

faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Christmas 2015



The Decline Issue

INSIDE:

- ▶ Episcopalians Continue Bleeding Members, Attendance at Alarming Rate
- ▶ Is Theology or Demography Killing the Presbyterian Church (USA)?
- ▶ United Church of Christ 'Drag Jesus' Congregation: God Is a Diva



The audience takes part in an opening prayer at the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. The top legislative body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recognized same-sex marriage as a Christian option, prompting more congregations in 2015 to seek dismissal to other reformed churches, Page 8. (Photo: David Guralnick/The Detroit News)

FEATURES

7 'Drag Jesus" Church: God Is a Diva
by Jeffrey Walton



15 Paris, ISIS, and American Responsibility
by Marc LiVecche



16 IRD Diary
by Muriel Truax

PROGRAMS

Presbyterian

8 Is Theology or Demography Killing the PC(USA)? Jeff Gissing

Religious Liberty

10 This Day We Fight: *Why the IRD Religious Liberty Program Is Focusing on Spiritual Warfare.* Faith J. H. McDonnell

Anglican

11 Episcopalians Continue Bleeding Members, Attendance at Alarming Rate Jeff Walton

United Methodist

12 The Case against United Methodist Divestment from 'Companies Profiting from the Israeli Occupation' John Lomperis

Evangelical

14 An Evangelical Woman's Liberation from the Pill Chelsen Vicari



THE INSTITUTE ON
RELIGION & DEMOCRACY
1023 15th Street NW, Suite 601
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202.682.4131
Fax: 202.682.4136
Web: www.TheIRD.org
E-mail: info@TheIRD.org

PRESIDENT
Mark D. Tooley

EDITORIAL
Jeff Walton
Executive Editor,
Communications Manager

STAFF
Joseph Russell
Research Analyst

Faith J. H. McDonnell
Director of Religious Liberty Programs

John Lomperis
UMAction Director

Kristin L. Larson
Business Manager

Rick J. Plasterer
Staff Writer

Chelsen Vicari
Evangelical Action Director

Marc LiVecche
Scholar on Christian Ethics,
War and Peace

Muriel Truax
Intern

Alan F. H. Wisdom
Adjunct Fellow
COVER

Outgoing Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori embraces new Presiding Bishop Michael Curry at his November 1 installation ceremony in Washington, DC.
(Photo: Washington National Cathedral)

African United Methodist Bishops Speak

Recently 14 United Methodist bishops in Africa, collectively representing 5 million United Methodists in Africa's growing churches, spoke out on the seemingly disparate topics of terrorism and marriage. Their words were very different from rhetoric typical of the long-declining U.S. church. (One of the bishops, David Yemba of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, pictured, recently visited my office as part of an ecumenical Congolese delegation of church leaders with the National Endowment for Democracy.)

Speaking well before the recent Paris terror, the African United Methodist bishops cited Islamist terror groups like Nigeria-based Boko Haram and Somalia-based Al-Shabaab for their "atrocities and mayhem," such as suicide bombings, kidnappings and rape. They prayed for "divine intervention" and for the "persecuted church," pledging to search for practical counter measures to "needless suffering."

The African bishops were too polite to mention that U.S. church agencies and officials almost never talk about terrorism per se, instead lamenting "violence," often implying no major moral distinction between terrorism and military/police action against it. I can recall no major official United Methodist attention in the U.S. to Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, which have murdered thousands of Africans, targeting Christians especially.

Unlike protected, wealthy Americans, the Africans must actually live with and contend against these ongoing Islamist terror forces. They don't share our luxury of detached, abstract theorizing about "violence."

The African bishops also strongly defended United Methodist biblical teaching on marriage, which next year's governing General Conference will again debate. Here are their words:

Marriage and Sexuality

Over the past four decades, from 1972 until the present, we have watched with shock and dismay the rapid drift of our denomination from this Holy call to a warm embrace of practices that have become sources of conflict that now threatens to rip the Church apart and distract her from the mission of leading persons to faith and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. One of such practices is the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender).

