist Church in Washington, DC. She previously served as pastor at two other beltway area United Methodist Churches, St. Matthew’s and Capitol Hill. She earned an MDiv at Yale Divinity School and was a Princeton Theological Fellow. She served as a general editor for *The CEB Women’s Bible*.



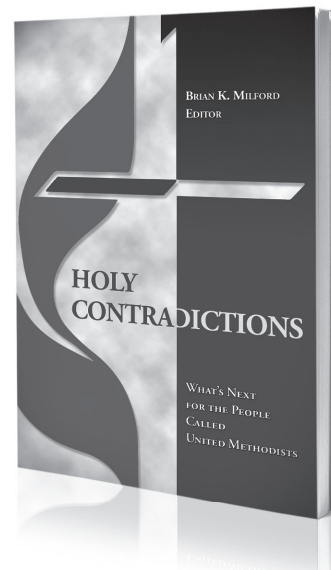
FAULTLINES



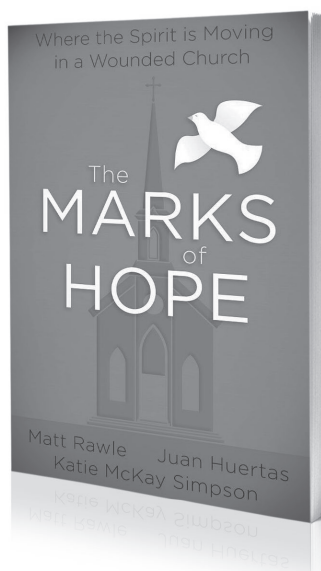
Living Faithfully is designed to help you understand the shape of the debate about what The United Methodist Church should teach about homosexuality, same gender marriage, and the ordination of LGBTQ persons. A Leader Guide is included with lesson plans to help facilitate a four-session small group study.



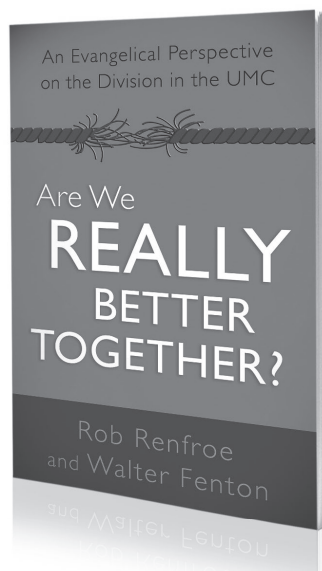
Helping Laity and Clergy Discuss Homosexuality One Question at a Time



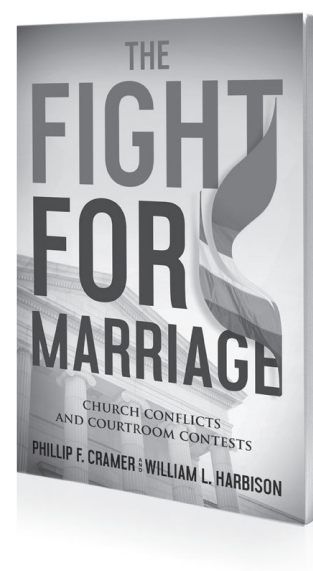
How might United Methodists bear witness to graceful and mutually respectful ways of living in the Wesleyan tradition amid enduring disagreements about same-gender relationships and related church practices?



The church can be a hopeful model for the world amidst changing culture, evolving ministry and the conflicts that arise.

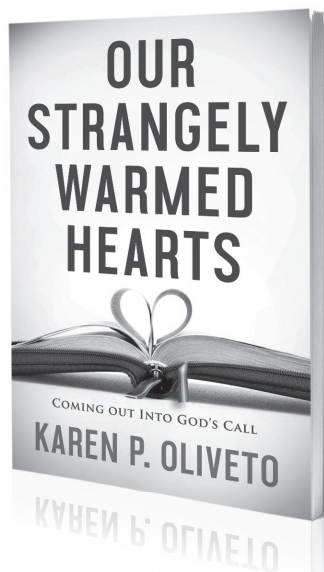


The authors set out to address the division within The United Methodist Church and contend that remaining united is hurting the church and the proclamation of the gospel.

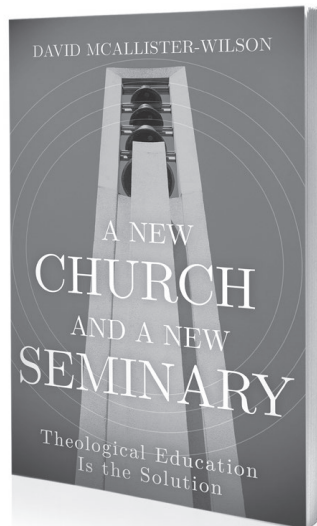


Unique perspectives from Christian attorneys on the front lines of the U.S. Supreme Court battle for marriage equality.

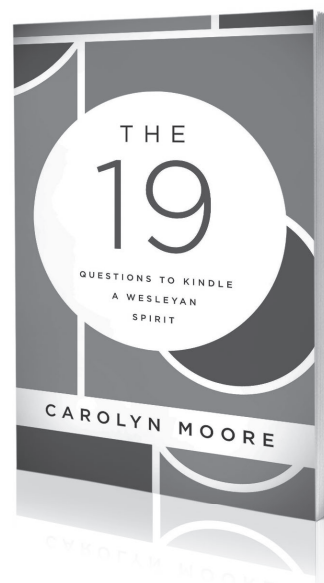
Abingdon Press is pleased to introduce Faultlines, a suite of new resources to encourage and inform robust conversations about challenging questions being debated by faithful United Methodists. We offer this array of books with differing perspectives for your study, reflection, and edification as together we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.



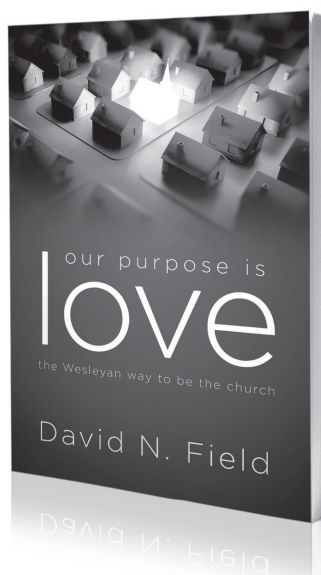
Through poignant stories and well-reasoned principles, Karen Oliveto discloses why and how spiritual renewal and a personal call to ministry emerge in the strangely warmed hearts of lesbian and gay Christians.



The future of the church and the future of the seminary are inextricably linked.



The questions around commitment to the rules of the Church have a contemporary urgency in this season of division.



What does it mean to love God and neighbor today—in both the world and the church—and can this be the answer to the conflict that divides and polarizes us?

 **Abingdon Press™**
Growing in Life, Serving in Faith
AbingdonPress.com/Faultlines



How Does Our Decision Affect a Local Church?

by Tom Berlin

Photo Credit: Getty Images

For eighteen months, I served as a member of the Commission on a Way Forward. Commission members worked in good faith and good will even as we expressed the range of opinions held by members from different continents and countries. Lay and clergy, male and female, gay and straight represented different cultures and ethnicities and covered the ideological waterfront of The United Methodist Church. It was intense and tiring. Many meetings ended with a dash to the airport to get home to my normal life, where I serve as the lead pastor

of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia.

