

Lifewatch

09/01/24
for Global and United Methodists

LIVE IN TRUTH, NOT IN AUTONOMY

“Different philosophical systems have lured people into believing that they are their own absolute master, able to decide their own destiny and future in complete autonomy, trusting only in themselves and their own powers. But this can never be the grandeur of the human being, who can find fulfillment only in choosing to enter the truth, to make a home under the shade of Wisdom and dwell there. Only within this horizon of truth will people understand their freedom in its fullness and their call to know and love God as the supreme realization of their true self.”

—Saint John Paul II (1920-2005)
(*Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998)

LIVE IN LOVE

“The school of love has a name: it is sacrifice.”

—Father Josemaria Escriva (1902-1975)
(quoted by S.A. McCarthy, “Reject the ‘Red Pill,’ Carry Your Cross,”
washingtonstand.com, March 18, 2024)

GREATER LOVE

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life
for his friends.”

—Jesus of Nazareth
(John 15:13, RSV)

Faithful Exemplar: Corey Comperatore, 1974-2024

CINDY EVANS, THANK YOU!

With a boatload of gratitude and with some sadness, I inform you that Mrs. Cindy Evans has retired from her work with Lifewatch (or the Taskforce of United Methodists on Abortion and Sexuality [TUMAS])—effective August 31, 2024. Weeks ago, to the Lifewatch Advisory Board, she first announced her plan to retire. Cindy and her husband Dave will remain in Cottleville, MO, which is located due west of St. Louis. Cindy—because of her good work, her friendship, her kindness, and her thoughtfulness—will be missed by all of us.

The Lifewatch Advisory Board and the Lifewatch community are deeply grateful to Cindy Evans for her many years of service. Way back in mid-2002, she became Lifewatch’s Publicity and Outreach Coordinator. While holding onto that position in early 2004, she also became Lifewatch’s Administrator. (Up to that time, Mrs. Ruth Brown, of Dothan, AL, had taken care of Lifewatch’s administrative tasks.) Since 2004, Cindy has worked both positions—and more! To Lifewatch, she

sacrificially gave of her time. To Lifewatch, she sacrificially gave of her home—that is, she surrendered enough space in her house to make room for a home office. And to benefit Lifewatch, she leaned on her husband for wise guidance, especially regarding digital matters.

I want to thank Cindy, in a personal yet public way, for her faithful service, which was always offered with much good cheer. Cindy, you efficiently took care of routine matters. You offered good counsel. You were always a source of encouragement and friendship. For years, I looked forward to our weekly telephone conversations on Tuesdays. And in the months to come, do not be shocked by my occasional call to you! I hope you will answer!

Again, Cindy Evans, the Lifewatch Advisory Board, the Lifewatch community, and I thank you. Always, you have been, are, and will be a good and faithful servant of the Gospel of Life. (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

THE CHURCH IS OUR MOTHER— NOT OUR MOMMY

The Church, founded and built by our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18), has been on a pilgrimage through history for almost 2,000 years. She has received the apostolic faith, which was revealed by God, and handed on that specific faith to generation after generation around the world. All the while, the Church is our Mother.

To accomplish that, she is busy and does many things. Through Word-and-Sacrament worship, she offers God's forgiveness to the repentant and withholds divine forgiveness from the proud and self-righteous. She preaches and teaches the Bible as the primary source of God's revelation to His people. She celebrates Baptism and Communion, as ways for Christ to visit His people. She keeps her dogma—e.g., The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed—in good repair, since it serves foundational purposes. She uses denominational doctrine to lift up Christian truth and to unify each communion as much as possible. She allows theologies of different sorts to arise, circulate, and mature, though she has been known to question, even overrule, some of them. She teaches the People of God the way they are to live and the ways they are not to live.

As Mother Church, she does everything for our good. With gratitude for God's call and guidance, with good cheer, with firmness, with confidence, she speaks and acts for us. She is not offended by our questions. She is not upset by our challenges. She is not thrown into a rage by our arguments with her. She has seen, and experienced, it all before. Under stress, she keeps her cool. She stays the course. She does what God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—calls her to say and do, informs her to say and do, forms her to say and do, empowers her to say and do. In every way, the Church proves herself to be our Mother.

The Church is not our Mommy. The Church does not try to impress us with her attractiveness or her relevance or her intelligence. The Church does not seek to please all her members or to make them happy. The Church does not change her mind because that is what her members (or the world) want her to do. The Church never strives to make her people immediately happy or contented.

Mother Church knows that true happiness is a result of holiness, of obedience to God's demanding commandments, of the sacrifice that is real love. Holy happiness comes after what is first experienced as unpleasant, difficult, hard, even painful. After repentance with tears. After the humility that feels like humiliation. After the recognition that what was desired is actually destructive. After a descent from a looked-up-to pedestal of some kind. Only then does happiness arrive. With joy. On the far side of unpleasantness.

Mother Church challenges us to think what we do not naturally think, to do what we do not naturally want to do. She is patient. And kind. And forgiving. She seeks out those who wander, who fall, who are too high to hear, too

low to listen. She does not water down what she knows to be true—even when it is hard for her children to hear. And she never changes what is love.

The Church is our Mother. She wants what is best for us. She wants salvation for us.