We are deeply saddened that the Holy Bible, our primary authority for faith and the practice of Christian living, and our

Book of Discipline are being grossly ignored by some members and leaders of our Church in favor of social and cultural practices that have no scriptural basis for acceptance in Christian worship and conduct. Yet they continue to attempt to persuade members of the Church to incorporate these practices as an accepted code of conduct within global United Methodism.

As leaders of the church in Africa, we call upon all United Methodists, Bishops, clergy and Laity to an unreserved commitment to the Holy Bible as the primary authority for faith and practice in the church. We call upon all members throughout the

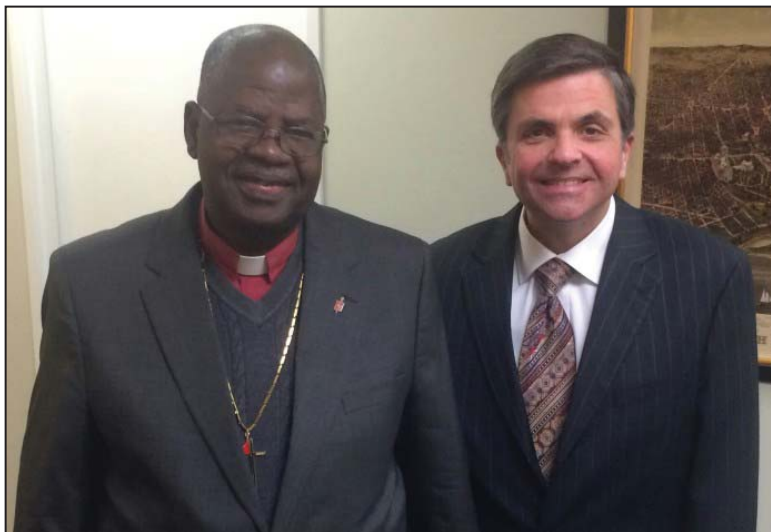
connection to adopt practices consistent with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. We submit to the teachings of Scripture that God designed marriage to be between man and woman, and the procreation of children is a blessing from God (Gen. 2:24-25; Psalm 127:3-5). Scripture also teaches that all persons are sexual beings, whether or not they are married. However, sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant bond of a faithful monogamous, heterosexual marriage, and not within same-sex unions or polygamy. The Christian marriage covenant is holy, sacred, and

consecrated by God and is expressed in shared fidelity between one man and one woman for life. In this vein, we denounce all forms of sexual exploitation, including fornication, adultery, sexual commercialization, slavery, abuse, polygamy, etc.

As shepherds of God's flock, we covenant to be in ministry with those of our members who adopt practices that are inconsistent with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.

The bishops concluded by urging that the 2016 General Conference include "daily prayer sessions for the return of our

Continued on page 9



United Methodist Bishop David Yemba of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and IRD President Mark Tooley

Mark Tooley



Mark D. Tooley is the President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy

Christian Relief Groups Launch 'National Refugee Sunday'

Christian relief and development groups World Vision and World Relief are promoting a call for U.S. churches to be more involved in supporting and resettling refugees.

World Relief CEO Stephan Bauman and World Vision U.S. CEO Rich Stearns announced "National Refugee Sunday" in a November conference call for church leaders hosted by Q Ideas founder Gabe Lyons. Participating congregations screened a short video on December 13 that the groups provided, along with holding a special collection and praying specifically for those seeking refuge from conflict zones.

The two officials also pushed back at recent concerns about security and refugee resettlement in the aftermath of Paris attacks that left 130 dead and more than twice as many injured. One of the attackers had a forged Syrian passport and traveled to France through Greece along with refugees.



World Vision USA CEO Richard Stearns
(Photo: WeWelcomeRefugees.com screen capture)

"We're taking the victims and victimizing them in this situation," assessed Bauman. "It is important that we move from fear to facts."

"Why are the governors voting this way?" the World Relief CEO asked about 31 governors who moved to restrict the resettlement of Syrian refugees in their states. "They are getting calls. If we get

ahold of the facts, ask what Jesus would do, ask 'how do we act in love,' and call our political leaders, we can turn this around."