The local church is the focus of my ministry. Floris is a large multisite congregation that has become multicultural as our majority Anglo membership has welcomed a growing number of members from India, Pakistan, West Africa, Mexico, and Central and South America. Our goal is to share the good news of life in Christ with our diverse, multicultural community. We are thoroughly United Methodist. Our members fill all the corners of our ideologi-

cally big-tent church. We are located near Washington, DC, and many of our members are connected to the work of the federal government. I knew something special was happening when I learned that economic advisors for Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and President Donald Trump met for brunch after attending church together.

The more we pursue a Pentecost-based calling to allow the love of Christ to unite diverse people, the more complicated our life together

becomes. We learn from our varied cultural and political viewpoints. However, those differences can also frustrate and lead us to question how we can collectively hold the same faith while sometimes supporting completely different policies. We have enough legitimate reasons to break community to marvel at the grace that keeps us together.

Like most United Methodists, our faith compels our service. We have a twenty-year mission partnership with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. Our members have also built relationships with Methodists in Haiti, Cuba, and various UMCOR projects in the United States. The majority of our service happens in our local community, where we address important concerns with our nonprofit partners.

Our church is like yours. Everything that I have described, and much more, depends in some way on the connectivity of The United Methodist Church. If our relationships break up, the ministry that serves the physical and spiritual lives of many goes with it. There is a lot at stake here.

Floris UMC is about ten minutes from Dulles International Airport, requiring a quick transition after the plane lands between the deep, thoughtful work of the Commission on a Way Forward and the broad concerns of our church. Here are some things I learned to remember that may help you with perspective.

Whatever the General Conference decides will not address many critical issues related to the future of the local church. If either side gets the exact outcome they desire, it will have little impact on the number of people who are motivated to regularly worship God, exhibit committed discipleship, or offer service in the name of Christ.

We are holding this called General Conference because LGBTQ people matter to our church and we need resolution to an ongoing conflict over their inclusion. I hope that resolution will bless LGBTQ people and enable us to redirect energy expended on conflict to a renewed strategy for church vitality. The future of our connection depends on a sustained focus on the ministry of the local church.

Local churches do not enjoy the near unanimous agreement about LGBTQ inclusion found in renewal and advocacy groups on either side who wield the largest megaphones in the dialogue. This is why we must keep the context of the typical local church in mind. As a pastor preaching at four worship services every Sunday, I am a bit jealous of the apparent unanimity in these groups. It would be wonderful to craft messages that easily result in the collective head nodding of a crowded room or get people fired up without anyone walking out. How nice to build your budget by having people agree on a select group of key issues and mutual frustrations without all the complexity found in the shared life of a congregation. While others benefit when people get wound up to act swiftly, most pastors spend time helping people cool down to think deliberately.

The church I serve is like yours. We have unity in Christ. We have a love for one another demonstrated in a thousand acts of grace and kindness. But the only time we experience full harmony or unison is when we sing. Even then, we can get a little off key. We need a resolution that the broadest number of people in our local churches finds compatible with their shared life together.

There is no plan that will make everyone happy. During the last day of the

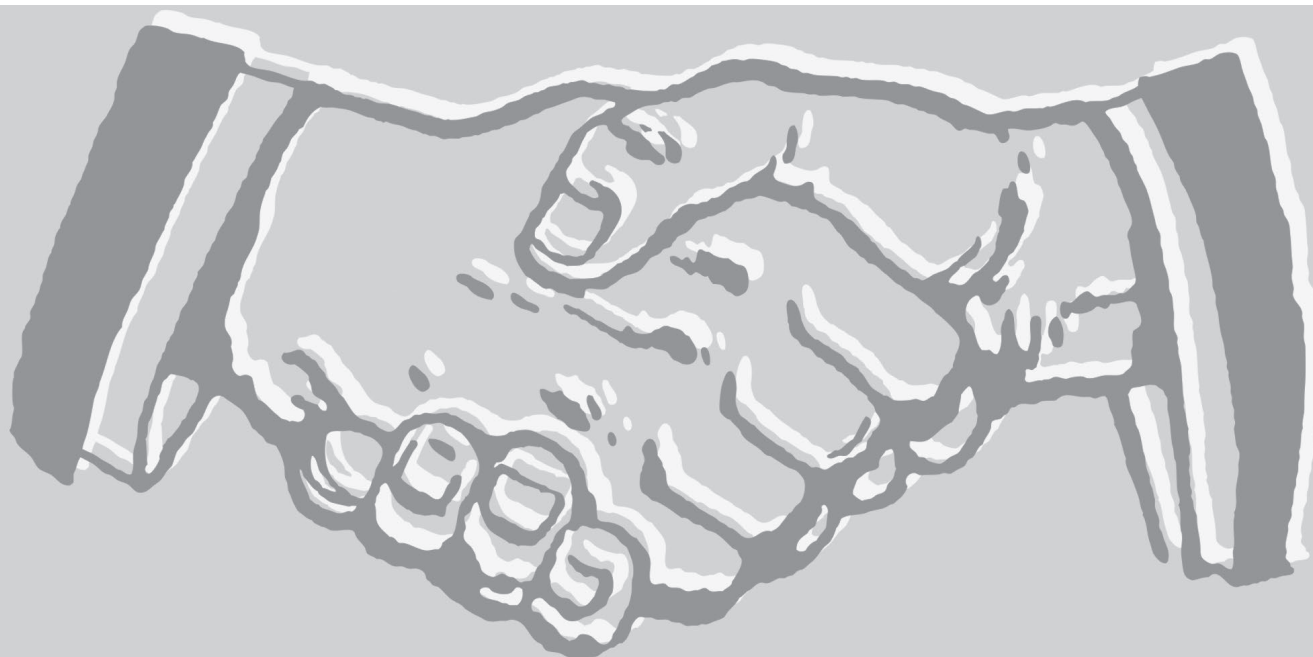
Commission meeting, I felt a profound sadness realizing that, in the end, we had not found the seamless solution that would honor the principles of all parties. While I never consciously thought that possible, I realized it was my deepest hope. Settling back into life when the Commission's meetings concluded, I remembered that few plans in our local church satisfy all parties. Relocating the church, starting a second site, altering ministries, ending events, updating the website, and other changes create tension, conflict, and even lead some to leave. Like you, I have many stories of compromises made, proposals altered, people gained and lost, and imperfect plans that have brought us unexpected blessings in the messy world of the local church.

No matter what plan prevails, we will need to understand that LGBTQ people will continue to be born and, hopefully, continue to call The United Methodist Church their home. Because of this, the question of their inclusion will remain long after 2019. General Conference delegates cannot get caught up in the rarified heights of denominational deliberation. They will be wise to consider and learn from the often untidy and chaotic community of the local church when considering our future together.

Tom Berlin

Tom Berlin is senior pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia. He is a graduate of Virginia Tech and Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Tom is co-author (with Lovett Weems) of *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results, Overflow: Increase Worship Attendance and Bear More Fruit*, and *High Yield: Seven Disciplines of the Fruitful Leader*. He is also author of video-based adult studies, including *Defying Gravity and Restored*.





AGREEMENT *TO* RATHER THAN AGREEMENT *WITH*

by John R. Schol

In every decision, there are elements of disagreement. Leadership in decision-making is a process of guiding people to agree *to*, not trying to get everyone to agree *with*. For example, sometimes we do not agree *with* an adult child's decision, but we agree *to* support and love them. The Greater New Jersey cabinet collectively has not always agreed *with* an appointment, but we all must agree *to* make the appointment. Agreement *with* means we all think alike and all agree with each other's thinking about the issues and circumstances of the appointment.

