

MARY LOU STALLSWORTH, SERVANT OF CHRIST (1928 -2016)

During the early morning hours of March 11, Mom died. She was the beloved wife of L. Clyde Stallsworth, and the attentive mother of Bruce, Sue, and this pastor. But she was, most definitively (that is, what truly defined her), a servant of Jesus Christ and His Church.

Mom was committed to the risen and living Christ, who is also the Christ revealed by the Bible. She was not only informed but also formed by the Bible, especially through her early morning devotional readings, Bible-study groups, and Sunday-school classes. She knew that truth claims -- moral, theological, doctrinal, and Biblical -- really do matter; and she enjoyed long and lively discussions of such truth claims.

As a Christian woman committed to Gospel truth, she was always a recipient of, and an agent of, God's love. Mom, as a United Methodist Christian, never pitted truth and love against each other. She had great respect for the Gospel (the truth about love, and the love in truth) and for the good life that God gives through the Gospel -- including marriage and family and human sexuality, which are best understood as gifts from God. At her best, Mom did not back away from difficult conversations; with hope, she embraced such conversations and the people involved in them.

Through the years, Mom proposed the Church's historic moral teaching on human sexuality -- among her own children and in the various groups she taught. And way back in the late 1970s, she sent me a copy of a pro-life book by a Catholic priest, which I proceeded to teach to a youth group. Obviously, she made a great impression on my life.

Mom faithfully loved her husband and her children. She comforted us. She challenged us. She demanded that we do our best, whatever the task -- and then she cheered us on toward the goal. She demonstrated, in front of us, how to serve Christ and His Church.

Now, Mom has crossed the Jordan and has been received into the Communion of the Saints, even as her body lies buried at Valley View Cemetery in Garden City, KS and there awaits the General Resurrection. Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, made all this possible for the world, for the Church, and for her.

May Mom rest in God's peace.

To God be the glory. (Paul T. Stallsworth)

GENERAL CONFERENCE 2016: STEPS TOWARD LIFE

Finally.

After all those years. After all those General Conferences. After all those attempts.

On May 19, on its second Thursday afternoon, General Conference 2016 voted to withdraw United Methodist boards and agencies -- namely, the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) and the United Methodist Women (UMW) -- from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC). Thanks be to God and God's providence!

RCRC, you will recall, is a well funded, pro-choice, political lobby based in Washington, DC. RCRC advocates in American public life to make all abortions accessible to all pregnant women, at any time in pregnancy, whatever the reason. (For evidence, just check out RCRC's own website.) After a debate in which a GBCS staffer was given the microphone a couple of times, on the General Conference floor, to answer questions without a time limit, the vote was taken. The result -- 425-268 -- was not even close. Just that quickly, The United Methodist Church was out of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice!

For years, Lifewatch and many others have yearned, prayed, and worked for that to happen. In my files, the earliest copy of the newsletter Lifewatch is dated January 30, 1988. A two-page newsletter, it boasted on its front page a brief article entitled "RCAR [Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, the founding name of RCRC] Loses Funding in West Michigan." Established in 1987, the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality (TUMAS, aka Lifewatch) was already monitoring RCAR/RCRC in 1988. From its beginning in 1987, Lifewatch has been dedicated to informing The United Methodist Church about RCAR/RCRC; this has been a part of Lifewatch's DNA. Now, finally, after all those years, our denomination is out of RCRC.

But General Conference's steps toward life were not completed with this one vote.

A little later in the same afternoon, General Conference quite logically and overwhelmingly voted to delete Resolution 3204. Support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice from The Book of Resolutions (2012, pp. 341-342). The vote was 561-197. That was the second step.

And General Conference's third step was voting to delete Resolution 2025. Responsible Parenthood from The Book of Resolutions (2012, pp. 119-122). Below, please see the article, by Cindy Evans, on this development. That was a third step toward life.

CELEBRATING RIGHTLY

These three steps -- indeed, these three victories -- tempt those of us in the Lifewatch community to look for a pro-choice (or pro-abortion) grave to dance on. Come on, be honest. But does that truly evidence "joyful obedience" to Jesus Christ? Is that loving and respectful toward those in The United Methodist Church who believe that RCRC is consistent with Christian ethics? Of course not. That would be excessive celebration. That would be similar to the smugness we often see in political discourse, and in athletic contests, throughout the land.

