

## THANK YOU! NOW, ON TO GENERAL CONFERENCE 2012!

Lifewatch is exceedingly grateful to you for your generous response to our December 1, 2011 letter. We are so thankful for your prayers, for your encouragement, and for your sacrificial giving to this ministry—so that our witness to the Gospel of Life can continue within The United Methodist Church and beyond.

On April 23, a Monday, several members of the Lifewatch community—namely, Cindy Evans, John Juergensmeyer, Paul Stallsworth, and perhaps others—will be traveling to Tampa, FL to prepare to be witnesses for life during the 2012 General Conference. Also, before the conference, Lifewatch will send a letter—regarding our church, life, and abortion—to all the conference delegates. Your additional gifts will help to make these ministries for life possible.

As you remember, gifts to Lifewatch can be given in three ways: (1) send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/ Cottleville, MO 63338; (2) donate online on our homepage at [www.lifewatch.org](http://www.lifewatch.org); and (3) give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office.

Again, we are deeply grateful to you.♥

## 2012 LIFEWATCH SERMON: “THE CHURCH AND ABORTION: RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH”

by Dr. James V. Heidinger II

*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15, RSV here and following)*

From this last of his letters before his martyrdom, the Apostle Paul wrote these moving, challenging words to young Timothy, whom he had left in charge of the church in Ephesus. Knowing his death was imminent, Paul was giving Timothy and the church what some call his “last will and testament.”

I love his charge to young Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of

truth.” A part of what this would mean for Timothy would be that he was to “[f]ollow the pattern of the sound words” that he had heard from Paul (II Timothy 1:13).

So the charge for all of us, particularly the shepherds and teachers of the Church, is to “rightly [handle] the word of truth,” or as the New English Bible translates it, “be straightforward in your proclamation of the truth.”

It may sound strange to some to speak about “the word of truth.” In American intellectual life today, we have a different view of truth—we call it postmodernism. This view asserts that groups and individuals create truth for themselves. There is no longer a common or universal reference point of truth which might be used as a guide. To claim one holds the truth is viewed as being exclusive of all other views, even unfairly pushing them to the margins. It is a thorough subjectivism.

But the Church has always spoken about the truth. I remember at the North Central Jurisdiction Conference in 1996, when four new bishops were consecrated, the liturgy challenged them, “As servants of the whole church, you are called to preach and teach the truth of the Gospel to all God’s people.” What is to be preached is “the truth of the Gospel,” or Paul would say “the pattern of the sound words,” “the truth” entrusted to us (II Timothy 1:13-14). And this includes the Church’s teaching about life, family, marriage, and children.

### TIME TO TEACH A GENERATION

As I have reflected on this Lifewatch Service of Worship and the 39th anniversary of the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision by the United States Supreme Court, I fear The United Methodist Church has not done well following the “pattern of the sound words.” We have not listened to what is taught in Scripture concerning the sanctity of life. We have not followed the teaching of the Church Fathers of the first five centuries. And we have not listened carefully to the sound teaching of our greatest theologians and ethicists.

We now have a generation of United Methodists, and of Americans as well, who have known nothing except the culture of abortion brought about by Roe v. Wade. Many of them may not be aware that it was not always this way. They also may not know that the arguments and rationales used back in the 1970s and 80s, in support of unrestricted abortion, were (and remain yet today) substantively weak, not carefully reasoned, and sometimes based on clearly dishonest claims. They may not know that the Court’s

decision, itself, continues to be sharply criticized by respected ethicists, legal scholars, and Christian theologians.

I have found myself reflecting on what it is I would say to this new generation of United Methodists who have only known our abortion culture of the past 39 years since Roe. And about what I would try to say to my precious grandchildren—my 6 and 7 year-old granddaughters and 22 month-old grandson—as they grow toward adolescence and maturity.

So, this morning, I want to share several of the things I would like to say to this generation as we try to “rightly [handle] the word of truth” about abortion. And I do it, I trust, prayerfully—and with compassion for those who have, and who will, struggle with the choice of having an abortion. As I share these convictions, I am aware that it is a contradiction to stand for the truth of Christ in an un-Christ-like way. But neither must we allow politeness to mute a passionate teaching and defense of truth.

#### THE SUPREMES STUMBLED

First, I would want this generation to understand exactly what the Roe v. Wade decision brought about, and why many of us continue to believe it should be reversed.