Superintendents do not all see and think about pastors, congregations, communities, theology, needs, and benefits of an appointment in the same

way. If we forced all to agree *with*, we would be challenged to finish appointment seasons. Instead, the GNJ cabinet, like other cabinets, recognizes that we are agreeing *to* make the appointment given a set of circumstances and issues, with which we will not all agree.

Jesus was more interested in *to* than *with*. Jesus was about action, intent, and mission. He could say to one person, the best way to love God and be a disciple is to sell all you have and follow. Yet, in another situation, the best way to serve was to use expensive perfume and oil to wash feet. In agreement *with*, the focus would be on wealth and expense. In agreement *to*, the focus is on how your mind is fixed on God through your actions.

Agreement *with* means that there is an attempt to get everyone to agree with all aspects of a plan. The plan inevitably must be watered down to reach final agreement. Agreement *with* focuses on what individuals want:

- I want to be a part of a denomination that agrees *with* me about homosexuality.
- I want the *Book of Discipline* to change so that we can fully be in ministry *with* gays and lesbians so that gays and lesbians can marry in our churches, be ordained, and participate fully in our churches.
- I want the *Book of Discipline* to stay just like it is because I agree *with* it.

When people focus only on what they prefer, the only option is all or nothing. There will be no agreement by the extremes if any change focuses only on what people want.

Instead, helping people focus on agreement to reorients the conversation.

- I agree to focus on the mission so that it is central and all have the opportunity to participate in the mission.
- I agree to stay in relationship with each other and focus on a common mission together, even though the change is not perfect for everyone.

LEADING TOWARD TO

Agreeing to calls for leadership to understand United Methodist disciples well enough to know their deeper desires, which, if met, will allow them to live with different beliefs and opinions. It is safe to say that there will not be agreement *with* any plan for a way forward. We will risk continued division if we seek agreement *with* a plan. Instead, inviting people to agree to actions for the good of the witness and mission of The United Methodist Church may provide a path for reason and passion to come together.

Overall, General Conference delegates seek to be faithful to the core teachings that make us United Methodist and seek to make changes that allow us to live our core teachings/beliefs/values. Agreeing to doesn't undermine what we believe. Rather, it provides a path to further enhance and live out our core teachings/beliefs/values.

CORE VALUES, BELIEFS, AND COMMITMENTS THAT MOVE THE MISSION FORWARD

As United Methodists, we value these core beliefs and commitments:

- God's grace is evidenced in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- All are called to be followers of Jesus Christ.
- Christ's example is loving God completely and loving our neighbor.
- John Wesley taught disciples to love by engaging disciples to regularly practice the means of grace: works of piety and intentional acts of mercy and justice.
- The means of grace call disciples to:
 - read, study, and follow the scriptures.
 - gather in congregations, so the body of Christ deepens their faith through the means of grace, which can mature believers and send disciples out to engage in transforming the world.
- The Bible is primary for our understanding of faith. We use the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience to understand how we live scripture in our daily living.
- Local congregations are connectional through the sharing of:
 - a clear set of core values.
 - a common mission.
 - a unified structure that is applied contextually.
- Resources through apportionments build up the body of Christ and advance the witness and mission of Jesus Christ.
- The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Congregations that practice these core values, beliefs, and commitments are Wesleyan in nature and in mission. They recognize the importance of our mission and that the mission strengthens as we serve together. Ultimately it is a common set of core values, beliefs, and commitments that holds us together.

THE CURRENT REALITY

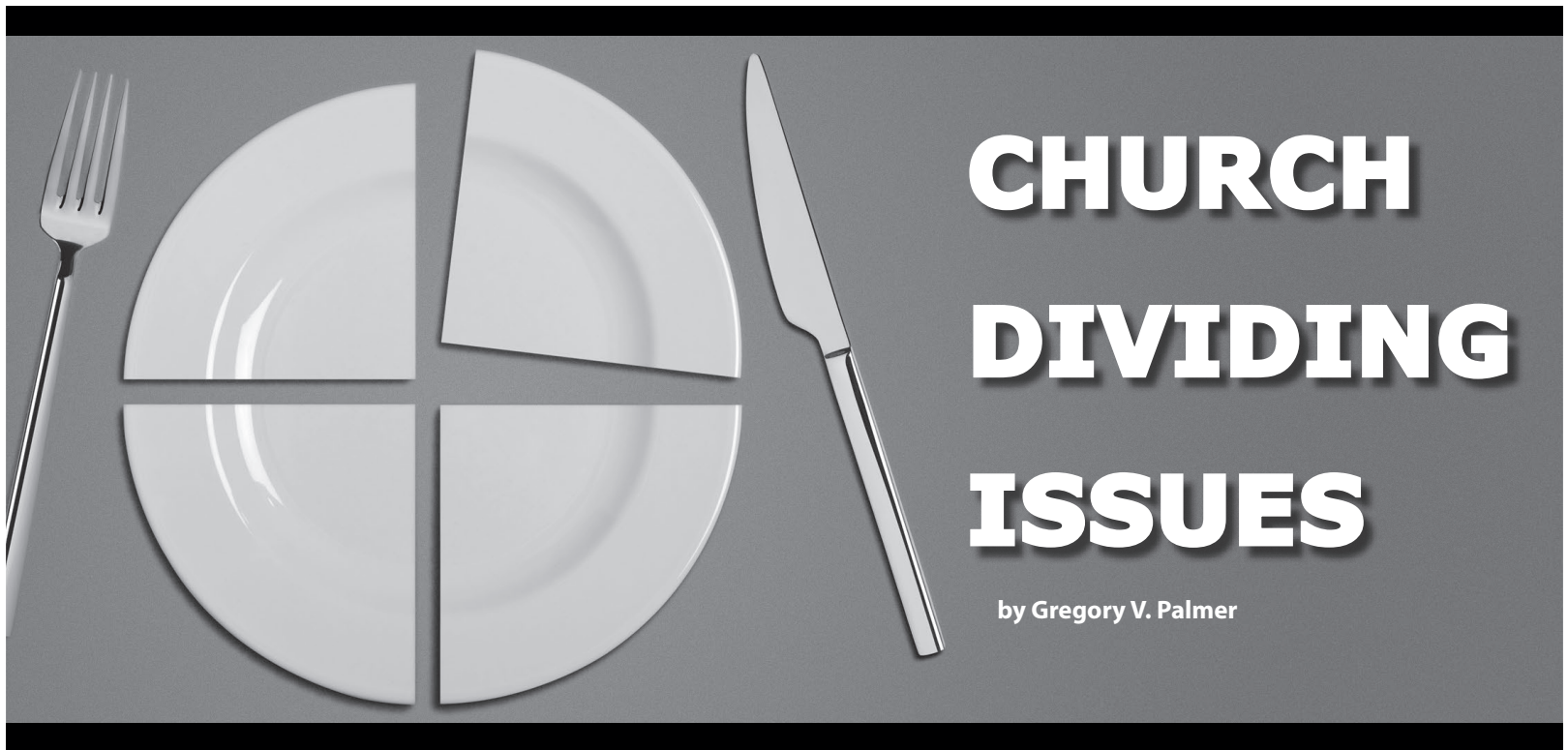
United Methodists are fractured by our focus on getting people to agree *with* a particular idea, and as a result the mission ultimately suffers. Our *Book of Discipline* thus becomes prescriptive in forcing compliance. Over the years, the *Book of Discipline* evolved to the point that it does not entrust United Methodists with the freedom and responsibility to interpret and live out our core values, beliefs, and commitments in different contexts. In other words, we are requiring agreement *with* rather than calling people to a posture of being and doing the great commandment, love God and love your neighbor. We are forcing agreement *with* rather than agreeing to fulfill calling, discipleship, and mission.