At a time like this, flush with victory, it is good to remain humble and remember the devotional talk -- really a brief, but powerful, sermon -- by Dr. David Watson, the academic dean at United Theological Seminary. (This presentation was, in this pastor's little opinion, the best preached word of General Conference 2016.) It began with: "[F]or God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." (II Timothy 1:7, NRSV)

Dr. Watson proposed: "Do not make winning an idol. This cannot be about winning. It has to be about witnessing... When it is about winning, we are setting ourselves [over] against other people."

Those on the other side of the aisle "matter to God, and God loves them. These are people for whom Christ died, and they matter. We may disagree with them, but they still matter.

"If this becomes about winning and not about witnessing, then we are not even in the game. God has called us to something better than politics; God has called us to be witnesses of the incarnate Word who died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead.

"Stand up for the truth, and conduct yourself in gentleness and humility and love. Even when people treat me with contempt, I hope I can meet them with a spirit of love." (General Conference Focus, Issues and Views from Good News, May 17, 2016)

What Dr. Watson preached, Lifewatch will attempt to do. In the midst of many defeats and occasional victories, Lifewatch will witness. Because The United Methodist Church is out of RCRC does not mean that Lifewatch's work is done. No. That is not true. Our church's teaching on abortion -- Paragraph 161J in The Book of Discipline (2012) cries out to be reformed by the Gospel of Life. And laity, clergy, and bishops need to be encouraged, again and again, to live this Gospel, to speak this Gospel, to teach this Gospel, to write this Gospel, and to proclaim this Gospel. Lifewatch's task, as Dr. Watson urged, is to witness -- not to win -- even if winning feels mighty good every once in a while. (PTS)♥

"RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD" IS NO LONGER (IN THE BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS)

The top executive of the United Methodist Women, Ms. Harriett Jane Olson, submitted to General Conference 2016 a petition (equivalent to a bill in American government) to

rewrite and expand significantly the "Responsible Parenthood" resolution in The Book of Resolutions (2012 edition, Resolution 2025, pp. 119-122). By a vote of 310-445, Ms. Olson's petition was defeated by General Conference.

The defeated resolution began by affirming the Biblical foundation for the family, but it soon turned to contraception and all forms of birth control. In addition to the "morning-after pill," "intrauterine devices," "tubal ligation," "condoms," and "emergency contraception," the term "family planning" appears twelve (12) times, and the phrase "reproductive health" appears four (4) times. Those terms are, of course, "code" for abortion. Hillary Clinton -- a United Methodist who is a former First Lady, a former US Secretary of State, and a current candidate for President of the United States -- admitted as much when she said (in testimony before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs): "We happen to think that family planning is an important part of women's health[,] and reproductive health includes access to abortion that I believe should be safe, legal and rare" (April 22, 2009).

If Ms. Olson's petition would have been approved by General Conference, perhaps The United Methodist Church would have partnered with Planned Parenthood, the United Nations, or even the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) to defend, promote, and spread abortion around the world for economic gain -- all under the banner of "helping" women and

families. But as noted in General Conference's floor debate on RCRC, The United Methodist Church's teaching on abortion is much more neutral and nuanced than the proposed, pro-Roe v. Wade resolution on "Responsible Parenthood." No wonder it was defeated.

Originally added to the United Methodist Book of Resolutions in 1976, the "Responsible Parenthood" resolution, over time, grew into a monstrosity which sought to encourage world-wide abortion-on-demand. Defeating and removing it from our church's Book of Resolutions was the just, merciful, and right thing to do. (CE)♥

HOW THE BISHOPS MIGHT BEST LEAD: SEVEN SUGGESTIONS

General Conference 2016 nearly begged for the Council of Bishops to lead The United Methodist Church forward. Then the Council of Bishops responded by writing a statement. Then the General Conference heard Bishop Bruce R. Ough read the Council's statement on how it would prefer to lead the church into the future. Then the General Conference debated whether or not to adopt the main points of the bishops' statement, as formulated in a motion by Rev. Adam Hamilton, the well published pastor and delegate from the Great Plains Conference. Then the General Conference voted down the Hamilton proposal. Then the General Conference debated whether or not to adopt the bishops' statement in full. Then the General Conference voted to adopt the bishops' statement as it was written. Later, the General Conference debated whether all of this was rightly handled, since the costs of a called General Conference in the bishops' statement had not been obtained before the vote. Then, rightly or wrongly, that issue was set

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aside by a presiding bishop, so the adoption of the Council's statement stood.