"I think we need to shift the conversation to the victims and ask who we want to be," Bauman added. "Jesus was a refugee."

Bauman responded to concerns about security in the refugee resettlement process, asserting that refugees have "the most stringently vetted entry into the United States."

Stearns agreed, adding that risk from the existing visa waiver program was "much greater than taking heavily vetted refugees." The World Vision officials noted that no one was seriously proposing closing borders to French and Belgian citizens "but that is who the majority of Paris attackers were."

Stearns emphasized that the vast majority of refugees were "in the region" and that aid efforts would first need to serve those in temporary camps, with only a small percentage ultimately seeking resettlement overseas.

Of Syria's 23 million people, Stearns reported 12 million are displaced and fleeing from homes. Of those, 7-8 million fled within Syria and four million have fled the country. The largest number of refugees has gone to Turkey, with another large group in Lebanon, which has 1.2 million refugees, constituting 1 in 4 persons in that country.

"Ninety-five percent plus are still in the region," Stearns reported. "The real humanitarian suffering right now is centered in the region, it's where we need to help people now who are in really desperate straits."

"If you are against refugees being settled in America, you can have that political conversation, but support the refugees where they are at," Lyons concluded. "If you are supportive of refugee resettlement, great, call your political leaders." ✚

Bishop Sentenced Following DWI Conviction

A former Episcopal Church Bishop has been sentenced to seven years in prison for killing a cyclist while intoxicated and failing to immediately return to the scene of the traffic accident.

Heather Cook, who was effectively defrocked this past spring by Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, had been serving as Bishop Suffragan of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland when the accident occurred. As the second-highest serving official in the diocese, Cook's previous drunk driving arrest placed the Episcopal Church's vetting procedures under scrutiny.

On October 27 a Baltimore judge sentenced Cook to 20 years imprisonment, but suspended 13 years of her sentence. Cook will serve five years imprisonment for manslaughter followed by a two year sentence for leaving the scene of the accident. She was sentenced to a further five years of probation upon completion of her term. Prosecutors had asked for 10 years imprisonment.

Anglican Ink reports that at the sentencing hearing Cook apologized to the victim's family, expressing contrition for her actions. The judge told Cook that the seven-year sentence would not be her final judgment. That would come when she would stand before her Maker.

Cook's arrest prompted the national Episcopal Church to review its policies on alcohol, culminating in a series of recommendations set forth by the denomination's governing General Convention in June to address alcohol and substance abuse and the use and promotion of alcohol in church-related events. ✚





Transgender Day of Remembrance Service at Wesley Theological Seminary's Oxnam Chapel (Photo: Jeff Walton / IRD)

Wesley Seminary Students Commemorate 'Transgender Day of Remembrance'

Students at United Methodist-affiliated Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, gathered recently for a special service to commemorate the lives of persons who identify as transgender.

The "Transgender Day of Remembrance" service held November 19 at Wesley's Oxnam Chapel was sponsored by Of Sacred Worth, a student organization established to promote understanding of persons in the church identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ).

"The Transgender Day of Remembrance is more than just a memorial. It raises public awareness of hatred and violence against those in our transgender community, which often the media

suppresses," a speaker introduced. "It offers us all an opportunity to stand together and say 'no more.'"

During the time of communion, the approximately 40 participants were invited to light a candle "as a visible expression of prayer and memorial for those who have died."

"Today, we remember our siblings lost at the hands of hatred, evil, and violence because of their gender identity and expression," read a student prayer leader.

The Scripture reading for the service came from Isaiah Chapter 56, which tells of God's promises to faithful eunuchs, which LGBTQ activists conflate with persons who identify as transgender.

"God of transformations, set us free

to change and grow," read the prayer leader. "We rejoice in the lives of our transgender siblings: different, strong, dynamic, and loved."

During the communion liturgy, Wesley Professor and Episcopal Priest Sathianathan Clarke proclaimed: "It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, O Father and Mother, creator of all things old, new, and in transition."

Clarke invited the congregation into a time of mourning the deaths of "those who wish to pursue the calling of sexuality that God has called them to" and to repent of "a refusal to accept difference, knowing that in the end, all difference is honored by God." ✚

Few Christians among Syrian Refugees Admitted to U.S.