I hope for a General Conference that calls us to a renewed mission. I believe, even with its challenges, the One Church Model invites us to a way forward missionally, in part because it does not ground our mission in seeking agreement *with* one another.

John R. Schol

John R. Schol is bishop in the New Jersey area. He was educated at the Boston University School of Theology. He served the Frankford Group Ministry in Philadelphia, helped a church restore its vitality in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and launched two popular mission programs at the General Board of Global Ministries.





CHURCH DIVIDING ISSUES

by Gregory V. Palmer

A *Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. (Eph 4:2-3 CEB)*

Ecumenical relationships, conversations, and partnerships are a gift. All of us have benefited from them in varying degrees across our life in the church. I recall most ecumenical relationships with fondness and appreciation, and only occasionally with tearful disappointment. Among the many blessings has been the opportunity to learn new (for me) terms and wrestle with familiar words in light of new contexts and relationships.

In recent years, the phrase “church dividing issue(s)” emerged. During a series of scheduled conversations in a bilateral dialogue of which I have been a part, these three words started to be used with regularity as the dialogue team began to reach some key decision points in our work. We would ask ourselves from time to time as

we waded through the pivotal theological and ecclesiological topics, “Is this a church dividing issue?” Or sometimes a participant might declare, “This is not a church dividing issue.” This checkpoint helped each participant and the entire dialogue team to distinguish between truly substantive matters and pet peeves, quirks, or misconceptions. To be sure, arriving at consensus or reaching sufficient agreement to move the work forward was not always smooth or easy. At several places, it was hard won, punctuated by lots of prayer and sometimes uneasy silences. I refer not to the kind of planned silence to give space for prayer and meditation. It was more the silence birthed in one of those *I can’t believe what I just heard* moments. But testing our work and our progress by whether or not something was church dividing gave us reasonable confidence that our labors focused on things that really mattered in light of the gospel and the mission of the church.

The proclamation of the gospel and the mission of the church are at stake. If one of the marks or characteristics of authenticity for church is oneness, then the church in every iteration and expression must wrestle with whether it embodies this quality or not. Oneness is not only the stuff of ecumenism. It is also essential and ongoing work within distinct church bodies or denominations. In the case of The United Methodist Church, now fifty years old but with roots much older, we must determine for ourselves what are and what are not church dividing issues. What rises to a level of importance that schism might be the most obvious, preferred, or best option?

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament and of church history make it plain in short order that people of Christian faith have found themselves at such odds that they determined they could no longer walk together or work together. Think about it. The Apostle Paul spent more than a little

Photo Credit: Getty Images

time urging and praying for the unity of the early Christian communities he sought to lead and encourage. He ex-

pursued a particular focus they felt called to emphasize. This short (not exhaustive) list points to a few crucial

us to both affirm and question what is essential for salvation and for the mission of the church. These instruc-

The proclamation of the gospel and the mission of the church are at stake.

horts, cajoles, and sometimes paints with words a picture of what oneness and unity look like. Who among us has not turned repeatedly to the body images he paints? Yet even Paul has some record of separation from others; namely Barnabas and John Mark (see Acts 15). It is not altogether clear whether this was a theological difference or, more likely, a personality one. Thanks be to God, there are intimations elsewhere in the record that there was some redemption, if not explicit healing and reconciliation. So clearly from the beginning, Christians have struggled with what it means to be bound together for the sake of the mission. We have not always been successful in this.

Beyond the pages of the New Testament, there have been all sorts of partings of the way for those who make up the church. People have engaged in vigorous conversations about how to articulate the faith and live it out in practical ways. These conversations sometimes began in formal church councils. Sometimes they were more movemental, triggered by the assertion of a new interpretation of scripture, the activity of the Spirit in an individual or small group who

turning points in which the church experienced division or radical change:

- Nicea
- Constantinople
- The Great Schism of East and West
- The Reformation

In our own Methodist tradition, there have been notable divisions over matters of race, worship practices, leadership and authority, how the Spirit evidences its work in the Christian life, and on and on. Occasionally there have been some reunions, and some would rightly ask, “but at whose expense?”

Not only do the scriptures bend in the direction of urging oneness and unity, but so do the witness and teaching of John Wesley. His thinking on these matters shows up in a number of places. Among them are “On Schism,” “Catholic Spirit,” and “A Letter to a Roman Catholic.” I also love the attention he gives to matters of unity and division in the church in “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.” Wesley returns repeatedly to several themes in his guidance: humility, liberty of thought, and love. He also challenges

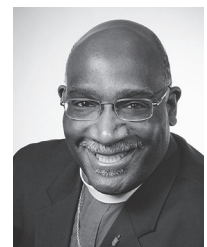
tive words are from “The Character of a Methodist”:

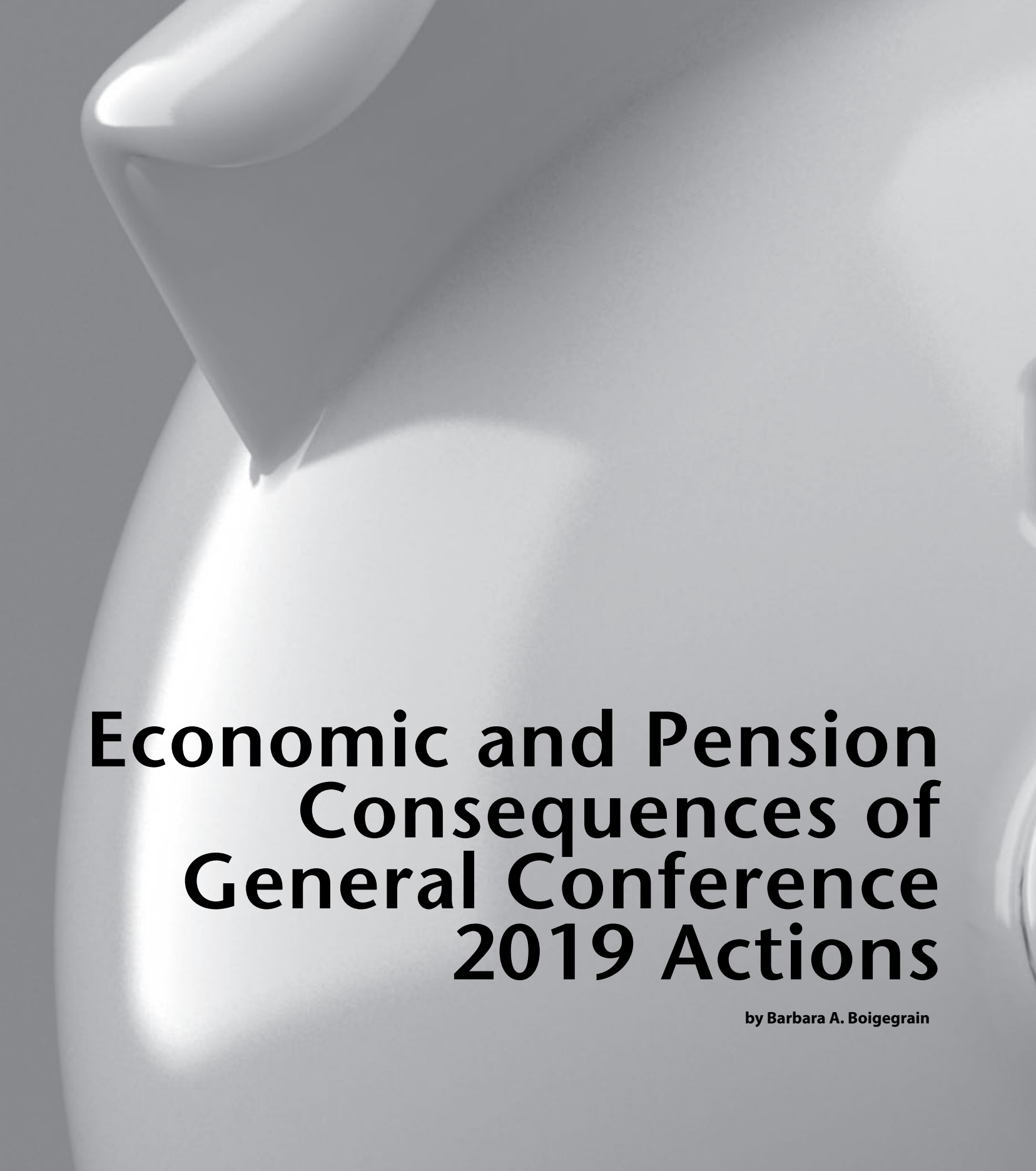
“But as to all opinions, which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist.”