So, the Council of Bishops and the bishops will now lead The United Methodist Church through the high tensions, widespread debates, and covenant breaches related to the church's teaching on human sexuality. As is widely known, the bishop's statement calls for a special Commission to be appointed by the bishops, and that Commission will work to reform every paragraph in The Book of Discipline that pertains to human sexuality -- in the hope of maintaining the church in unity, ministry, and mission. If the Commission completes its work early enough, it can offer its proposals to a special called General Conference in 2018 or 2019. Otherwise, the Commission's proposals will be presented to the 2020 General Conference.

With these facts in mind, here are seven (7) suggestions on how the bishops, at this time and in the near future, might best lead The United Methodist Church forward.

1. Get beyond a superficial analysis of today's fight in The United Methodist Church. Sure, there are three "parties" in the church today: the progressives on the left, the large number of moderates in the middle, and the evangelicals and orthodox on the right. But the actual debate -- in the various public squares of the church -- is between the progressives and the evangelical-orthodox; the vast majority of the denomination, in the middle, simply lay low. It is easy to get impatient with those on the left, and those on the right, for continuing to argue with each other. It is easy to hold both responsible.

However, look more closely and deeply. The Methodist Church in America was minding its own business when the Sexual Revolution started, developed, and conquered. First, Methodism surrendered on marriage and divorce. Then Methodism caved on life and abortion. For some reason (perhaps because the plain meaning of Biblical texts on homosexual practice is so unambiguous), when homosexual practice was first promoted, The United Methodist Church (or parts of The United Methodist Church) stood up and defended historic Christianity's moral teaching. That would have been the evangelicals and the orthodox. The bishops should have stood up and defended our church's doctrine and discipline, but they did not. According to The Book of Discipline: "As followers of Jesus Christ, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church." (Paragraph 403, p. 316, emphasis added). Only our church's bishops in Africa did indeed stand up and offer a defense of our doctrine and discipline; see their "Statement on the State of Global UMC and Our Common World," September 7-11, 2015. But again, the point is this: the evangelicals and the orthodox are simply defending what is being attacked, and that is the Church's apostolic teaching on human sexuality. This defense is not radical. It is not partisan. It is not from battle lust. It is simply the Church being the Church: defending her God-given teaching.

Again, the progressives are doing the attacking. That is, the progressives are arguing against the church's doctrine and discipline. In other words, the progressives are in dissent. As a matter of fact, they are the aggressors, the instigators, of this denominational argument. They have the freedom and right to carry on their fight. But we should never lose sight of the fact that the progressives are responsible for rocking the United Methodist boat. They believe they have good reasons for doing so. Fine. But they are doing the rocking. Dissent is allowed in

The United Methodist Church, so that the larger church can consider the claims of the dissenters, learn from them, and accept them or reject them. But dissenters should never be allowed to run over and disrupt the church. A church that allows dissenters to topple its rule of law is a church that does not take itself, or its government (or polity), seriously.

Once again, the evangelical and orthodox are committed to defending historic, ecumenical Church doctrine and discipline. The progressives are committed to dissenting from, and fighting against, the same. These two sides are not equally responsible for the ongoing, contemporary fight in our denomination. It is superficial to claim equal responsibility.

2. Agree, and commit, to upholding church discipline. The bishops should celebrate the fact that they all agree to uphold The Book of Discipline. But then they must -- absolutely must! -- come to a solid agreement on what it means "to uphold the discipline." That is, every bishop does not get to decide individually what upholding the discipline means. All must agree that upholding church discipline means that, for example, breaking covenant has real, unpleasant consequences -- no matter who breaks the covenant, no matter how the covenant is broken, no matter where (in what jurisdiction) the covenant-breaking occurs. Real infractions must have real consequences. Not ruthless. But real and just.