The Roe decision on January 22, 1973, with its companion Doe v. Bolton, overturned two state laws (Roe in Texas and Doe in Georgia) that prohibited abortion. With Doe's expanded understanding of the phrase “a mother's health,” Roe eliminated all meaningful, state limits on abortion throughout the entire nine months of pregnancy. This generation probably does not fully realize the scope of these decisions: they struck down laws prohibiting abortion in most of the states. Prior to the Roe decision, New York allowed abortions but its legislature had voted to restore legal protection to unborn children—though the action was blocked by a governor's veto. In 1972, Michigan and North Dakota voted strongly to reject proposals to loosen their abortion laws. The Roe decision, with its companion, trumped those and the existing laws in all of the states; and they created a national policy on abortion more liberal than any state law at the time. This was not a benign decision reflecting a gradual liberalizing of abortion law in America. This was a radical departure from the then-present practice in America.

I also long for this generation to know that eminent legal theorists have criticized the Roe decision itself as seriously flawed jurisprudence. In his dissent, Justice Byron White strongly criticized the ruling as an exercise in “raw judicial power.” Noted legal scholar Archibald Cox of Watergate fame said the reasoning of the Court in Roe was an “embarrassment.” Professor John Hart Ely, of Yale Law School, has said that Roe is “a very bad decision....It is bad because it is bad constitutional law, or rather because it is not constitutional law and gives almost no sense of an obligation to try to be.” Edward Lazarus, a former clerk to

Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote the Roe opinion, says that “Roe, as constitutional interpretation, is virtually impossible to defend.” Few today are aware of these devastating critiques.

In 1992, in its Planned Parenthood v. Casey decision, the Court reaffirmed Roe. However, three justices said they were doing this not so much because the original case was rightly decided, but simply because it had been the law for a long time and many had come to rely on the availability of abortion. But the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops responded rightly, saying: “If one realizes the decision was wrong, it is doubly wrong to keep imposing it on the country.” In his dissent in Casey, Chief Justice William Rehnquist noted that in the previous two decades the Court had “overruled in whole or in part 34 of its previous constitutional decisions.” Those concerned by the abortion

epidemic in America should realize that a reversal of Roe would not at all be unprecedented in terms of the Court's history.

Many today may not realize that eminent scholars, theologians, and ethicists believe the Court made a serious mistake when it first considered, then decided to reject, the precedent on

abortion found in the Hippocratic Oath. The Hippocratic ethic, which clearly opposes abortion, was at the heart of all medical ethics, since the Fourth Century B.C. This ancient oath came to be accepted not only by Jews and Christians, but also by Arabs, medieval doctors, Renaissance and Enlightenment scholars, and scientists of the Nineteenth Century. For the Court to ignore the Hippocratic ethos on abortion, wrote theologian Harold O.J. Brown, was “to reject the very heart of our ethical tradition, of principles common not merely to Judeo-Christian religion in the narrow sense, but to Western Civilization as a whole.” I am confident most United Methodists are unaware of this.

I believe the Christian churches in America are slowly but surely coming to understand the flawed, tragic character of this sweeping Court decision. It is not something to be celebrated, but lamented. It is bad law—and its result has been to give us more than 50,000,000 lost lives since its passage. This realization would help the churches continue to challenge the abortion culture in America. However, on the real nature of the Roe decision, neither our church nor our courts have done as well as they might have in “rightly handling the word of truth.”

DR. NATHANSON TURNED

Second, I would want this generation to be fully aware of the amazing life transformation and subsequent witness of Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a leading abortionist of the 1970s.

In 1970, Dr. Bernard Nathanson, the son of a distinguished medical doctor, began running the Center for Reproductive and Sexual Health in New York City. In addition to performing and giving supervision to thousands of abortions, he became a zealous crusader and campaigner

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for the legalization of abortion. He and his colleagues argued before voters, lawmakers, and judges that laws against abortion were worse than futile and thus should be opposed. He confessed later that they lied, boldly and relentlessly, about the number of women who died each year from illegal abortions—claiming the number was more than ten times higher than it actually was. In 1973, he left the Center to become chief of obstetrical services at St. Luke’s Hospital Center, but he continued doing abortions. While there, however, he discovered the latest in fetal technology—the ultrasound machine. It opened the window for him on fetal development. His personal struggle began.