Unfortunately, Mommy Church only tries to please us. In the end, she devastates or destroys us. (PTS) ♥

LIFEWATCH CHANGES

With the retirement of Cindy Evans, some changes in the Lifewatch ministry are occurring. Lifewatch's administrative office is moving from Cottleville, MO to my study in Wilson, NC. That change is reflected throughout this issue of Lifewatch. To reach Lifewatch, you will now be contacting Wilson, NC. That is, Lifewatch and I can be reached at 2400 Foxcroft Road NW/Wilson, NC 27896, phone 252.640.2755 and email paulstallsworth@nccumc.org. Do not hesitate to communicate with me in the days to come. I welcome engagement with you.

It is no secret that renewal-and-reform ministries have been going away from the United Methodist scene. As congregations disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church, they joined the Global Methodist Church or another evangelical denomination; or they

remained independent. Therefore, renewal-and-reform ministries discerned that their work was completed or near completion. For example, for over three decades, The Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church lifted up Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord, and asserted the essential role of doctrine in the faith and life of the Church. Now, The Confessing Movement is gone. For 57 years, Good News emphasized the primary role of the Bible (well interpreted) in the faith and life of the Church and the Christian. Now, Good News has written, edited, printed, and distributed the last issue of its excellent magazine Good News. It looks like Lifewatch could be the last, remaining evangelical-traditional-orthodox renewal ministry in The United Methodist Church.

Today's is a new denominational landscape. As many predicted, The United Methodist Church is moving toward progressivism and, at the same time, striving to keep its tent as large and as anchored as possible. The Global Methodist Church is in the process of laying a doctrinal and disciplinary foundation that will, with God's help, endure for decades to come. With denominations and congregations in survival mode, Lifewatch will strive to witness to the Gospel of Life—beginning with Jesus Christ and His Church (and challenging the covenant-less church of choice), lifting up the gift of human life (and opposing the destruction of little ones), and asserting the goodness of human sexuality within the marital covenant (and admitting the harms of intimacy outside of the covenant of marriage).

In the days to come, you will notice that Lifewatch will attempt to reach out to Methodists of all stripes: United Methodists, Global Methodists, and Free Methodists,

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AMEs, AMEZs, and others. That is our goal.

You play an essential role in the ongoing witness of Lifewatch. Stay with, or join with, Lifewatch in this ongoing, Methodist ministry for the Gospel of Life—including Christ, life, and marriage. During the course of this witness, your support—including prayers and contributions—has been, is, and will be absolutely essential. (Paul T. Stallsworth) ♥

TWICE ADOPTED

by Rev. James H. Harry

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.... (1 Peter 1:3, NRSV)

For as long as I can remember, all I was ever told was that I was wanted. I was chosen. “Jimmy, out of all the children available in the whole wide world, we adopted you!” Granted, growing up with this sense of entitlement did not always bode well for my siblings as my brothers and sister would often hear, “Well, Mom and Dad chose me. They were stuck with you.” Fortunately, the four kids growing up in the Harry household chalked it up as simple sibling banter.

When I was born, for reasons I will never know but can fully appreciate, my birth mother did not believe she could provide a safe or positive environment for me. The product of a teenage fling, I was given up for adoption. I am grateful that my birth mother, perhaps with the help and encouragement of her own parents, had the courage to continue with, and not end, her pregnancy and my life prematurely. I suspect that “going through with it” in the 1960s subjected her to difficulties beyond my understanding. I am grateful to her and to the Lord for the gift of my life.

When preaching the Good News of the holy adoption of God through his Son, Jesus Christ, I tell the story this way. Days after I was born, I was taken from the hospital to an orphanage and placed for open adoption. Back in those days, names were typed on a thin strip of paper, placed in a plastic tube wristband, and wrapped around the baby’s wrist. My wristband said, “Baby Doe.” A few weeks later, Robert and Jean Harry, who had previously filed for adoption, received a telephone call informing them that a baby boy was approved for them to adopt. Ecstatic, my parents began making the necessary preparations to bring me home. The adoption agency asked the Harrys what they were going to name me. My mom told them “James Harold Harry.” As I like to tell the story, after hanging up, the adoption agency typed a new name on a new strip of paper. They slipped it into the plastic tube. They walked into my room, and with a pair of scissors, they cut off my old wristband and wrapped a new wristband with my new name around my tiny, wrinkled wrist. Wow! I finally had a name! I was chosen! I was adopted! I was loved!

I thought that was the end of the story. After all, I was named, taken home, loved, and nurtured. It was not! Little did I realize that I was going to be adopted a second time. As I was growing up, my parents shared the story of God

with me. In gentle ways throughout my childhood, my parents told me the stories of Jesus. They took me to worship and Sunday School. I was taught about God’s love for humanity and our need for forgiveness. My parents shared the story of God with me. I was invited into this story, and I accepted. I gave my life to Jesus Christ my Savior. I like to tell the story this way. For the second time in my life, an old wristband with my old name was cut off me, and I was given a new name. This time, a new name was not only wrapped around my wrist, but it also wrapped around my heart and my soul. What was this new name? “*Child of God. Heir according to the promise of God.*” I was adopted...again. I was chosen...again. I was named...again, but this time, “*By [God’s] great mercy he has given [me] a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead....*”

In being allowed to be born, my life was spared. In being adopted, I was given a new name. In dying with Christ by faith and in baptism, I was born again. In Christ, I am alive now and forever. Amen!