3. Warn fellow bishops: If you want to be a prophet and you refuse to uphold all the church's discipline, you should leave your episcopal position. To presume to be prophetic, to violate the church's discipline and to mislead God's clergy and laity, all the while enjoying the exalted status, high salary, and generous benefits of a bishop (active or retired), is wrong. It makes no sense. True prophets do not live like kings.

4. Be representative in appointing the Commission. Most United Methodists are evangelical, orthodox, or moderate. Progressives and LGBTQI folks should certainly be appointed to the Commission, but not in disproportionate numbers. Furthermore, progressives and LGBTQI folks should not in any way dominate the Commission -- not the Commission's membership and not the Commission's agenda. The Council should follow the quotas of jurisdiction, skin color, and sex. But more importantly, those appointed to the Commission should be representative of the moral and theological beliefs of United Methodists throughout the world-wide church -- which are generally evangelical, orthodox, and moderate.

5. Instruct the Commission: Begin your work with Scripture and Tradition. First of all, the Commission must receive the Bible's and Church Tradition's teaching on human sexuality. After hearing from the Bible and Tradition, the Commission will be better prepared to recast United Methodist doctrine and discipline in the most thoughtful, engaging, faithful way.

The bishops should make certain that the Commission does not start with hearing from LGBTQI people's experiences and stories, and then move on to try to stir those stories together into a concoction that attempts to be palatable to all.

The bishops should remind the Commission: not everyone is going to be happy with the result of the Commission's work. This should not be surprising. The Church, if she is truly the Church, never makes everyone in the Church happy. In other words, the unity of the Church always goes through the truth of the Gospel; and from that, some will always dissent.

6. Do some soul-searching: “Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Galatians 1:10, NRSV) The efforts of the bishops and the Commission members are to be faithful to God, first and last, and not pleasing to people.

7. Rediscover the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel involves the Triune God, who is love, saving sinful, broken people (heterosexual and homosexual and all others) who more than anything else need to be forgiven and transformed. The Gospel is not about a nice God nervously nudging nice people to be nicer. H. Richard Niebuhr, the American theologian (1894-1962), once lamented that liberal Protestantism can become: “A God without wrath [brings] men (sic) without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” (The Kingdom of God in America [Harper, 1937], p. 193) The Gospel of John Wesley seems much closer to the opposite Niebuhr’s description: A God with wrath brings people with sin into a kingdom with judgment through the ministration of a Christ with a cross.

These suggestions are offered for the assistance and encouragement of the bishops and the Commission they will appoint -- and for the good of The United Methodist Church, as part of the Body of Christ, as a one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. (PTS)♥

LIFEWATCH WITNESS TO GENERAL CONFERENCE DELEGATES

Because of the strong support of the Lifewatch community, a March 1 letter and a copy of “Significant Statements 2016: United Methodist Leaders Oppose Our Church’s Affiliation with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice” were sent to the delegates elected to the 2016 General Conference. For your information, the contents of the March 1 letter and “Significant Statements 2016” follow.

March 1, 2016

Dear General Conference Delegate:

Lenten grace and peace to you and yours.

Your Annual Conference has elected you to be a delegate to the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. So your Annual Conference loves you, respects your faith and life, and trusts you -- to listen carefully, to think clearly, to speak thoughtfully, to decide wisely, and to serve nobly at General Conference in Portland, Oregon.

May our Lord, through the Holy Spirit, truly guide General Conference 2016 -- including you. And may you remember, hear, and heed the Lord of life during the crushing busyness of the conference to come.

Indeed, General Conference should be about increasing The United Methodist Church’s faith in, and witness to, Jesus Christ. That is, General Conference is more than approving budgets, deciding who will do what for the next four years, setting priorities, editing The Book of Discipline and The Book of Resolutions, and making the greatest

number of United Methodists happy (and the least number disgruntled). First and last, General Conference should be about striving to be faithful to God’s Word.

For Lifewatch, increasing The United Methodist Church’s faithfulness includes two notable opportunities at General Conference 2016. First, General Conference can vote to withdraw our church agencies -- the General Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women -- from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), a pro-choice political lobby. (See **Petition 60837**, DCA Advance Edition, Volume 2, Section 1, p. 325.) Please read through the enclosed “Significant Statements 2016” to learn many compelling reasons for our church to leave RCRC.