By 1974, he penned a widely noticed article in the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine. In the article, he revealed his growing doubts about the popular view that abortion was merely the removal of an “undifferentiated mass of cells,” and not the killing of a developing human being. In abortion, he wrote, “We are taking life, and the deliberate taking of life...is an inexpressibly serious matter.”

By 1979, Nathanson had become convinced that what was developing within the womb was, indeed, human life, from the very onset of pregnancy. This emerging conclusion was devastating for him to face personally. Referring to abortions he had either performed or supervised, he confessed to an “increasing certainty that I had in fact presided over 60,000 deaths.” In 1979, he authored (along with Richard N. Ostling, a prominent journalist with Christianity Today and Time) his first book, Aborting America. The impact of this stunning new conviction took him out of the practice of abortion. Before long, he came to regard the procedure as an unjustified homicide. In the early 1980s, he dedicated himself to the fight against abortion, the procedure for which he was once its most influential advocate, especially to persons of influence in high places. In 1985, using the new fetal imaging technology, he produced the documentary film, “The Silent Scream,” which went viral in the pro-life movement in America.

Thankfully, his story does not end here. All of this happened while he was an irreligious, atheistic Jew. His argument against abortion was not, he always insisted, religious in nature. It was based on science and principles of the rights and dignity of human beings. He was thoroughly secular. He had been married three times. Living an “unspeakably shallow” life, he described himself as materialistic and ruthlessly ambitious. While attending a pro-life rally in New York City in 1989, he saw something that began to break through his long-held religious defenses. He saw, in his words, “an intensity of love and prayer that astonished me.” He went on to confess that, on that day, he began “for the first time in my entire adult life...to entertain seriously the notion of God.”

For the full, moving story of Nathanson’s conversion to

Christianity, I would urge you to read Charles Colson’s and Nancy Pearcey’s How Now Shall We Live? (Tyndale House, 1999, Chapters 22 and 23). In a wonderfully moving account, Colson describes the phone call that came to his office on a cold December morning in 1996. His secretary said it was Dr. Bernard Nathanson inviting Chuck and his wife, Patty, to his baptism at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, with John Cardinal O’Connor presiding. Two weeks later, Colson and his wife were welcomed by Father John McCloskey, and they joined others in a small basement chapel. Colson knew Father McCloskey had had a powerful student ministry at Princeton University. He had been the one who had given Nathanson the good news of God’s forgiveness and had guided him into the Christian faith.

After Cardinal O’Connor gave a short welcoming homily, Nathanson was escorted forward by a young woman whom Colson immediately recognized as Joan Andrews, now Joan Andrews Bell. She was a former nun who had spent five years in a Florida prison for nonviolent resistance at abortion clinics. Now, there she was, guiding one of the world’s leading abortionists to the baptismal font! Here was a Jew by birth, an atheist by

conviction, and a gifted but amoral doctor by profession—kneeling before the Cross of Christ in baptism, and being received into the Catholic Church.

After the service, the small group went together for refreshment and fellowship. Colson describes this precious moment: “Speaking softly and with deep feeling, Nathanson thanked everyone for coming. ‘All I could think about while I was kneeling at the altar was my bar mitzvah,’ he said. ‘That day I was so afraid.’ He hesitated, then looked up, and said, ‘Today I felt all that fear fall away. I experienced sheer grace.’”

Friends, since you last met here in this place, Dr. Bernard Nathanson died—in February of 2011. He died in the Lord. Dr. Robert George, a professor at Princeton University, wrote a magnificent tribute to his friend, “Bernie,” as he called him. Dr. George said that one of the lessons we learn from Bernard Nathanson’s life is “the luminous power of truth.” I love that! Luminous means “to give off light,” “to help things be readily understood.” As Nathanson himself admitted, the edifice of abortion is built on a foundation of lies. Nathanson admitted he told those lies, indeed, he helped invent them, said Dr. George. However, the truth about life that he observed in the mother’s womb convinced him what he was doing was morally wrong. And he saw others witness to this truth. And when he was exposed to their bold, un intimidated, self-sacrificial, and loving witness, the light of truth overcame the darkness of falsehood and deception. Joan Andrews Bell said Nathanson was “like St. Paul, who was a great persecutor of the Church,” yet became its great apostle. Likewise, Nathanson, the abortionist, became a great witness

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on behalf of life and spoke passionately the rest of his days about the evil of abortion.