Rev. Harry is the Senior Minister of Saint Paul Methodist Church in Goldsboro, NC.♥

SIX POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

This article was first outlined on May 31, 2024. Ninety years before that day, on May 31, 1934, The Barmen Declaration was adopted by the vote of more than one hundred Protestants—both clergy (pastors and professors) and laity—who were assembled at a local church in Barmen, Germany. “[F]ortified by strong coffee and one or two Brazilian cigars,” the systematic theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) had drafted the declaration. The Barmen Declaration aimed to help clergy and laity defend the Church and the Church’s faith from being turned into theological tools of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialism.

At that time, the so-called German Christians were working to nazify their churches and their faith by redefining Christian tenets in the terms of National Socialist ideology. For example, they discerned God’s revelation in the rise of Adolf Hitler to power and saw divine providence at work in his political program. In response to this attempt to make Christianity a servant of Nazism, Barth and Barmen declared an uncompromised and uncompromising No! (Barth later regretted that Barmen did not oppose the murderous anti-Semitism of the Nazis.)

The Barmen Declaration is a theological statement. In a time and place where the Church’s historic faith was being seduced and exploited, Barmen strives to set the record straight. In no uncertain terms, it declares: The Jesus Christ of the Bible, not another, is the Lord of this world and the Church. All people require this Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, for salvation, and for guidance. The Church belongs solely to this Jesus Christ; the Church does not belong to the State. The Church is provided faithful leaders by the mysterious providence of God, not by the State. Church and State, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, have distinct (but related) responsibilities in this world, and both realms must be protected; one must never dominate the other. The Church follows the command of Jesus Christ, not the spirit of the age, until the end of

history. Needless to say, the German Christians and other Nazis did not think well of The Barmen Declaration.

Shift to the American Scene

Since its founding, the United States has been provided with a modicum of religious guidance by what used to be known as the “mainline Protestant denominations”—e.g., the Episcopal Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), The United Methodist Church, and so on. In the 1980s, however, they began to be referred to as the “oldline denominations,” a sure sign of their waning public influence. These same Protestant churches, or what remains of them, can now be described as “sideline denominations” (Richard John Neuhaus), as they have been destabilized and marginalized over the last several years.

Yet even today, some pastors in the sideline denominations remain addicted to providing political guidance to their flocks and to those who are beyond their flocks. In what follows, this pastor will admit and demonstrate his own addiction to this once-mainline-Protestant pastoral habit.

America is in the midst of a significant political campaign that will end on Election Day, November 5, 2024—or soon thereafter. In one way or another, the life issues will play a major role in many races—especially since Democrats are making abortion an important—perhaps the most important—focus in the presidential race. So be warned, over the next four or five months, the countless political campaigns will become deafeningly noisy and quite exhausting to all of us.

Six Principles

In the current political climate and campaign season, and with The Barmen Declaration in mind, I propose the following six political principles, based on a Christian foundation, that might be useful in evaluating political candidates, parties, ads, interviews, and speeches in the months to come.

1. Because the Triune God creates, sustains, and redeems this world, including its people: Political discourse that uses God’s name in vain, in mundane or flippant or scandalous ways, should be understood as unnecessary, degrading, even blasphemous, and therefore ruled out of bounds.
2. Because Jesus Christ is the Lord of this world and commands protection of the weakest: Politics and policies that multiply and exploit powerless people—such as pro-choice politics that permit the unborn to be eliminated, open-border policies that allow cartels to use and abuse those who are illegally immigrating, and violent anti-Semitic demonstrations occurring on campuses and in the streets—should be exposed and opposed.
3. Because Jesus Christ is the Lord over creation and history, and because His Lordship includes providence: Political discourse that promotes a paralyzing fear of opponents, and a frightening dread of the possibility of their victories, should be dismissed as a sign of bad faith or no faith. Such fear should be counted as harmful to democracy.
4. Because the Lord Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection defeated (though did not eliminate) sin, death, and the evil one: Political discourse that suggests an opponent is totally demonic or evil should be dismissed as exaggerated and untrue.

5. Because Jesus Christ is Lord and commands His followers to love their neighbors: Political discourse that aims to increase the hatred against a person or a group should be ignored, discounted, and opposed.

6. Because only Jesus Christ is the Lord and Judge of history, whose reign over democratic nations is often mysteriously exercised through the rule of law: Campaigns in a democracy that use governmental resources for partisan purposes should be understood as exercising unfair, and perhaps criminal and tyrannical, advantage.

Consider using these principles as a guide for your political decision-making in the days to come. The failed attempt to assassinate former-president and now-candidate Donald Trump might well increase the relevance and need of these principles. If you find these principles are being routinely breached during the months ahead, you are encouraged to raise objections to the offending candidates and their campaigns; and possibly consider changing your vote.