And second, General Conference can reform our church’s teaching on abortion (Paragraph 161J, The Book of Discipline [2012]). (See **Petition Number: 60698** and others that are similar, DCA Advance Edition, Volume 2, Section 1, pp. 313-317.) Our teaching now refers to “tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion....” Unfortunately, because of these words, our church has legitimated laws around the world that allow for the elimination of massive numbers of unborn children -- over 55 million in the United States alone since 1973. Unborn children, innocent and helpless, are precious to our heavenly Father and much more important than most justifications given for their abortion.

Thank you for reading this letter and its enclosure. In May, travel well to General Conference. And continue faithful, to Jesus Christ and His Church, for the sake of the world.

In Christ,

(The Rev.) Paul T. Stallsworth, Pastor
Lifewatch Editor/President

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SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS 2016: United Methodist Leaders Oppose Our Church’s Affiliation with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Dr. Bill T. Arnold

Paul S. Amos Professor of Old Testament Interpretation
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, KY

Scripture places the highest value on human life -- from Torah instruction, to prophetic exhortation, to the Gospel’s kerygma theology. The United Methodist Church’s Social Principles partly reflect this value in our statement on abortion (The Book of Discipline, Paragraph 161J). And yet our entanglement with the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) is incompatible with both Scripture and the theological reasoning used in our Social Principles. This unfortunately leaves us with a mixed witness about our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life. I pray 2016 is the year our church decides to withdraw from membership in the RCRC altogether.

Dr. Jason Byassee

Butler Chair of Homiletics and Biblical Hermeneutics
Vancouver School of Theology

Vancouver, British Columbia
Canada

I've seen the church do amazing things to come alongside those who've felt they have no choice but have an abortion, and show them they have more friends on earth and in heaven than they ever imagined. United Methodists assume that their offerings and their church's moral credibility go to support those in need and overlooked by others -- refugees, victims of war or natural disaster, prisoners, the mentally ill, and our eldest neighbors. Can we not align our support with the side of the weak and powerless on this issue as well?

The Reverend Dr. Leicester R. Longden

Elder of the West Michigan Annual Conference
Associate Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship Emeritus
Director of United Methodist Studies (retired)
University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
Dubuque, IA

The stated goals and convictions of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) clash with United Methodist teaching on abortion. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that RCRC is simply a political lobby that twists basic Christian teaching to echo a culture of abortion. RCRC actively works against any and all obstacles -- theological, moral, political, and legal -- to abortion. RCRC's advocacy often directly contradicts our Social Principles on abortion; still, RCRC uses our church's name. Therefore, General Conference 2016 must end The United Methodist Church's relationship with RCRC, if our church's teaching and witness are to have any integrity.

The Reverend Dr. Stephen W. Rankin

Chaplain and Minister to the University
Southern Methodist University
Dallas, TX

We know that United Methodists of good will disagree on abortion. Many of us know people caught in tragic situations who desperately need pastoral support. But we cannot develop good policy from bad thinking. A utilitarian ethic has degenerated to self-interest and masquerades in the language of justice. Therefore, it's time for United Methodist agencies to step away from membership in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Let's get clear of misguided commitments and search for a fresh moral vision.

Mrs. Marget H. Sikes

General Conference Delegate (2000, 2004, and 2008)
Vice Chair, Church and Society 2 Legislative Committee (2008)
Director, General Board of Church and Society (2000-2008)
Good News Board of Directors
Tunnel Hill, GA

There is no value in being at the table with an organization whose primary agenda is to promote abortion on demand. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) needs the United Methodist name to lend legitimacy to their aggressive and offensive public promotion of women's "choice." The United Methodist Church does not need RCRC. In the sixteen (16) years I have worked on this issue, I have lost many dear friends to other denominations because of their embarrassment and frustration over our church's membership in RCRC. I urge the delegates of General Conference 2016 to say "Enough!" to RCRC, to get about the business of winning souls for Jesus

Christ, and to love and cherish the lives of mothers and their children, born and unborn.

The Reverend Dr. R. Kendall Soulen

Professor of Systematic Theology
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, DC

The Book of Discipline's statement on the subject of abortion recognizes legitimate concerns on both sides of this perennial and painful debate. Our church needs language, practices, and policies that are consistent with our complex intuitions on this subject. Unfortunately, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice is an obstacle to this effort, because it recognizes only one legitimate side in this debate. Continued affiliation with RCRC is inconsistent with United Methodist principles and a hindrance to the work of cultivating common ground.

Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker (retired)

Keller, VA

"Can there be any doubt that there is silence and passivity about abortion in our church? How often is a sermon about abortion, or an educational forum on abortion, offered in our congregations? How many congregations are involved in supporting crisis pregnancy centers in their communities or offering tangible support to women with unwanted pregnancies? What kind of pastoral counsel is being offered behind the closed doors of the pastor's office? When the bishops gave splendid leadership in the Bishops' Initiative on Children in Poverty, there was a great mobilization of ministries for children, but not even scant mention was made of the deaths of unborn children because of abortion. At the 2004 General Conference, the church endorsed our agencies' continued participation in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice without much of a debate about how participation in this coalition compromises our public witness against abortion.

"We who are United Methodist Christians should continue to seek to embody in our teaching, pastoral guidance, congregational care, and public witness the preservation of human life, and a protest against the killing of human life, in the name of the God of peace." ("Do No Harm!," Lifewatch, March 1, 2005)

General Conference 2016 can do its part by voting to withdraw United Methodist agencies from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

Institutions are named above only to locate the spokespersons. Published by Lifewatch, March 1, 2016.

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The following statement was not a part of "Significant Statements 2016." Even so, Lifewatch is very pleased to publish it.

The Reverend Andrew C. Thompson, Th.D.

Senior Pastor
First United Methodist Church
Springdale, AR

For too long, The United Methodist Church (UMC) has lent institutional support to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC) through the General Board of

Church and Society and the United Methodist Women. The time has come for the General Conference to end all connections between The UMC and the RCRC.

Prior to his ascent into heaven, Jesus tells his followers that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. That command is given to us still. That means that the doctrines we teach and the stances we take, as a church, really do make a difference.

We must support women and children in every way, and that includes children in the womb. Biblical justice requires providing the means for life even in the most difficult situations for the vulnerable among us. Jesus tells us, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Ultimately, the faithfulness of our *witness* is determined by our *willingness* to follow our Savior in that teaching! May God guide our way.♥

COSTLY GIFTS

This year the North Carolina Conference published Lenten devotions on the theme of generosity. On February 12, the third day of Lent, the following reflection appeared. It is by Rev. Jessie Larkins, who is the Assistant to the District Superintendent of the Corridor District, which is located around Durham, NC.

"For God so loved the world that God gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

My favorite part of this familiar verse is the gift: eternal life. I don't spend much time thinking about the giving part. God's great generosity required a sacrifice. A son was given.

During Lent 2008, I received a gift. On February 12, my husband and I drove into the parking deck of the BB&T Building in downtown Raleigh. We rode the elevator to the twenty-third floor and emerged two hours later with a baby. We paid the lawyers for their time, but the baby was a gift, given to us by a woman whose name I will never have the privilege of knowing. The day of our greatest joy was likely the day of her greatest pain. We received a gift, given in a complicated act of love, with a cost that I do not easily comprehend.

Every year on February 2, we have a day to celebrate our son. We shower him with gifts and eat cake and jump on the trampolines with friends. It is always a great day and, as on most days, my cup runs over for the unique gift of this brilliant and funny child. On February 12, however, my thanksgiving is for a different act of generosity. This day, I give thanks for the woman who gave us her son, and the death that she endured so that we might have this life.

In his book, The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that grace is free but it's not cheap. I pray that I might never forget that the greatest gifts of my life have always been free to me, but never without cost.♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

- We are exceedingly grateful to you as you remember Lifewatch in your prayers and with your gifts -- especially now in the wake of General Conference 2016. A gift to Lifewatch can be given in two ways. You can send a check to Lifewatch/P.O. Box 306/Cottleville, MO 63338. And you can give stocks by first contacting Mrs. Cindy Evans in the Lifewatch office. Lifewatch is most grateful for your prayers and for your financial support.

- Words that bear repetition: "No one wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal, caught in a trap, wants to gnaw off its own leg." This comment, by Frederica Mathewes-Green, is quoted once again in her article "When Abortion Suddenly Stopped Making Sense" (The Human Life Review, Winter 2016, p. 85-89). Congregations should always be alert to discern, and to minister to, pregnant women who feel caught in a trap.