Christians and other religious minorities in Syria have been targeted for death, sexual slavery, displacement, cultural eradication, and forced conversion by the jihadist group ISIS.

Many of these persecuted Christians hope to escape to the United States. They have been largely excluded, with the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration admitting to officials at The Barnabas Fund, a Christian relief agency, "There is no way that Christians will be supported because of their religious affiliation."

According to data from the State Department's Refugee Processing Center for Fiscal Year 2015, resettled Syrian refugees were 97 percent Muslim. The Hudson Institute's Nina Shea, in a November 2 article in *National Review*, showed that in the past five years 53 out of 2003 Syrian refugees accepted by the United States have been Christians (about 2.5 percent of the total). But about 10 percent of Syrians are Christians.

"The U.S. government's response has been woefully inadequate—neither helping these minorities defend themselves and stay, nor providing them asylum to leave," explained IRD Religious Liberty Program Director Faith J. H. McDonnell.

"Christians cannot go to U.N.-run refugee camps because there they face the same persecution and terror from which they fled. If they are not in the refugee camps they are not included in the application process for asylum."

The State Department is aware of this, McDonnell charges, but continues to allow the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to select refugees for asylum with no regard to the endangered religious minorities.

"The blame is not just with the United Nations and the administration. U.S. organizations who resettle refugees are also to blame," McDonnell asserts. "This includes Christian groups that resist any focus on Christian victims of ISIS, and oppose actions by Congress to welcome not just economic migrants but also Christians and other religious minorities victimized by ISIS."

Other religious minorities—such as Jews, Yazidis, Mandaeans, Shia Shabaks, and Turkmen—are also being targeted, and are also largely left out of refugee resettlement. Shea notes that only one Yazidi was resettled in the U.S. in the past five years of Syria's civil war, even though thousands of Yazidi girls as young as 9 are taken as sex slaves by ISIS fighters. ✚

Few Signs of Reform following Christian Support for Iran Nuclear Deal

The Economist reports that Westerners hoping the recent Iran nuclear deal might produce positive lasting changes in the Middle East "have been humbled in recent weeks." That's because hard-line Iranian officials have "undermined" attempts by President Hassan Rouhani to reform his country and end its international estrangement.

In its November 14 issue, the magazine reported that Iran's Revolutionary Guard has continued intervening in the country's economy and arrested a prominent Iranian-American businessman, countering Rouhani's attempts at economic liberalization. In addition, the ongoing imprisonment of five journalists in Tehran has complicated a prisoner swap with the United States.

After Western powers reached a deal with Iran in July, IRD President Mark Tooley warned that pacifist Christians who advocated for the agreement should expect some unwelcome surprises. Continued toleration of the Iranian theocracy, Tooley wrote, would only result in "further empowerment for Iran's tyrannical mullahs."

"Serious Christians can't just cry peace, peace, peace," Tooley counseled. "We've a sacred duty to think through unintended consequences and advocate policies that seek approximate justice and security, which requires diplomacy and capacity for effective force."

Mark Melton—Deputy Editor of IRD's new foreign policy journal *Providence*—noted concerns that Israel could "face increased insecurity" because of the deal. Among other looming threats was the possibility that without sanctions in place, Iran would "have more spare cash to fund Israel's enemies, especially Hezbollah."

Christian groups including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Council of Churches, Sojourners, and Friends Committee on National Legislation (a Quaker lobbying group) all praised the nuclear deal. ✚

Syrian refugees wait to cross the Greece-Macedonia border at Gevgelija on August 24 (Photo: Karl Gruber / Wikimedia Commons)



'Drag Jesus' Church: God Is a Diva

by Jeffrey Walton

A United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation in Massachusetts is generating both wanted and unwanted attention after it promoted an annual "Drag Gospel Festival" with a 12th century icon of Jesus Christ "digitally enhanced" with makeup and earrings.