Karl Barth and Barmen taught the Church and Christians: When political challenges are great, do not just react. Rather, think, reason, and respond in ways that are, first and last and always, faithful to the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and who is always providentially engaging and judging, the nations and states, the politicians and the parties, of this world. (Paul T. Stallsworth)

An earlier version of this article was first published as a Pastoral Reflection on The Human Life Review website (humanlifereview.com). It was posted on June 17, 2024.♥

THE BISHOPS SHOULD REPENT AND APOLOGIZE

During its 2024 Session, on June 14 in the Greenville Convention Center, the North Carolina Conference debated and voted down the following resolution, which was written by your friendly scribe. Though its adoption failed by a wide margin, this resolution might be of some interest to you and to others. (PTS)

RESOLUTION: AN INVITATION TO THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS AND INDIVIDUAL BISHOPS TO REPENT AND APOLOGIZE

Whereas, “a bishop, as God’s servant, must be blameless; he [sic] must not be arrogant...” (Titus 1:7, NRSV); and **Whereas**, John Wesley interpreted what the NRSV calls “arrogant” as “selfwilled--Literally, pleasing himself...” [1]; and

Whereas, The United Methodist Church requires its Council of Bishops to “plan for the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of the entire Church and for carrying into effect the rules, regulations, and responsibilities prescribed and enjoined by the General Conference...” (The Book of Discipline 2016 Par. 47); and

Whereas, “...bishops are members of the Council of Bishops and are bound in special covenant with all other bishops. In keeping with this covenant, bishops fulfill their servant leadership and express their mutual accountability.... The Church expects the Council of Bishops to speak to the Church and from the Church to the

world and to give leadership in the quest for Christian unity..." (The Book of Discipline 2016 Par. 422); and

Whereas, The United Methodist Church charges its resident bishops "[t]o guard, transmit, teach, and proclaim, corporately and individually, the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and tradition, and, as they are led and endowed by the Spirit, to interpret that faith evangelically and prophetically" (The Book of Discipline 2016 Par. 414); and

Whereas, in recent years, individual bishops have ignored and openly dissented from church doctrine, and neglected or flagrantly broken church discipline. In response, the Council of Bishops has not held such bishops accountable, neither institutionally through due process nor personally through collegial correction; and

Whereas, when The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops and certain individual bishops did not carry out what General Conference had decided, by teaching church doctrine and upholding church discipline—that is, when the Council and certain of its members acted according to their own will—they set an example of "expressive individualism" (Robert Bellah), by ranking their personal opinions over church doctrine and church discipline; and

Whereas, the expressive individualism, of the Council of Bishops and certain bishops, spread throughout The United Methodist Church among the clergy and among the laity; and

Whereas, over time, the example set by the Council of Bishops and certain bishops caused, or contributed to, thousands of congregations disaffiliating, and hundreds of clergy withdrawing, from their Annual Conferences. In the North Carolina Conference alone, 326 local churches recently disaffiliated; and

Whereas, to date, the Council of Bishops and individual bishops have not admitted or confessed that the Council and its members have been responsible, in any way, for the recent schism in The United Methodist Church;

Now, therefore, be it resolved, striving for authentic Christian reconciliation which requires honesty and truth-telling, the 2024 Session of the North Carolina Conference invites the Council of Bishops and individual bishops to offer repentance to God, and to issue an apology to The United Methodist Church, for the division that they have contributed to within the church they were ordained and consecrated to serve for the sake of unity; and

Be it further resolved, the 2024 Session of the North Carolina Conference expresses hope that such repentance and apology will lead to increasing forgiveness and reconciliation throughout The United Methodist Church and beyond—between her bishops and former bishops, her clergy and former clergy, her congregations and former congregations, and her members and former members; and

"[T]here is one, overriding reason for today's schism: Misguided episcopal leadership. First, the Council of Bishops ignored the teaching and discipline of the church. Then bishops publicly dissented from church teaching and blatantly broke church discipline. Finally, the bishops' example spread throughout the denomination. Schism resulted."

Be it further resolved, the 2024 Session of the North Carolina Conference instructs the Conference Secretary to email and mail this resolution to the President of the Council of Bishops, the Secretary of the Council of Bishops, and to all other individual bishops (resident and retired).

[1] Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, Volume II, Titus 1:7. Available at [http://](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-st-pauls-epistle-to-titus/#c5552)

wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-st-pauls-epistle-to-titus/#c5552.

(This resolution appears in the Conference Workbook, 2024 Session of the North Carolina Annual Conference [nccumc.org/ac2024], pp. 84-85.) ♥

A SPEECH FOR THE ABOVE RESOLUTION

The following is an unedited version of a three-minute speech that was written for the floor debate of the North Carolina Annual Conference to support the aforementioned resolution. A version of this speech was delivered on the conference floor by Rev. Stallsworth.

General Conference is behind. Our delegation participated, and more of you served, in Charlotte.

Reports from Charlotte boast: "This General Conference was different! More respectful! More loving! We United Methodists finally got along!" Such reports are accurate.

But they are accurate because of imbalance. At General Conference, one side dominated. Less competition, less contention.

Before celebrating our lessened tensions, we must ask: "Why did so many congregations disaffiliate?" There are several possible answers. Disagreements about sexuality. Differences about the Bible. Competing theologies. Partisan politics. Social classes in conflict. All were involved.

But there is one, overriding reason for today's schism: Misguided episcopal leadership. First, the Council of Bishops *ignored* the teaching and discipline of the church. Then bishops *publicly dissented* from church teaching and *blatantly broke* church discipline. Finally, the bishops' example spread throughout the denomination. *Schism resulted.*

I could stand here, name offenders, cite dates, describe infractions. That is neither necessary nor charitable.