Friends, this is a story of redemption and transformation. And it is a story that this generation desperately needs to hear.

#### THE UNBORN IS A CHILD

Third and last, I would want this present generation to be aware of the strong testimony that exists in support of the humanity of the life growing in the womb. There is more consensus here than most Americans realize.

In its Roe decision, the Supreme Court claimed that it was unable to make an accurate determination by scientific, or other means, as to when life begins. But having made that claim, the Court's ruling actually denied the humanity of the fetus. Furthermore, the Court actually made a critical admission, saying "[i]f this suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant's

case [i.e., "Roe," who was seeking an abortion], of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed by the [14th] Amendment."

I fear that as a result of this ruling, most Americans have never heard the Court's admission that it could not determine the humanity of the fetus, but have simply accepted what the Court implied by its ruling—that the fetus must not be human. Such an understanding found broad support from the media and, sadly, from many leaders in the "mainline" churches.

May I tell you what has amazed me about this for the past several weeks? It is that Dr. Bernard Nathanson—who presided over more than 60,000 abortions and who would have had more reason than most anyone to want to conclude that the fetus was not human, just to vindicate and justify himself—came to the opposite conclusion: That what was growing in the womb of the mother was in fact human. It was such a painful reality that he confesses that amidst his guilt and shame, he contemplated suicide. And this was years before he came to faith in Christ. I am simply struck at how compelling the evidence must have been for Bernard Nathanson to reject all of the personal and cultural influences.

The truth is that, today, there is far more consensus for the fetus' humanity than most realize. As early as 1967, at the First International Conference on Abortion, convened in Washington, DC, 19 out of 20 physicians—eminent scientists, they—joined in issuing a statement that they "could find no point in time between the union of sperm and egg...and the birth of the infant at which point we could say that this was not a human life. The changes occurring between implantation, a six-week embryo, a six-month fetus, a one-week-old child, or a mature adult are merely stages of development and maturation."

**Please remember to pray and fast for the ministry of Lifewatch on the first Tuesday of every month.**

But one should ask, What about the Church? As one looks at the long history of the Great Tradition of the Church's teaching, one is impressed by the weight of teaching which supports the humanity of life in the womb. Again, I fear we have not been faithful to Paul's exhortation, to Timothy and to the early Church, to "[f]ollow the pattern of the sound words" regarding unborn life. There is, indeed, a significant and persuasive pattern of sound words about the humanity of the fetus about which our present generation needs to know.

For example, the Church Fathers of the first five centuries were univocal in their opposition to abortion. They spoke against it as the killing of the child, as destroying a life, etc. Tertullian expressed, at the end of the second century, an affirmation of the humanity of the fetus: "He also is a man who is about to be one; you have the fruit already in its seed." In his work Abortion and the Early

Church, Dr. Michael J. Gorman provides a thorough account of the unanimous pro-life, anti-abortion stance of the first five centuries of Christianity. I confess that testimony had a profound impact on me when I first discovered it. It is a compelling witness.

Looking for similar testimony, one could review the centuries of Church history. What I have found so impressive is the teaching of the great theological giants of the Twentieth Century. I confess, to my shame, that I was not aware of the testimony of some of them until only a few years ago.

Karl Barth, the great German theologian, wrote: "He who destroys germinating life kills a man." No nuance in his words.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and martyr, wrote: "Destruction of the embryo in the mother's womb is a violation of the right to live which God has bestowed upon this nascent life." He goes on to say that to deprive this nascent human being of life is "nothing but murder." Again, little nuance there.

Helmut Thielicke, another German—who pastored a large church in Hamburg, taught at Tubingen, and authored the three-volume Theological Ethics—wrote: "Once impregnation has taken place, it is no longer a question of whether the persons concerned have the responsibility for a possible parenthood: they have become parents." These theologians are giants in the Twentieth Century Church. Their lifetime vocation was "rightly handling the word of truth."