First Church Somerville UCC in Somerville, MA, touts the festival as its third highest-attended Sunday each year, after Christmas and Easter services. The event features a talent show, Gospel worship, drag show, and brunch all raising money for a group assisting those who seek political asylum in the U.S. based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"This year's poster for the Festival ruffled some feathers," acknowledged Lead Pastor Molly Baskette.

Baskette has praised the event as "a grand occasion" but fretted about the safety of this year's event after a young man interrupted the Sunday worship service and "began to condemn us with ancient words from the Hebrew Scriptures."

"We all froze," Baskette wrote, citing her fear of the recent shooting deaths at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. "We felt the happy liberal Massachusetts bubble we thought we were in suddenly burst, showering us with fear

that this would end tragically."

The man departed the service without further incident after speaking with the lipstick-wearing male associate pastor.

First Church embraces a "theologically ultra-progressive" identity, participating each June in Boston's LGBT Pride Parade complete with a marching band and costumes. The congregation describes itself as "about 40% LGBTQ" and "mostly, but we're working on it, Anglo."

"Are these church people weirdos, nerds, hypocrites and heretics?" the congregation's web site asks, answering its own question with "Short answer: yup!"

First Church has hosted its Drag Gospel Festival since 2011, when the congregation's "Drag-Queen-in-Residence" Serenity Jones launched it as "a fun romp and a testimony of our solidarity with the queer community."

"There are kids running around in feather boas, straight men in skirts, people who never thought they'd be in a church basement hollering Hallelujahs!" the church's web site proclaims. "It is a guaranteed good time."



"God is GOOD all the time! That means God is a DIVA....and girl.... Jesus is FIERCE!" the congregation states on its web site. "For one weekend in October, First Church Somerville becomes FIERCE

Church Somerville for two joyful days of Spirit in worship and praise, using our GOD-GIVEN musical and artistic talent, creativity and FASHION WITHOUT BORDERS, welcoming all God's children to her FIERCE DIVA queen-dom."

First Church Somerville is part of the United Church of Christ, an oldline Protestant denomination formed from the 1957 merger of Congregationalist and Reformed churches. The denomination traces its roots back to Puritan colonists and counts 943,521 members as of 2014, a decline of more than half since 1962. ✚



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager and Anglican Program Director at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

An Evangelical Woman's Liberation from the Pill

Continued from page 14

What Evangelical wants to adopt something that perpetuates the objectification or sex trafficking of women? Not this one.

Spiritual

By supporting the Pill, Evangelical women and men are buying the lie that children are a nuisance, something to be avoided, and that a woman's value is based on her job title, paycheck, and body image and the Pill can help her achieve all this. But the Pill directly conflicts with God's very first commandment given to man: "Be

fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28).

Here's what Evangelicals have missed: a strongly pushed, top-down effort among Evangelical church leaders to tell all pastors that they have an absolute moral duty to inform all couples to whom they give pre-marital counseling that they have a moral obligation to do their research, avoid abortifacient birth control methods, and seriously consider Natural Family Planning (NFP) or Fertility Awareness Monitoring. But I'd bet that at least 90 percent of pre-marital

counseling by Evangelical pastors really drops that ball by never mentioning NFP as an option.

NFP is the ground on which we can truly build an Evangelical-Catholic partnership. If more married couples understood the benefits of NFP, they might reconsider their unqualified acceptance of the Pill.

I'm not alone. Some younger Evangelicals are realizing key problems with contraception that we overlooked in the past. What I hope you, my dear Catholic neighbors, realize is that now is not the time to dismiss your Evangelical brothers and sisters as sold-out supporters of the Pill. We are learning, and have more to learn, and it is you who can help teach us. ✚

Is Theology or Demography Killing the PC(USA)?

by Jeff Gissing

The audience takes part in an opening prayer at the 2014 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Detroit. The top legislative body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) voted by large margins to recognize same-sex marriage in the denomination's constitution as a Christian option. (Photo: David Guralnick/The Detroit News).

According to the Religion News Service, Global South Presbyterian denominations continue to distance themselves from the Presbyterian Church (USA) in response to its General Assembly permitting the ordination of practicing homosexuals (2011) and redefining Christian marriage to allow, but not mandate, same-sex weddings (2014). The Presbyterian Churches of Brazil and Peru join the Presbyterian Church of Mexico who, in 2011, ceased its mission partnership with the PC(USA).