Right now, there is a great temptation for us to make nice, to avoid our problems. But The United Methodist Church is a covenant community. The Lord of the covenant demands of us mutual discipline. We discipline one another in love.

You reply: “How dare a retired elder write a resolution that calls bishops to repent and apologize!” Well, bishops *are* elders. After elders are elected bishops, consecration does not elevate bishops above the need for discipline. So, Annual Conference: we can, and we should, offer bishops the gift of discipline: Invite them to repent and apologize for the schism!

Vote your conscience formed by the Word of God. Vote not by reflex. Vote not with friends. Vote not out of fear. Vote because of the truth, which our church so desperately needs.♥

“... elders are elected bishops, consecration does not elevate bishops above the need for discipline. So, Annual Conference: we can, and we should, offer bishops the gift of discipline.”

EVIDENCE FOR THE ABOVE RESOLUTION: Years, Bishops, Infractions

The above speech does not offer evidence of bishops who violated The United Methodist Church’s doctrine and discipline. The reason I gave: Because “[t]hat is neither necessary nor charitable.” Reconsidering this matter, I decided to publish the following evidence because of an overriding reason: Not publishing the evidence would mean that, by my silence, I would be “bearing false witness” (Exodus 20:16, NRSV) and breaking the Ninth Commandment. (PTS)

In 1982, Bp. Melvin E. Wheatley appointed an openly gay pastor, Rev. Julian Rush, to a Denver congregation.

At the 1996 General Conference in Denver, fifteen bishops (Bp. Judith Craig, Bp. William W. Dew Jr., Bp. Jesse DeWitt, Bp. Leontine T.C. Kelly, Bp. Calvin D. McConnell, Bp. Susan M. Morrison, Bp. Fritz Mutti, Bp. Donald A. Ott, Bp. Sharon Zimmerman Rader, Bp. Roy Sano, Bp. Mary Ann Swenson, Bp. Melvin Talbert, Bp. Melvin Wheatley Jr., Bp. C. Dale White, and Bp. Joseph H. Yeakel) made a public statement that rejected The United Methodist Church’s ordination rules that oppose homosexual practice.

In 1999, Bp. Melvin Talbert publicly defended an investigations committee for dropping church charges against 67 clergy who had celebrated together a “service of blessing” for a same-sex couple.

During the 2000 General Conference in Cleveland, pro-LGBT protests inside and outside the venue resulted in disruption of the proceedings, and the arrests of Bp. Susan Morrison and Bp. C. Joseph Sprague.

During the 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh, pro-LGBT protesters entered and disrupted the conference floor. Presiding at the time, Bp. Janice Riggle Huie greeted the protesters with, “Let’s welcome our brothers and sisters.”

During the 2008 General Conference in Fort Worth, pro-LGBT protesters went to the conference floor and interrupted conference business, with assistance from bishops. Presiding, Bp. J. Lawrence McCleskey used his

authority to favor the protesters and their agenda. Bp. Melvin Talbert spoke; he implored the General Conference to reconsider its traditional votes against homosexuality.

In 2013 near Birmingham, AL,

Bp. Melvin Talbert became the first United Methodist bishop to officiate at a same-sex service. This he did by breaching another bishop’s episcopal area and breaking covenant with fellow bishops.

In 2016 in North Carolina, Bp. Talbert co-officiated a similar service.

The 2016 Western Jurisdictional Conference elected Rev. Karen Oliveto, a woman who lives a lesbian lifestyle, bishop. Bishops at the Jurisdictional Conference, in the College of Bishops, and on the Council of Bishops let the election stand, though church discipline forbade such an election.

During the 2019 Special Called General Conference in St. Louis, after the Traditional Plan passed, leaders of the Western Jurisdiction delegation announced to the entire assembly that they would not follow the provisions of the Traditional Plan, which the General Conference had just approved. In addition, several bishops promised that they would not uphold the same provisions in their episcopal areas.

On March 28, 2019 in Garner, NC, a “Sacred Witness” event, which was pro-LGBTQIA+, was staged outside North Carolina Conference headquarters. The event featured Bishop Hope Morgan Ward as a supportive speaker.

The 2022 Western Jurisdictional Conference elected Rev. Cedrick D. Bridgeforth, a man who lives a gay lifestyle, bishop. Bishops at the Jurisdictional Conference, in the College of Bishops, and on the Council of Bishops let the election stand, though it was forbidden by church discipline.

At the postponed 2020 General Conference in Charlotte, some bishops (and others)—who for years had pushed The United Methodist Church to neutralize its Biblical-Traditional doctrine and discipline on homosexual practice—finally got their way. And their denomination continues to divide and diminish—no matter what the denomination’s public-relations campaign is saying or singing. God have mercy. (PTS) ♥

DURING WWII: REV. FRANK BAKER MINISTERS TO JURGEN MOLTMANN

Dr. Paul W. Chilcote is a United Methodist minister, speaker, and author. During the recent North Central Jurisdictional Conference, Dr. Chilcote recalled a heartfelt story about the power of love and hope: “Many of you will know the name Jurgén Moltmann [German Reformed theologian, 1926-2024], who died just about a month ago....