But there is one more ethicist of the last century that I wish United Methodists knew more about. He is one of our own—Dr. Paul Ramsey, a United Methodist layman, the Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Religion at Princeton University. For many years, Dr. Ramsey was one of the pre-eminent Christian ethicists in America. He was the primary author of the statement on abortion that came before the 1972 General Conference in Atlanta, was amended and

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adopted, and placed in the 1972 Book of Discipline. He included the phrase about our belief “in the sanctity of unborn human life.” Unfortunately, during its legislative consideration, an additional statement, “we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures,” was hurriedly proposed from the floor and accepted. With too little time for debate, the amendment passed. Dr. Ramsey was deeply distressed and felt the amendment left United Methodism with a confusing and contradictory statement on abortion.

Why was he so disappointed? Because he believed firmly in the humanity of the life growing in the womb. In fact, he had written in 1970, prior to the General Conference and the Roe decision, these words: “The human individual comes into existence as a minute informational speck...His subsequent prenatal and postnatal development may be described as a process of becoming what he already is from the moment he was conceived.”

Ramsey was an ethicist of recognized stature across America. In 1974, he gave testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee on “Protecting the Unborn.” In response to the oft-repeated phrase about “a woman’s right to choose,” Ramsey gave this impassioned testimony: “[L]ife-and-death decisions involving lives possessing sanctity have never before in the history of our civil community been believed to be a proper subject for purely privatized choices.”

Admittedly, there are others who would not agree with these giants of the Church we have mentioned, but one cannot deny that there is strong, compelling testimony in support of the humanity of fetal life. I long for our church to be aware of it—so that this great truth can be, in the words of George Weigel, a part of “the public voice of the teachers of the church.”

#### IN CONCLUSION

I am so grateful for the faithful ministry of Lifewatch and of others who have helped to give us a United Methodist position on abortion in our Discipline that is far more affirming of life than it once was. It is a position which opposes the reasons usually given for probably 95% of all abortions in American society.

Let us remember each of us is called to be “a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” How desperately this is needed amidst the scandal of abortion in America. Dr.

Robert George is right. There is such a thing as “the luminous power of truth.” It shines “in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

O Lord, grant us the courage to be faithful. Amen. *Dr. Heidinger delivered this sermon, during the 2012 Lifewatch Service of Worship, on January 23 in The United Methodist Building in Washington, DC. An ordained elder in The United Methodist Church, he is the President and Publisher Emeritus of Good News. Before his retirement in 2009, he led Good News for 28 years. For citations, please contact Dr. Heidinger at [jimheidinger@yahoo.com](mailto:jimheidinger@yahoo.com).♥*

## THINKING ABOUT ABORTION— THEOLOGICALLY, PERSONALLY, MISSIONALLY

by Rev. Tim Reeves

If you have any question or naivete about the horrible impact of abortion on our culture, I suggest you become a pastor. I have been serving in full-time ministry for more than 15 years. In that time, I cannot count the number of women with whom I have had heart-rending counseling sessions concerning their troubled emotional state over having had an abortion. These have included young women in their twenties and women in their fifties, all of them suffering from some degree of post-abortion stress syndrome (PASS). Some women have wrestled with the issue for more than 25 years, and it has ruined marriages and families. The amount of guilt, anxiety, psychological numbness, depression, and even thoughts of suicide have, at times, overwhelmed my pastoral senses.

I will admit up front that I am not pro-choice. Personally speaking, I do not think The United Methodist Church’s position on abortion is strong enough. As United Methodist Christians, we need to take a more Christ-like position toward life, especially the lives of unborn babies, who are without a doubt now being relegated to be the least, and most lost, of our society.

#### OUR STORY

However, my position is also indelibly impacted by my personal experience as well. Let me share that story with you.

When my wife and I were young newlyweds trying to get a family started, we did not have much success. Understand, that time frame was the late 1970s, when the abortion freedom had been unleashed across the nation, due to Roe v. Wade.

Finally, we were blessed by God with a pregnancy. At that time, my wife was substitute teaching at the local elementary school. She was less than three months pregnant when a German measles outbreak struck the school. She was exposed, although she did not contract the disease, because she had had measles as a child.

However, our baby doctor was alarmed by the exposure, and he recommended an abortion because of the potential danger to our unborn baby. “Strongly recommended” were the words he used, even though there was no evidence the baby had been negatively impacted by the exposure. The second part of the doctor’s argument was that the fetus was not far along, so abortion could be justified.