Representatives of the PC(USA)—including the denomination's highest elected official, Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons—contend that the disagreement is simply about the extent to which the Christian church should endorse LGBT people in their sexual identity: “Some think they should be loved and changed, and some think they should be loved and accepted.”

The churches of the Global South don't quite see it that way. In their letter announcing the break, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil stated that the PC(USA)'s position goes, “against the principle of the authority of Scripture over the life and faith of the Church.”

As a result, partnerships in Brazil—such as ones that provide continuing education for Brazilian pastors and missionaries and plants new churches—will cease in 2016. However, the PC(USA) continues to maintain links to the United Presbyterian Church of Brazil, a younger and smaller denomination that separated from the Presbyterian Church of Brazil in the 1970s. Work will also continue in Peru, though through other Presbyterian denominations in that country.

These rifts are tragic given that American Presbyterianism has a long history of significant global mission work—including starting virtually all of the denominations that have now distanced themselves from the PC(USA). The founding fathers of these indigenous Presbyterian Churches now find themselves being chided by their spiritual offspring for abandoning the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

While the PC(USA) is the legal successor to prior Presbyterian denominations, dating to the founding of the United States, it is not heir to the same theological vision. It has squandered the inheritance it received, leading to a significantly diminished witness at home and abroad.

At home, the denomination reports that 50 American congregations have departed since the redefinition of marriage in June 2014, and 209 congregations total in 2013–2014 alone. The last time the denomination had a net increase in membership—one unrelated to a denominational merger—was 1965.

Explanations vary as to the reason. Parsons claims that approximately one-third of the recent decline can be attributed to congregations departing to more conservative or evangelical denominations like the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO).

The remaining two-thirds are due to “...aging, the lower birthrate, people moving to where churches aren't.” There is no doubt that both of these causes— theological conflict and demographic shifts—have precipitated the numerical decline of the PC(USA). These same trends threaten the denomination's very existence.

Theologically, the PC(USA) made the calamitous choice of choosing to abandon consistent doctrinal standards of even the most elemental type in favor of an ad hoc, case-by-case approach, in which no belief

is out-of-bounds as long as a majority votes for it. In a denomination that has come to value niceness as the zenith of all Christian virtues, simply appealing to one's private, subjective interpretations or experience is generally sufficient.

The PC(USA) is a denomination full of well-educated people, but at times it evinces a peculiarly petulant stupidity. Take, for example, a recent conversation in which it was claimed that should Presbyterian pastors be required to believe and follow the denomination's confessions they would immediately be fired since they do not observe the Lord's Day in the fashion envisioned by the Westminster Confession of Faith.

The assumption is, of course, that no one should be deposed from ministry because of this. This is based on the now almost universal presupposition that whatever I/we/culture do is right simply because I/we/culture do it.

Now, I have no desire to depose a person from the pastorate simply for working on a Sunday—I do desire, however, that Christians (especially pastors) observe a Sabbath in accordance with God's creational ordinance and for their own enjoyment.

This argument—that we cannot require confessional affirmation—assumes that all things to which the confessions speak are of equal importance. But the choice does not have to be between total subscription to the confessions and total freedom to believe as one wishes.

A third way exists—a way, incidentally, pursued by the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)—that allows for a diversity of beliefs in some areas and for consistency of beliefs in others. Where the PC(USA) has made “mere Christianity” optional, ECO has made it central. ECO has chosen rightly where the PC(USA) chose wrongly: to preserve a core theological identity that affirms mere Christianity while avoiding doctrinal relativism or doctrinal obscurantism. An organization will decline when the beliefs and narratives that once supported it become too diverse to hold it together: This is where the PC(USA) is today.

The PC(USA) is also, quite literally, becoming extinct. Over the last 40 years, the makeup of our nation has changed considerably, yet the PC(USA) remains remarkably homogenous—even the gays and lesbians qualify for AARP.