One of the great theologians of our time. And a great friend of Methodism, particularly because of his deep friendship with Tom Langford (1930-2000), who was dean at Duke Divinity School for some years. Because of that friendship, Moltmann made quite a number of visits to Duke.... I was in my PhD program by that time, and I am very shy, very introverted. It took a lot of courage for me to go up to Moltmann and invite him to lunch. But I did. And he very graciously accepted. And so we went together over to the student union, sat down, and had lunch.

“As we were starting, I thought I had better say a bit more about myself: ‘Again, my name is Paul Chilcote. I am working on my PhD with Frank Baker [1910-1999, British Methodist minister, professor of Wesleyan studies at Duke Divinity School].’

“He interrupted and said, ‘Oh, would you like to hear a story about Frank and [his wife] Nellie Baker?’

“I said, ‘Yeah....’ [laughter] So I kinda sat back to take it in.

“[Moltmann] said, ‘During the Second World War, there was a prisoner-of-war camp on the northeastern coast of England. Many of the prisoners who were there were Luftwaffe [Nazi airmen], who were shot down during the blitz. So they were hated by many of the people surrounding them there in the north of England. There was a Methodist pastor and his wife who were stationed in that area. They felt compelled to do something to reach out to those prisoners, who they believed were their neighbors.

“So they went one afternoon and had an appointment with the commander of the facility. They said that they had dreamed up an idea, and they wanted to see if it was possible. They said, ‘We would like to take home a prisoner on Sunday morning with us to our churches to worship and then come to our home, have Sunday dinner together, and then take him back to the prison.’

“To their utter astonishment, the commander agreed. So throughout the remainder of the war, a steady stream of German prisoners went and worshipped with Frank and Nellie Baker, and had their Sunday dinner in their home.

“Then there was a pause. And [Moltmann] looked deep into my eyes, and he said, ‘Paul, I want you to know that one of those young, German soldiers was a man by the name of Jurgen Moltmann; and it was at the Bakers’ Sunday dinner table that the seed of hope was planted in my soul.’”

Dr. Moltmann said to Rev. Chilcote, “I was seventeen [then]. And it’s like it just happened yesterday.”

Rev. Chilcote concluded by challenging his audience: “Brothers and sisters, plant seeds of hope. Love people extravagantly. And take the whole world, as one of the early Methodist women said, into your loving embrace.”

Love. Christian love. Christian love that is sacrifice for the good of the other. The Bakers loved, truly loved, the Nazi airmen—including the one named Moltmann.

Who should we love? Who can we love? Who are we not seeing, but with God’s help we can see, so that we can love them? (PTS)

(“Lifting Every Voice for the Purpose of Multiplying Love,” with Rev. Paul Chilcote and Dr. Ashley Boggan, North Central Jurisdictional Conference, July 11, NCJ 2024 Videos, vimeopro.com, begin at 31:30) ♥

A PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

The following prayer was written by Bishop Timothy Whitaker (1948-2024). Composed when Whitaker was the Norfolk (VA) District Superintendent, it first appeared in The District Beam (January/February 2001), a publication of the Norfolk District. Thanks to Mr. Joseph Slife for retrieving it. (PTS)

Eternal God, you who cherish everything you make, you have taken all of us human beings into your heart through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. By the outpouring of your Holy Spirit, you have established your church to be the visible body of Jesus Christ on earth and chosen us to be members of Christ’s body. Hear our intercession for your church in this new year.

Unite all the broken parts of the body of Christ into one peaceable communion so that the divisions among brothers and sisters in Christ may not make a mockery of your purpose to gather up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ.

Build up your church in faith upon the foundation of the teaching of the apostles with the proclamation of Christ as the cornerstone. Deliver your church from the blindness of heresies and from the cowardice of acquiescing to the principalities and powers of this present age.

Give us courage to raise the sails of the ark of salvation, which is your holy church, so that we may be blown forward in mission by the wind of your Holy Spirit. Deliver us from the temptation to steer your ship into safe harbors to protect ourselves from the bracing breezes of that Spirit who would send us into uncharted waters where we do not want to go.

Enliven our imagination in worship so that by lifting up our prayers, reading and hearing your Word, sharing in the mysteries of your holy sacraments, confessing the creeds of your universal church, and singing psalms and hymns, all your people may be gathered up into the tremendous drama of divine salvation and know themselves as your saints who are strengthened in their inner being and equipped to do every good work.

Inspire every congregation in your worldwide church to reach out to the poor, the lonely, and the lost with the love embodied by the incarnate Word of God and poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Preserve your assemblies from profane strife, weariness of spirit, and fear of holy boldness.

Enable all the members of the church of Jesus Christ to know their dignity as your own people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and a chosen race. Give them the ability to discover their gifts and to use them in the mission of your church so they may fulfill their destiny to be the unique persons they were created to become.

Renew the call to ordained ministry within all your deacons and elders. Deliver them from fear to speak and to do the truth because of a wrong desire to please. Give to them a hunger and thirst to taste the sweetness of your Word, a tenderness toward all people, and a zeal to order your church to fulfill its mission to a world forgetful of you and your ways.

Make all the bishops of your church strong in body and soul so that they may shoulder their heavy burdens with cheerful service. Illumine their minds with the mind of your

universal church enlightened by your Spirit down through the ages. Let them lead your church with humility of spirit as gentle shepherds of your precious flock.