The question before us in the present struggle of The United Methodist Church over matters of human sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, is whether or not “it strikes at the root of Christianity.” How we answer that will speak loads about the gospel to the world and determine, at least in part, our missional and institutional future.

Gregory V. Palmer

Gregory V. Palmer is bishop of the West Ohio area and also served the Iowa and Illinois areas. Previously he served United Methodist churches in Ohio and North Carolina. He studied at George Washington University and Duke Divinity School. He is the coeditor of *That They May Be One: The Episcopal-United Methodist Dialogue*.





Economic and Pension Consequences of General Conference 2019 Actions

by Barbara A. Boigegrain



Photo Credit: Getty Images

SERVANT OF THE CHURCH

As administrator of plan benefits for The United Methodist Church, Wespeth Benefits and Investments¹ (Wespeth) is responsible for investing plan assets and sustaining benefit payments long into the future. Wespeth has been caring for those who serve since 1908—sixty years before this church was “United.” We intend to continue caring for those who serve for generations to come—by making whatever adjustments are necessary to pension plan design, administration, and investments in our role as a prudent fiduciary of the church.

Our mission of caring for those who serve is rooted in the earliest days of Methodism, with the Easter offering in 1774 for “preachers in want.” The first formalized support for itinerant ministers was the Preacher’s Fund—created in 1784 for “worn-out preachers, widows and children,” and based on John Wesley’s guidance. Wespeth’s history as a general agency started with the General Conference 1908 authorization to create the Board of Conference Claimants, a denomination-wide agency to help support retired clergy and their families.

ADAPTING TO CHANGES

Over the span of more than two hundred years, benefits for retired clergy and their families have adapted to meet changing times and needs.

Today our pension plans are at a crossroads—not only because of the impending vote by General Conference 2019 and its potential impact on the future of the church, but also because of demographic trends that have nothing to do with the special General Conference. Trends such as declining membership in US churches,

Through our scenario planning and over one hundred years of serving the church, Wespath is well-positioned to continue fulfilling our mission well into the future.

decreasing numbers of ordained elders, and increasing part-time local pastors and lay ministers also drive long-term plan design considerations.

Reviewing plan designs periodically is a normal course of business. From time to time, Wespath's board of directors recommends changes to address denominational, demographic, and economic factors. Proposed changes are subject to General Conference approval, so we are typically planning at least a quadrennium ahead. In weighing long-term sustainability of retirement benefits, we are looking

ten, twenty, and even fifty years into the future.

Our church faces uncertain times in the near future. What remains certain is Wespath's commitment to securing benefits over the long haul for United Methodist clergy and other plan beneficiaries.

MANAGING THROUGH A CHANGING CHURCH STRUCTURE

While none of us can accurately predict the outcome of General Confer-

ence 2019 and its aftermath, many of us have closely followed the work of the Commission on a Way Forward. We have contemplated the Commission's proposals and considered how potential rearrangement or avenues for exit of clergy, churches, or annual conferences might impact UMC structure—and specifically pensions.

As part of their thoughtful discernment process, both the Commission and the Council of Bishops asked Wespath for analyses to help them better understand how restructure scenarios could impact pension benefits, funding, and administration. Wespath has

..... ECONOMIC AND PENSION CONSEQUENCES OF GENERAL CONFERENCE 2019 ACTIONS

been in discussion with both groups regarding the impact on individual clergy benefits, local church contributions, and annual conferences' financial liabilities. Wespath formed a scenario planning team to study restructure consequences in depth.

Notwithstanding potential changes in the church, Wespath is focused on assuring that the plans we manage for clergy and the funds we invest are sustainable.

However, while benefits for retired clergy are secured—and accrued benefits for active clergy also are secured—we believe that pension plan designs must be modified toward a more account-based design to protect the long-term viability of benefits for future generations of clergy.

Church restructure scenarios could *accelerate* the need to modify pension

plan designs for a long-term outlook; however, restructure in itself would not *create* this need.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR PENSION PLAN

Each clergyperson has a unique combination of benefits based on one's specific years of service and the plan designs in place at that time of service. Most active clergy now also contribute to their own retirement savings, and thus are more engaged than prior generations in assuring their personal financial readiness for retirement.

However, annual conferences ultimately assume responsibility for paying benefits promised to retirees. Annual conferences and local churches (through the conference) fund the lion's share of retirement benefits. As we think about any future church

changes, this responsibility of benefit payments is one of many questions that Wespath is reviewing. Specifically, we are examining what would happen to funding if a local church leaves The UMC.

The connectional nature of our denomination means that departure by one church affects others. Churches that leave The UMC should be responsible for paying "their fair share" of pension funding, as part of the annual conference's aggregate unfunded pension liability.

CASE STUDY—PAST INFORMS FUTURE

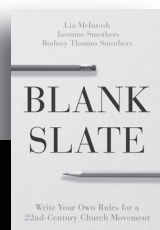
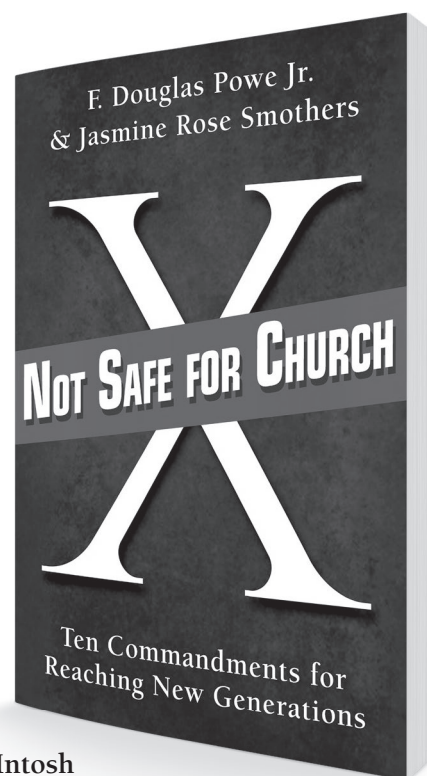
Keeping track of service records, itineracies, and funding for each clergyperson's unique benefits profile is challenging as is. Add in potential realignment of conferences or exits of

REACHING A NEW GENERATION REQUIRES A NEW CONVERSATION.