- On April 7, Pope Francis addressed a group of Methodists with these words: "Dear brothers and sisters, I offer warm greetings to you in this Easter season, as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord who enlightens the whole world. We come together united in the faith that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised him from the dead. This baptismal faith makes us truly brothers and sisters. I greet also the bodies that you represent: the World Methodist Council, the Methodist Council of Europe, and the Methodist Church in Britain.

"I was pleased to learn of the opening of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome. It is a sign of our growing closeness, and particularly of our shared desire to overcome all that stands in the way of our full communion. May the Lord bless the work of the office and make it a place where Catholics and Methodists can encounter one another and grow in appreciation of one another's faith, whether they be groups of pilgrims, those training for ministry, or those who guide their communities. May it also be a place where the progress achieved through our theological dialogue is made known, celebrated, and advanced.

"Almost fifty years have passed since our joint commission began its work. Although differences remain, ours is a dialogue based on respect and fraternity, one which enriches both our communities. The document currently being prepared, which should be published later this year, clearly witnesses to this. Building on the Methodist acceptance of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, it has as its theme, 'The Call to Holiness.' Catholics and Methodists have much to learn from one another in how we understand holiness and how it can be lived out. We both must do what we can to ensure that members of our respective congregations meet regularly, come to know one another, and encourage one another to seek the Lord and his grace. When we read the Scriptures, either alone or in a group, but always in an atmosphere of prayer, we open ourselves to the Father's love, given in his Son and in the Holy Spirit. Even where differences remain between our communities, these can and must become the impetus for reflection and dialogue.

"John Wesley, in his 'Letter to a Roman Catholic,' wrote that Catholics and Methodists are called to 'help each other on in whatever...leads to the Kingdom.' May the new common statement encourage Methodists and Catholics to help one another in our lives of prayer and devotion. In the same letter, Wesley also wrote, 'if we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least we may love alike.' It is true that we do not as yet think alike in all things, and that on issues regarding ordained ministries and ethics much work remains to be done. However, none of these differences constitute such an obstacle as to prevent us from loving in the same way and offering a common witness to the world. Our lives of holiness must always include a loving service to the world; Catholics and Methodists together are bound to work in different ways in order to give concrete witness to the love of Christ. When we serve those in need, our communion grows.

"In today's world, afflicted by so much evil, it is more than

ever vital that as Christians we offer a joint witness inspired by the light of Easter, becoming a sign of the love of God, which in the resurrection of Jesus is victorious. May this love, also through our humble and courageous service, reach the hearts and lives of our many brothers and sisters who are looking for such love even without knowing it. ‘Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (I Corinthians 15:57).” (“Pope Francis Addresses Methodist Guests: Full Text,” http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/04/07/pope_francois_addresses_methodist_guests_full_text/1220885#, accessed 04/08/16)

- It was a shock to the nation when the death of Antonin Scalia, an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, was announced on February 13. Whether one agreed with his judicial positions and reasoning or not, Scalia was a giant of a jurist and a giant of the Christian faith in the public square. He once said, “I attack ideas. I don’t attack people. And some very good people have some very bad ideas.” (Interview with CBS News, “60 Minutes,” aired in April 2008) Also, he candidly noted in his dissenting opinion on Obergefell v. Hodges (which legalized same-sex marriage), “So it is not of special importance to me what the law says about marriage. It is of overwhelming importance, however, who it is that rules me. Today’s decree says that my Ruler, and the Ruler of 320 million Americans coast-to-coast, is a majority of the nine lawyers of the Supreme Court. The opinion in these cases is the furthest extension one can even imagine -- of the Court’s claimed power to create ‘liberties’ that the Constitution and its Amendments neglect to mention. This practice of constitutional revision by an unelected committee of nine, always accompanied (as it is today) by extravagant praise of liberty, robs the People of the most important liberty they asserted in the Declaration of Independence and won in the Revolution of 1776: the freedom to govern themselves.... And to allow the policy question of same-sex marriage to be considered and resolved by a select, patrician, highly unrepresentative panel of

nine is to violate a principle even more fundamental than taxation without representation: no social transformation without presentation. But what really astounds is the hubris reflected in today’s judicial Putsch.... These Justices *know* that limiting marriage to one man and one woman is contrary to reason; they *know* that an institution as old as government itself, and accepted by every nation in history until 15 years ago, cannot possibly be supported by anything other than ignorance or bigotry. And they are willing to say that any citizen who does not agree with that, who adheres to what was, until 15 years ago, the unanimous judgment of all generations and all societies, stands against the Constitution.”