We were torn, naturally, as any innocent and naive young newlyweds would be. What should we do?, we asked ourselves. Should we ignore the medical advice? Should we listen to someone whom we trusted to have more experience than us in these matters? Should we listen to our hearts?

We prayed about it, discussed it, and agonized over what to do. Finally, we decided we would leave it up to God: keep the baby and live with God’s will.

Today, that potential abortion is as good a daughter as any father could ever ask for. She is the wife of a wonderful son-in-law, a leader in her church, and the mother of the most wonderful granddaughter in the world. (Yes, I admit I am biased—especially because she is our first!) If we had listened to the doctor, we—along with everyone else—would have been deprived of these blessings.

I realize our story is not typical of most life-and-abortion stories. No two such stories I have heard have been the same. However, my pastoral experience has allowed me to hear even worse, and much more tragic, stories than ours.

#### OUR CHURCH’S TASKS

My question for our denomination is this: How, in all our Christian thoughts and speeches and sentiments, can we in any way support unlimited and unquestioned abortion? How can we even think about promoting or supporting the idea of abortion on demand, even to the point of young women not having to notify parents?

We have had the specter of abortion hanging over our nation for more than a generation now. Originally, we were told we needed to legitimize and legalize abortion because of the need to save the life of a woman or to deal with horrible outrages such as incest and rape. That is why we needed to make abortion a clean, rare, medical procedure and move it out of the dirty alleys and backrooms. That made sense, and I can support those historical motivations.

However, over the past 40 years since Roe v. Wade, abortion has become a multi-billion dollar industry in America. Less than 3-4% of all abortions are now performed for those original intents, and the rest are conducted for the purposes of birth control and convenience. We have also exported the abortion mindset and acceptability around the world. Plus we are now in the gray area of making abortions legitimate procedures for gender selection or for economic convenience.

Abortion is an issue we in the church need to start discussing in an open, honest, Christ-based and -centered discussion. It needs to become a front-and-center issue in every United Methodist congregation.

We can no longer sit back silently and ignore the horrible aftermath of the abortion holocaust. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.—whose birthday we celebrate in the same month as we remember the ignominy of Roe v. Wade—warned us about the consequences of sitting on the sidelines and keeping quiet about social and moral issues. Without question, abortion has become such a major social issue. He said: “History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people. He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. The hottest place in hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict.”

God’s word from Psalm 139 likewise speaks to a Christian understanding of abortion: “O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar....Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether....

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?...For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works!”

If God is with the unborn baby; if that new life is more than just a mass of protoplasmic cells and is a body, complete with a soul, being formed by God; if that unborn baby is a hand-made creation of God, then how can we who call ourselves Christians not stand up, and speak out, for the right of the unborn to life?

I wholeheartedly support the work of United Methodist boards and agencies in exploring ways to reduce the need for abortion. However, I also believe we need to be much more vocal in prophetic ministry. We need to marshal all our resources to both condemn the unlimited practice of abortion and to quit any assistance in exporting the procedure.

If that means we need to become more involved in helping young women bring their unborn babies to full term and become more active in adoptions, so be it.

The voices of millions of unborn babies who wanted to live, and who could have been blessings to the world, cry out to us to do more than sit back and just talk about the issue.

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## BISHOPS, PLEASE TEACH!

For years, *The Unity Dialogue of the North Carolina Conference* has been discussing and debating matters related to *The United Methodist Church and homosexuality*. On December 8, 2011, the dialogue met at conference headquarters in Garner, NC. During the meeting, a version of the following speech was presented by Rev. Stallworth.

1. Thank you for taking the time to be here. You are following Christ and being the Church. Again, thank you.
2. My task is to respond to the November 10, 2011 pastoral letter from the Council of Bishops to all United Methodists. The letter is from the Council of Bishops; this response is from a village pastor; no equality of status there! Listen critically to this response—and then engage, discuss, and even argue with it. Rev. Richard John Neuhaus often used the phrase “critical affirmation.” I will offer a critical affirmation of the Council’s pastoral letter.
3. First, the affirmation. By writing its letter, the Council of Bishops did what it had to do. After all, issues related to homosexuality continue to agitate The United Methodist Church. Recently, thirtysomething retired bishops declared their support for the ordination of those who practice homosexual behavior. More recently, over 1,000 clergy declared their support for formalizing same-gender couples. Most recently, nearly 15,500 clergy and laity have signed letters that challenge the Council to “enforce” the Book of Discipline. The Council accurately sensed that it had an over-due assignment to complete; by writing the pastoral letter, the Council completed its assignment. I affirm the Council for writing a pastoral letter. Also, I believe the Council has written a graceful (Paragraph I), encouraging (Paragraph II), clear-sighted (Paragraph III), loving (Paragraph IV), unifying (Paragraph VI), and humbling (Paragraph VII) pastoral letter. By doing so, the