Congregations say they want to reach new and younger people, many of whom are simply turned off by church. The big idea is that congregations must be willing to embrace radical ways to connect with new generations. Re-thinking old assumptions is a starting place but more is needed. To really connect congregations have to move beyond and start doing new things that are out of their comfort zones.

Jasmine Rose Smothers is the Lead Pastor of the historic Atlanta First United Methodist Church.

F Douglas Powe Jr. is the James C. Logan Professor of Evangelism and Professor of Urban Ministry, at Wesley Theological Seminary.



COMING IN MARCH 2019

Blank Slate

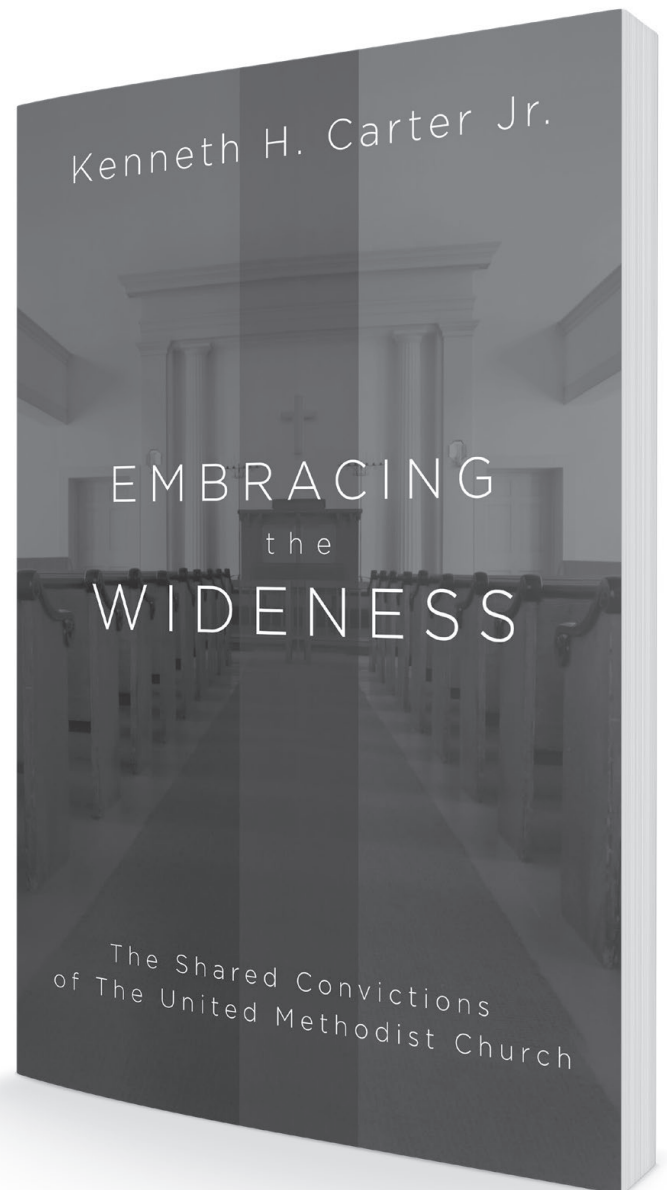
Jasmine Smothers, Rodney Thomas Smothers and Lia McIntosh

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HEAL THE CHURCH BY REDISCOVERING A GENEROUS ORTHODOXY.

Embracing the Wideness describes the shared space where author Ken Carter contrasts a generous orthodoxy with the culture wars that seek to drive a wedge between Christians with deep faith convictions. A generous orthodoxy is possible for The United Methodist Church because scripture supports both a confessing movement and a reconciling movement.

What great things could be accomplished if we rediscovered an orthodoxy in service of the healing, instead of dividing, of our bodies, that is, our churches! Such a generous orthodoxy would help us not to become immersed in the emotional processes that pit people against each other. Such a generous orthodoxy would keep us from becoming stuck in cycles of harmful collusion and escalating conflict. Such a generous orthodoxy would know that the source of our capacity to be healed of our schisms is a miracle beyond our human power or goodness or intelligence.



Kenneth H. Carter Jr. is Resident Bishop of the Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. He is a moderator of the Commission on a Way Forward and in 2018–2020 will serve as president of the Council of Bishops.

..... ECONOMIC AND PENSION CONSEQUENCES OF GENERAL CONFERENCE 2019 ACTIONS

churches, and “challenging” expands to “extremely complicated.”

The 2010 merger of four conferences into the Upper New York, Susquehanna, and New England annual conferences offers a case in point when thinking about UMC restructure. This merger required carefully tracking and reallocating pension obligations from more than 1,200 churches, and appropriately correlating with individual clergy. Wespath spent two years and seven thousand labor hours on facilitating the pension-related administrative requirements for this merger.

FULFILLING OUR MISSION— FOR GENERATIONS TO COME

Regardless of the GC2019 outcome, Wespath remains committed to our mission: caring for those who serve

by providing investment and benefit services that honor the mission and principles of The United Methodist Church. We are planning for the long-term sustainability of your benefits, and those of generations to come, as we look to plan designs that are increasingly account-based and portable.

Through our scenario planning and over one hundred years of serving the church, Wespath is well-positioned to continue fulfilling our mission well into the future. We have carried on through times of change, challenge, and divisiveness in the past. Our commitment to those who serve won't waiver, even amid the church's current storms.

1. G. K. Wespath Benefits and Investments (Wespath) is the name under which the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church conducts business. As a general agency of The UMC,

Wespath is administrator for UMC benefit plans and the investment manager of plan assets, as described in ¶1504.1, *The Book of Discipline*.

Barbara A. Boigegrain

Barbara A. Boigegrain is general secretary of Wespath Benefits and Investments, the largest reporting faith-based pension fund in the world (100,000 participants). She oversees all fiduciary services and administrative operations of Wespath, a general agency of The United Methodist Church. In addition, Barbara serves as a standing director of the Church Benefits Association and is a standing steering committee member of and current chair of the Church Alliance. Barbara and her husband are members of Glenview United Methodist Church in Glenview, Illinois.



A New Kind of Methodist Church For People Not In Church.

A wave of new Christian churches are emerging to reach unchurched and dechurched people who live in a culture that is increasingly non-religious and multi-religious. These new forms of church gather and network with people who typically have never been to church. The new faith communities listen to people and go where they are on the journey toward Jesus.