Gracious God, have mercy on your church called to the greatness of divine purpose but so often hindered by the smallness of human beings deaf to your Word. As the body of Christ, by your grace let it die to its sinful life of doubt, complacency and self-absorption so that it may be resurrected to a splendid new life of faith, hope and love.

May your church experience anew the freedom of obedience, the joy of adventure, and the satisfaction of being employed in your great work in the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen. ♥

AN EMAIL TO LIFEWATCH

From Joseph Slife, former editor of the MethodistThinker website (which is now offline but available at archive.org), on the other side of the Tiber in Louisville, KY, and a parishioner at Our Lady & St. John:
June 18, 2024

Dear Pastor Stallsworth:

I hope you don't take offense at this, but the last issue of *Lifewatch* [June 1, 2024] and its reporting/commentary on the UMC brought to mind the story of a conversation between Malcolm Muggeridge and Mother Teresa.

Muggeridge had become a Christian (to the surprise of many) but was not yet a Catholic.

From Gregory Wolfe's *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography* (Eerdmans, 1995, p. 411): "As her letters demonstrate, Mother Teresa did not always take the confrontational approach with Malcolm; she was able to empathize with his loneliness and sense of exclusion. But she was also capable of cutting Malcolm's self-justifications short.

"He frequently alluded to a conversation he had with Mother Teresa while walking along the Serpentine in London. As they strolled through the park, he explained to her that he shared [philosopher] Simone Weil's belief that God needed Christians outside the [Catholic] Church as well as inside.

"No, he doesn't," she said to him tartly.

"There was something about her simple confidence that seemed to him to cut through all his evasions." ♥

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT

• **Thanks to you, the Lifewatch witness continues in the face of great obstacles and opponents.** Because of you, this witness for the Gospel of Life has continued for over 35 years. This witness has not been silenced. Bishops who care little about the apostolic faith of the Church catholic,

"Only with your help can we sustain our witness for the Gospel of Life to United Methodists, Global Methodists, other Methodists, and beyond."

denominational executives who serve a pro-choice agenda (regarding Christ's Church, human life, and human sexuality), seminary professors who are fixated on what is theologically novel and popular (for a while), and pastors who are unwilling to propose any Christian truth that might

upset someone have not canceled this witness. You and your generosity have helped keep the Lifewatch witness alive and well, strong and forthright. Thank you!

Gifts that you make, no matter how small or large, maintain and even extend our witness. Our ministry has usually had limited financial reserves. So your gifts are immediately deposited into our bank account, and they are carefully spent in short order. Only with your help can we sustain our witness for the Gospel of Life to United Methodists, Global Methodists, other Methodists, and beyond.

Please donate to Lifewatch (if you have not done so) in one of four ways. First, go to the Lifewatch website (www.lifewatch.org), click the "Donate" button at the right end of the red line at the top of the home page, and then follow the instructions to give digitally. Second, send a check, made payable to "Lifewatch," to Lifewatch/2400 Foxcroft Road NW/Wilson, NC 27896. Third, give stocks (first contact Rev. Stallsworth in the Lifewatch office in NC). And fourth, transfer earnings from your IRA directly to Lifewatch and possibly save on your taxes (again, first contact Rev. Stallsworth).

Our heartfelt thanks to you for your support—prayers and gifts, past and present.

• **Lifewatch is dedicated to the Gospel of Life.** The Gospel of Life is the Gospel grounded in Jesus Christ and first received by the Apostles. The Gospel is handed on, through time, by the Church of Jesus Christ. The Gospel contains thanksgiving for God's gift of marriage and children—and moral commitments to protect the preborn child and mother from abortion, and to defend the estate of marriage from all that would undermine it. So Lifewatch witnesses to the Gospel of Life—which includes the Church of Jesus Christ, the blessedness of children, and the beauty of marriage.

It is obvious that Lifewatch does not promote a church of choice. A church of choice is pro-choice with regard to the Church and its message and ministry and mission, pro-choice with regard to life and abortion, and pro-choice with regard to marriage and sexuality. Indeed, Lifewatch is honored to challenge pro-choice Christianity whenever the opportunity arises.

• **"Liberalism in religion is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion,** but that one creed is as good as another....It is inconsistent with any recognition of any religion as true. It teaches that all are to be tolerated, for all are matters of opinion. Revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste; not an objective fact, not miraculous; and it is the right of each individual to make it say just what strikes his fancy." If spoken today, these words of St. John Henry Newman (1801-1890), which were

first uttered over 145 years ago, would shake the rafters of many sanctuaries and lecture halls. (George Weigel, "Ticket to Oblivion?," firstthings.com, Web Exclusives, 6.19.24)

● **"Liberalism in Christianity invariably stokes distrust of tradition,"**

claims R.R. Reno, who edits First Things. "Famously, nineteenth-century scholars raised doubts about the Bible. Not only was it deemed untrustworthy as a witness to historical events, but it was also increasingly pried apart as scholars looked at the many layers of authorship. A similar skepticism was applied to church history (a critical attitude already at work during the Reformation).