Council’s letter has done “no harm.” I affirm the Council’s letter for its appealing tone and generous outreach.

4. Now, the critique. I believe the letter’s Paragraph V is problematic. In that paragraph, the Council states flatly: “As the Council of Bishops we will uphold the Book of Discipline as established by General Conference.” Thankful that the Council pledges to abide by the Discipline, I am concerned that its pledge lacks forcefulness. Many of us live in families with children. We know that, every once in a while, even a United Methodist child will do something wrong. The parent will then say to the child, “Now, say you are sorry for what you have done.” After a prolonged silence and some drama, the child will surrender and say, “Okay, sorry.” I fear that is how the Council’s pledge to “uphold the Book of Discipline” comes across to United Methodists. “Okay, we will uphold the Discipline.” This pledge seems to be the result of necessity, nothing more and nothing less. In today’s great debate over homosexuality in The United Methodist Church, if it is to lead the whole church, the Council of Bishops must speak and teach with authority and substance. When the Council declares itself on this controverted matter, it must relate its position not only to “the covenant we have made” and to the Book of Discipline, but also to the Bible, to Church Tradition, and to the Church universal. In other words, the Council of Bishops should base its position on historic, ecumenical Christian truth. If it deals not with truth, the Council understands itself simply as a functionary of General Conference—when the Council should be much more. Standing solely on the denomination’s changeable law, lacking reference to the truth, the Council’s pledge to “uphold the Book of Discipline” seems perfunctory. Please allow one more point. Truly upholding the Discipline would involve the Council of Bishops in teaching the morality of the Discipline before enforcing the law of the Discipline. Such teaching would

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have the Council explain why the Church teaches what she teaches about homosexual practice. A warning: if the Council enforces the law of the Discipline, without first teaching the morality of the Discipline, enforcement will likely appear to be arbitrary and unfair, and ultimately it will probably be unsuccessful.

5. This is my critical affirmation of the Council's letter. The Council has done its duty—and with graciousness. But the Council could have, and should have, related its pledge to “uphold the Book of Discipline” to “the Church's one foundation.” Thank you for your generous attention.♥

**LETTER TO LIFEWATCH**

December 22, 2011

Paul:

My husband [Rev. John N. Grenfell III] was turning cartwheels when he read all the letters from bishops and responses which Lifewatch published [December 1, 2011]. He has been saying for years that our problems in The United Methodist Church sit at the feet of the Council of Bishops. Finally he is getting support and another voice—mainly yours. God bless you for your boldness, and we pray your ministry will be fruitful as you faithfully serve Him.

*Jeannine Grenfell  
Port Huron, MI*

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**YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT**

• “NYC41Percent” is a program initiated, in part, by New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan. It seeks to call attention to the alarming abortion problem in New York City, which could well be known as “the abortion capital of the world.” The 2010 abortion rates for the

city have just been released. Although slightly lower than the 2009 abortion rates in NYC, the 2010 rates are frightfully high—40% of pregnancies in the city end in abortion. Particular communities are especially abortion prone. Among non-Hispanic blacks there were 38,574 abortions out of 65,209 pregnancies, or 59% of pregnancies ended in abortion. Among non-Hispanic black teens there were 5,956 abortions out of 8,221 pregnancies, or 72% of pregnancies ended in abortion. Among all teens, there were 12,139 abortions out of 19,346 pregnancies, or 63% of pregnancies. Think about it. In those three groups—blacks, black teens, and all teens—many more abortions occurred than births. Pray for those in New York City who are working for the protection of the unborn and their mothers from abortion. (Matthew Cantirino, “New York's Tragedy,” First Thoughts, a blog at [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com), 01/05/12)

• *Magna est veritas, et prevalebit.* “Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail.”♥

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