On February 19, a Friday, Antonin Scalia lay in repose at the United States Supreme Court Building. Across the street, The United Methodist Building’s Simpson Memorial Chapel opened its doors to guests who desired to pray for Justice Scalia, his family, and the nation. That day General Board of Church and Society staff greeted such guests. The board’s General Secretary Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe said, “Justice Scalia was a tireless public servant. His devotion to his faith and his country was undeniable. I am honored that we were able to offer the chapel for visitors needing a prayerful space.” (<http://umc-gbcs.org/faith-in-action/the-united-methodist-building-opens-its-doors-for-justice-scalia-mourners>, accessed 02/25/16)

The Lifewatch community joins United Methodists throughout the United States in thanking Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe and the General Board of Church and Society for initiating this extraordinary act of Christian hospitality.

- Interpreter is a magazine published by The United Methodist Church. It focuses on “United Methodists living their faith.” The March/April 2016 issue, released just days before General Conference convened, was entitled “Guided by Our Principles” -- that is, our Social Principles. Contained in the issue is the article “Encouraging Social Awareness and Action” by Mr. Tom Gillem. The article notes: “The [General Board of Church and Society] always welcomes United Methodists who

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have different values and perspectives than those stated in the church teachings, [Dr. Susan] Henry-Crowe said.

"Earlier this year, Lifewatch, an active group of United Methodists that supports human life and abortion prevention, held its annual worship service in the chapel of The United Methodist Building.

"My position, and I think correctly the church's position should be, is we're all in this together," Henry-Crowe said. "If Lifewatch promotes a legitimate position on questions of life, of course, they are welcome to pray in the chapel, as are all people in the church who have a different perception and views on life." (p. 17)

It is always nice to be noticed and remembered. And Dr. Henry-Crowe is indeed quite welcoming to Lifewatch and many others, I am sure. (Please see the prior comment.) However, if all people in the denomination get to think what they want to think about life and abortion, without being bothered by the claims of authoritative church teaching, that means the church has no real, operational teaching on these matters. That means everyone in the church just gets to make it up as they go along, as they go their own way, as they have it their own way. But that turns a church into a big tent full of Christians who think they have the faith all figured out, no thanks to the church and her teaching. But that is not the Church. That is a social club with a religious veneer.

- New bishops will be elected in The United Methodist Church at Jurisdictional Conferences this summer. If you happen to be a delegate to the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference (SEJ) at Lake Junaluska, NC on July 12-16, I hope you will give extraordinarily serious attention to Rev. Harold D. (aka "HD") Lewis. When Rev. Lewis was a pastor in Washington, DC, he preached a Lifewatch sermon; and for years, he has been a member of the Lifewatch Advisory Board. Rev. Lewis has a strong doctrinal spine, a clear moral

eye, and a courageously decisive voice. He would be a shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep.

As the Jurisdictional Conferences make their decisions in the weeks ahead, may our Lord be with them. Perhaps as never before, The United Methodist Church needs bishops who are committed to Christ and His Church, including the doctrine and morals of His Church through the ages, and who are virtuous and hopeful -- and strong enough to take some heat and some hate.

- Ludmya Bourdeau "Mia" Love (R-UT) "recalled her amusement while on the [United States House of Representatives] floor when one of her pro-abortion colleagues said that pro-life laws are a ploy by a caucus of angry white men. Her response was, 'I'm not angry. I'm not white. And I'm not a male. What I am is a mother who's disappointed. This [debate about abortion] is about a child.'" (Bradley Mattes, "2016: Call to Action," February 11, 2016, www.lifeissues.org/2016/02/2016-call-action, accessed on 03/28/16)

- *Magna est veritas, et prevalebbit.* "Truth is most powerful, and will ultimately prevail."♥

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