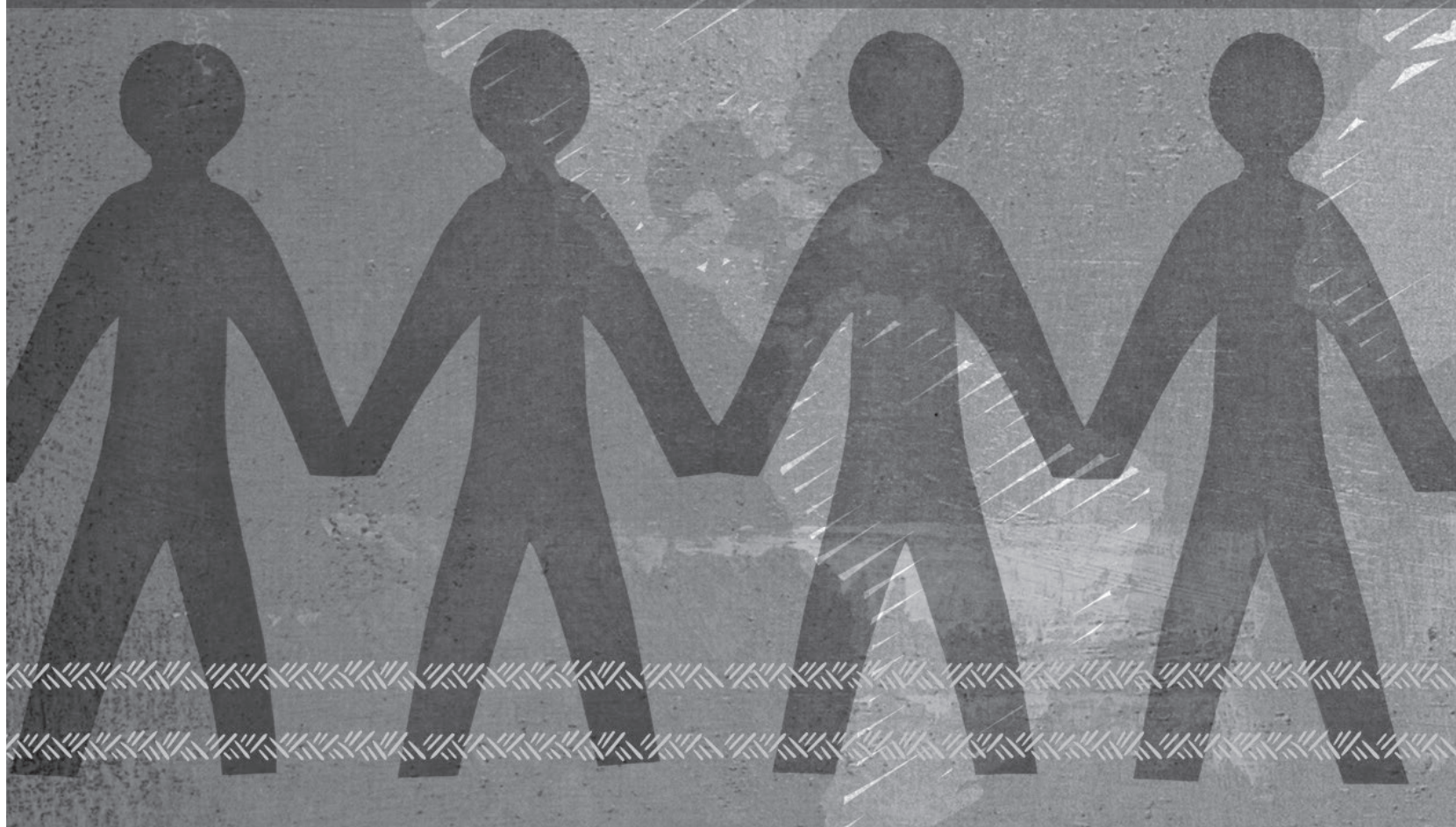
Kenneth H. Carter Jr. is Resident Bishop of the Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The Rev. Dr. Audrey Warren is the Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church, Miami FL.



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Unity for the S



Whenever I pause to reflect on how I and so many African men and women are products of God's mission through The United Methodist Church, I am amazed. I think back to my days at Africa University, where James Salley (Africa University's Associate Vice

Chancellor) still likes to remind graduates that we are the fruit of missional investments of fellow United Methodists locally and around the globe. We are among those who could not afford to have meals on the table or go to school if not for the generosity of

countless other United Methodists. As a member of Africa University's touring choir, I was able to visit many of these supporting congregations as we met and expressed our gratitude to those who had invested in us. I cannot say thank you enough for this great work.

Photo Credit: Getty Images

Sake of Mission

by Mande Muyombo



During my time on staff at the General Board of Global Ministries, I had the opportunity to witness God's mission through various projects undertaken by United Methodists across the globe. From Malawi to Cambodia, and from Argentina to the Philippines, I

experienced firsthand transformation through vital missional programs in congregational development, health, food security, disaster response, agriculture, and leadership development. At stake in our decisions in 2019 and 2020 is whether this Wesleyan mis-

sional movement will continue for the next fifty years and more in new places, such as Tanzania and Southeast Asia, where I have witnessed the thirst for the gospel and the need for missional engagement.

-continued

For us to be faithful to God's mission around the world as United Methodists, we seek to develop a sense of mutual accountability with one another. Drawing from his experience as the current General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (an ecumenical body composed of many member churches with diverse theological statements), Olav Fykse Tveit suggests that "mutual accountability refers to the quality of relations between and among people in the community. It refers to an attitude of active responsibility that must characterize any authentic relationship, the profoundly moral dimension of life together. . . . Mutual accountability is a matter of how we seek the truth together by sharing insights into the truth we carry."¹

Peter, James, and John wrestled with Paul concerning the introduction of Gentiles in the Christian community.

As followers of Christ, regardless of their disagreement on the topic, they developed strong relationships with each other while sustaining a unified mission between the communities of Jerusalem and that of Antioch, and eventually the other places where God's mission led Paul with their support through significant risks. The saints outside Jerusalem continued to support, without failure, God's mission in Jerusalem. For instance, Paul collected offerings to support the poor in Jerusalem.

While the proposed approaches for Christian unity of the United Methodist kind may fall short of perfection, like those outside Jerusalem, I believe that God's Spirit can lead us into God's mission, which is strengthened through authentic relationships. Many communities around the globe need to hear the gospel, the message of hope coming from United Method-

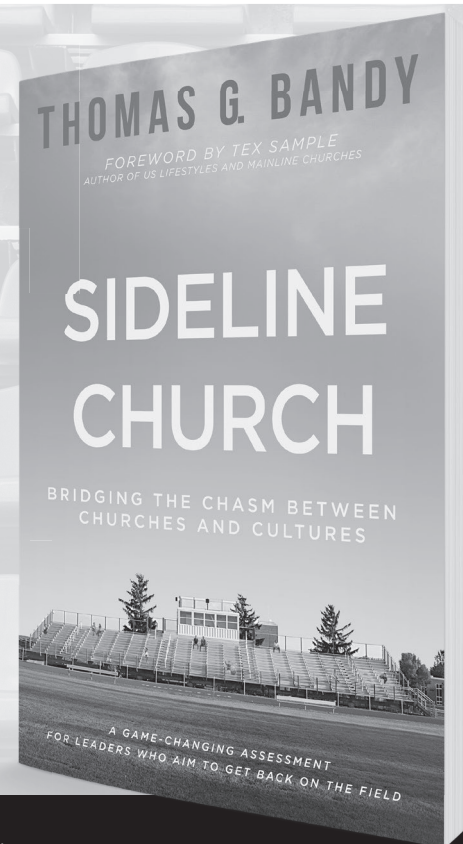
ists, other denominations, and even other faith traditions. As I visit people in North Katanga, Tanganyika, and Tanzania, I still see saints who are in need of food, shelter, healthcare, education, justice, and peace. In every community, young men and women share with me that they are seeking opportunities to study and be meaningful in their communities. Furthermore, I continue to see communities that need access to drinkable water and to be freed from cholera and other diseases. These human beings are seeking signs of God's kingdom through the good news of Jesus Christ manifested in mission built on authentic relationships and mutual accountability.