That larger demographic shifts are all but absent in the profile of the PC(USA) suggests that it has been unable to effectively carry out the very essence of its stated mission—bearing witness to the kingdom of God here and now—which includes people of diverse ages and ethnicities embracing the gospel. A denominational report indicates that almost 50 percent of church members are not employed. Only 7 percent of members report, on the other hand, being “full-time homemakers.” Could it be that almost half of our church members are retired?

So who's right—the Global South or the West? Is this a theological crisis or a demographic one? The answer is, both. A theological vision that is based on the absence of conflict rather than upon the presence of truth isn't compelling to a culture that no longer values civil religion of the sort that typifies PC(USA). ❖



Jeff Gissing serves as Pastor for Discipleship at First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

From the President: African United Methodist Bishops Speak

Continued from page 3

denomination to Biblical teachings, the unity of the church, global terrorism (remembering the millions of refugees) and the cessation of wars around the globe.”

They also asked that the Council of Bishops “commit to demonstrating their shepherding responsibility (1 Peter 5:2-4) by acting consistently with the Holy Bible for to do otherwise would require that one must recuse himself or herself from the divine call to be Shepherd of all of God's people.”

There is almost no precedent in the modern history of United Methodism for a group of bishops to speak out forcefully in defense of traditional Christian doctrine. And there's no precedent for the African bishops together speaking publicly. This statement represents an important turning point for our church.

The Africans increasingly realize they represent the emerging majority of our church, an awareness that requires accepting increasing responsibility. Membership

statistics indicate the U.S. church lost another 100,000 members or so in 2014, now standing at 7.2 million, having lost nearly 4 million members in 45 years. Meanwhile United Methodism in Africa stands at nearly 5 million and grows 200,000 annually, soon to become a majority, perhaps in 8 years or less.

American Methodism is exhausted and depleted. There are pockets of vitality but they prosper despite—not because of—the denomination, whose governing elites have presided over a half century of decline, institutional inertia, and theological discordance.

But the Lord is preserving and reviving global United Methodism through Africa, without which our denomination would have long ago suffered the schism and accelerated decline of nearly all other U.S. Mainline Protestant denominations after they abandoned Christian teaching about marriage. While the American

Mainline dies, United Methodism is a growing, soon-to-be 13 million member denomination.

The further globalization and Africanization of United Methodism will discomfit many U.S. church members. Liberals of course are exasperated that they no longer can hope to sexually liberalize official church teaching, despite their 40 year battle. Moderate institutionalists will lose power and authority over the church bureaucracy. And many conservatives will not appreciate that the new standard bearers of orthodoxy are in Africa and are far more numerous than United Methodist Evangelicals in America.

There will be many, many growing pains for United Methodism. An old identity that was failing but familiar is dying, and the new identity is foreign and untried. But this transformation is the salvation of our church, so let's thank God for it. ❖

THIS DAY WE FIGHT: *Why the IRD Religious Liberty Program Is Focusing on Spiritual Warfare*

By Faith J.H. McDonnell

The name of IRD Religious Liberty Program's project to encourage spiritual warfare (prayer and fasting) for persecuted Christians and against the evil of the Islamic supremacism that is threatening us comes from the film *The Return of the King*, the third film in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, based on J.R.R. Tolkien's novels.

In *The Return of the King*, King Aragorn exhorts his warriors:

*My brothers! I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me! A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship. But it is not this day. An hour of wolves and shattered shields when the age of Men comes crashing down! But it is not this day! **This day we fight!** By all that you hold dear on this good Earth, I bid you stand! Men of the West!*

Pastor and author Francis Frangipane quotes this declaration in *This Day We Fight! Breaking the Bondage of a Passive Spirit* (Chosen Books, 2005). Dealing directly with the current global crisis in the context of spiritual warfare and the need to resist passivity and take action, Frangipane addresses terrorism as "physical and spiritual war." In chapter four, "The War Mode," he writes:

*We are at a war on a global scale, and **physical war always calls Christians to spiritual war** [emphasis mine]. This aggressive stance is governed by love for people, but it is fearless and uncompromising against the powers of darkness... For many years Islamic terrorists have been bullying nations throughout the Middle East and beyond. Even the U.S. was intimidated and overly cautious, hesitant about retaliating against the repeated attacks Islamists made against our*

nation... For years we accepted their tactics and let appeasement guide our actions. Our prayer was hardly more than a whimper: "Please make them leave us alone."