"As the authority of the Bible and tradition waned, liberal theology turned inward. Our feelings and experiences became the arbiters of true doctrine. Karl Barth's *bon mot* [clever remark] about Friedrich Schleiermacher, the patriarch of liberal Protestant theology, captured the spirit of liberalism in theology: 'He [Schleiermacher] talked about God by talking about man in a loud voice.' My teachers at Yale, which included George Lindbeck, were not anti-modern, and they certainly were not fundamentalists. But they recognized that liberalism in theology has a disintegrating effect. The through-line [theme] of the Bible was lost as it was atomized, turned into data for historical speculation. Everyone became his own judge of theological truth, which, given the power of secular culture to shape our sensibilities, means that the fickle fashions of this world dictate doctrine, not the Word of God."

Following the path of liberal Christianity as the respectable cheered and clapped, United Methodist elites for years have led their denomination toward its current chaos. The sadness, even as bishops cheerlead throughout the denomination, is stubborn and does not go away.

● **"By 'liberalism' in religion, I mean the tendency to reduce the supernatural to the natural.** Liberal Catholicism was regnant when I was going through school, and it took the form of expressing the doctrines of Christianity in terms of anthropology, psychology, and especially politics. If, during my grade school and high school years, you had asked me what religion was all about, I probably would have said 'social justice, especially racial justice.' A little later in life, if you had asked me the same question, I might have said, 'becoming a well-adjusted and generous human being.' Obviously

"As the authority of the Bible and tradition waned, liberal theology turned inward. Our feelings and experiences became the arbiters of true doctrine."

there isn't one little thing wrong with social justice, being well-adjusted, or generosity. The problem is reducing religion to these concerns and its purpose to these results. When we do so, the faith becomes, at best, a faint echo of what can be heard in the secular

culture, and when that happens, people very quickly lose interest. And this is why liberal Catholicism has never generated the kind of energy and enthusiasm that I saw in Indianapolis [at the National Eucharistic Congress]."

This third cut on liberal religion is from Bishop Robert Barron, the Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester in MN and the founder of the Word on Fire Catholic Ministries. After participating in the recent National Eucharistic Congress, which drew over 50,000, he wrote the above paragraph, which appears in "The Eucharistic Congress and the Primacy of the Supernatural" (wordonfire.org website, July 23, 2024).

● **Bishop Karen Oliveto is the first chair of the recently established Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage**, a ministry of the General Commission on Archives and History. Might this new center provide a striking example of the "liberalism in religion" noted above?

● **"And how is [abortion] different than slavery**, wherein the slave's 'owner'—again, not the state—gets to decide if the person he 'owns' gets to live or die? So I don't really see them as different. Both systems [that is, legalized abortion and legalized slavery] give one person the right to take the life of another for whatever reason they will. Both systems are evil, and with God's grace, will not endure." (Dr. Joel Brind [professor of human biology and endocrinology at Baruch College and CUNY], email to the 115Forum, July 20, 2024)

● **Love tells the truth, but we are always tempted to do otherwise.** Laura Perry Smalts, who was freed from transgenderism by Christ, explains: "[T]oo often we [Christians] are so quick to tell people what they want to hear because we don't want to hurt people's feelings. But if we're really honest, it's because we don't want them to say bad things about us. The Lord told me one time as I was praying....[that] there's an idolatry in the Church of wanting to be loved by the world, of wanting the world to say '[T]hat's the most loving church,' '[T]hat is the most loving Christian I know.'..."

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09/01/24

- * Lifewatch changes & continues
- * Liberalism's link with a culture that kills
- * United Methodist Heritage includes LGBTQ+?

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“And some people will say that. And of course we want to speak truth in love always, but...one of the enemy's number one tactics is to make us feel like we're hateful Christians, like we're not being loving enough. But Jesus said that we would be hated. In fact, He said, Woe to you when all men speak well of you....

“He said, If they reject my message, they're going to reject yours. Jesus said many people walked away from Him, but we don't know how many of them came back. We know that many times the seeds take time to grow. And I've had people come and reject me initially and come back later and thank me for what I said.”

John Stonestreet and Jared Hayden respond to Laura Smalts: “Laura is right. We are not only commanded to love our neighbor, but first we are

commanded to love God. St. Augustine talked about the importance of properly ordered loves. If we try to love our neighbors first, before loving God, we won't successfully love either. In our efforts to love our neighbors, Christians must first love God. We know what love is because He first loved us, sending Jesus to rescue us from our self-imposed delusions, lies, and rebellions. We must never become so concerned with pleasing our neighbors that we fail to love Christ.” (Stonestreet and Hayden, “Love Tells the Truth,” Breakpoint Daily from the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, April 3, 2024, breakpoint.org)

● **The last issue of Lifewatch (June 1, 2024) contains a typo which makes for a good laugh.** Under “You Should Know That,” the fifth comment makes reference to the “K.C. Chefs.” No, the National Football League's Kansas City Chiefs have not gone politically correct and renamed themselves the “Chefs.” However, given the fact that barbecue in Kansas City is delicious, big business, that name change is thinkable, if improbable. Sorry for the stumble.

● ***Vulnerari praesidio.*** “Protect the most vulnerable.”

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

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LETTERS/COMMENTS TO THE EDITOR:

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth,
Lifewatch Editor
2400 Foxcroft Road NW,
Wilson, NC 27896
252.640.2755
paulstallsworth@nccumc.org

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