"The truth of the gospel can only be sought in a sense of accountability to what is given to us as the faith through the ages, and in a sense of accountability to those whom the gos-

CHURCHES HAVE BECOME MERE "SPECTATORS" STUCK ON THE SIDELINES. HOW DO THEY GET INTO THE GAME?

Most churches, regardless of their tradition, are now on the sidelines. They observe cultural change, but don't care to participate in it. Liberals and conservatives shout insults at one another across "the stadium." Churches become so preoccupied with what is going on in the "stands" that they pay less and less attention to the "game."

Many churches will never be able to cross that chasm between churches and culture. Those that do will discover that **the key is empathy of the most intimate and profound kind**—a true "heart burst" for others.



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pel addresses today, in their context, in their time, in their search for hope.”²

Young Christian leaders, millennials, and their communities seek hope for the future. They are looking for a church that will pass the torch for generations to come, as a church that values God’s mission.

The Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops gave significant consideration to mission and context as critical elements to be considered for a way forward for The United Methodist Church. In the ecumenical world, mission and service has become a critical element in cementing the unity of church and interchurch relationships. God’s Spirit drives a mission that continues to surprise by taking us on some challenging journeys, which sometimes encounter uncomfortably different views than our signature doctrinal

and theological positions. God’s Spirit surprised Peter, John, and James by introducing them to a self-proclaimed apostle of Christ, who claimed to have seen the risen Christ on his way to Damascus. In the same way, God’s Spirit continues to surprise communities around the world, even in America, who learn that women are equal and that we recognize their contributions to the church.

Some years ago, I lost a daughter to malaria. I believe that in a sense her resurrection is meaningful on earth as it is in heaven through the Imagine No Malaria program and subsequent health initiatives that United Methodists have invested in. We are in this mission *together*. Because we are better and more effective together than we are alone, I desire a *United Methodist Church* that will tackle together the issues of global migration and refugees around the world. I want to

see a *United Methodist Church* that will continue to invest in planting new faith communities around the world, and I still want to see a *United Methodist Church* that will continue raising up new Christian, principled leaders through global education initiatives.

1. Olav Fykse Tveit, *The Truth We Owe Each Other: Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016), vii.

2. Ibid.



Mande Muyombo

Mande Muyombo is bishop for the North Katanga area in the Congo Central Conference. Previously he was an executive for the Board of Global Ministries and president of Kamina Methodist University. He is a graduate of Africa University and St. Paul School of Theology.



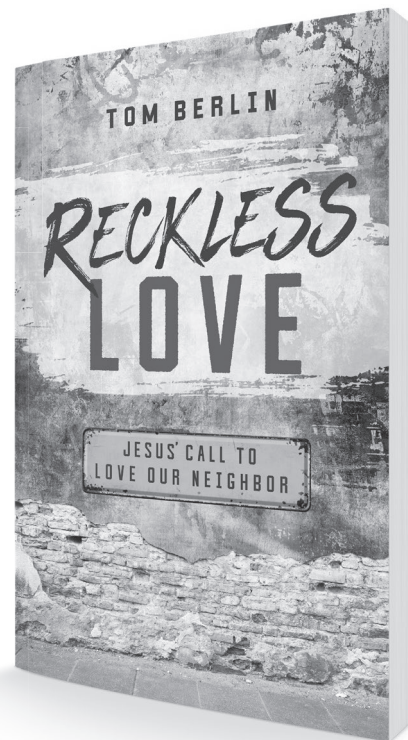
LOVE GOD MORE DEEPLY BY LEARNING TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR BETTER

In his latest book ***Reckless Love***, author and Pastor Tom Berlin writes that Jesus taught them to love neighbor first as a way to more deeply love God. In his exploration of Jesus’ teaching and travels with his disciples, Berlin suggests that Jesus teaches us how to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength by showing us how to love our neighbor.

In ***Reckless Love***, you will see the ways Jesus’ care for others disrupted the way his disciples thought and acted so deeply that they learned to love God fully and join Jesus’ mission to share the good news unambiguously.



Tom Berlin is Senior Pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia and the author of *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More, 6 Decisions That Will Change Your Life, 6 Things We Should Know About God, and 6 Ways We Encounter God*.

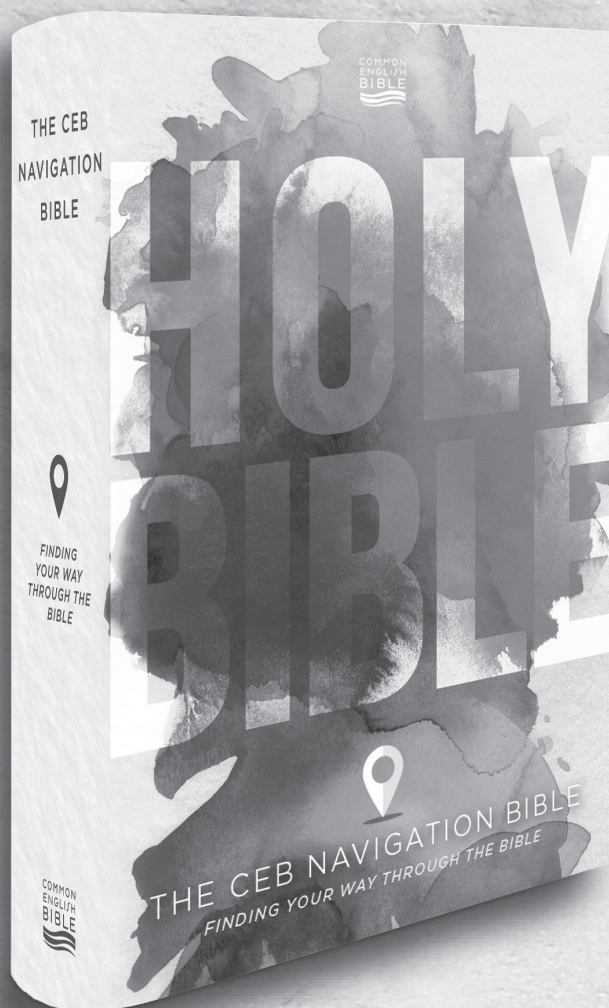


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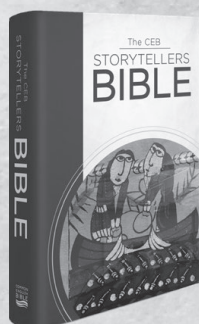


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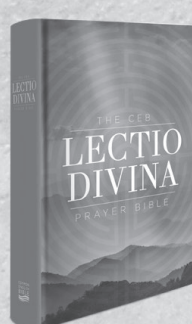
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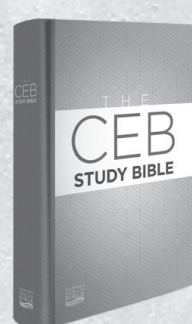
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