Other whimpered prayers and wishes in our culture today include the "Please

have perpetrated great evil around the world have been offered "power-sharing" arrangements rather than receiving justice. The second way evil is excused is in **moral relativism**, downright denial that evil even exists. People have been spiritually deceived into believing that they are being "nicer" and "more tolerant" when they do not call evil "evil."

In conclusion, Frangipane warns:

We must not confuse false peace, which is the result of compromise born of fear, with real peace, which comes from our resolve to win our war against evil... As long as we are at war, [or as long as there is a war being waged against our Christian brothers and sisters and other vulnerable populations] our role as Christians is to stand up and pray for our leaders, support our troops, and intercede for mercy to fall upon the Muslim people. We must engage in the intercessions of Christ. And we must follow through fearlessly in spiritual warfare, praying aggressively against terrorism and the demons that drive terrorists to fulfill evil.

In order to engage in spiritual warfare, we need to be prepared for battle. Psalm 144 says that is the LORD himself who "trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle." Together we must let God train us, and we must engage in spiritual battle for the sake of suffering members of the Body of Christ. Will you join us? ✚

(Quotations from *This Day We Fight: Breaking the Bondage of a Passive Spirit*, Francis Frangipane, 2005, Chosen Books, Grand Rapids.)

Frangipane addresses terrorism as "physical and spiritual war."

make us nicer people, so they will like us," mode of response to Islamic *jihad* by those who see America as the guilty party. They believe we are getting just what we deserve.

As Frangipane puts it, "We blamed their fury on poverty, ignorance, or the exploitation of Muslims by the West." Some U.S. government officials are in such deep denial of reality that they have made excuses for terrorist groups such as Nigeria's Boko Haram. Frangipane points out that "God's command to governments" is "different from his word to disciples." The government's role "is to administer justice and to exercise punishment." We should pray that the government functions in the way that God has created it to function.

In spiritual warfare it is important to counter false narratives. Individuals, churches, or governments excuse evil in two ways, allowing "the wicked" freedom "to fulfill evil without consequence." One is through seeing perpetrators of evil and their victims as **morally equivalent**. In recent history, many who



Faith J. H. McDonnell is the Director of Religious Liberty Programs at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.



Episcopalians Continue Bleeding Members, Attendance at Alarming Rate

by Jeff Walton

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori departed office this autumn after a tumultuous nine years in office that saw significant conflict and numerical decline in the oldline church.

Statistics released by the denomination's Office of Research indicate that Jefferts Schori has bequeathed her successor, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry (shown in the above photo), with decline that is escalating rather than tapering off.

The church's domestic U.S. membership dropped 2.7 percent from a reported 1,866,758 members in 2013 to 1,817,004 in 2014, a loss of 49,794 persons. Attendance took an even steeper hit, with the average number of Sunday worshipers dropping from 623,691 in 2013 to 600,411 in 2014, a decline of 23,280 persons in the pews, down 3.7 percent.

The numbers are significantly worse than 2013, when the church reported a 1.4 percent decline in membership and 2.6 percent decline in average Sunday attendance. One contributing factor is figures from the Episcopal Church in South Carolina (TECSC), the local Episcopal Church jurisdiction formed after the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina departed the denomination in 2012. Updated figures from TECSC show that the body has 6,387 active baptized members and an average Sunday attendance of 2,812 persons. This is down 77 percent from the 28,195 members and 12,005 attendance average previously reported. The Diocese of South Carolina is one of five dioceses to depart the denomination since Jefferts Schori's election, along with hundreds of individual congregations. The Diocese of

South Carolina has accepted an offer of oversight from the worldwide Anglican Communion's Global South and now functions independently from the U.S.-based Episcopal Church.

Other measures of Episcopal Church vitality also saw decline: the denomination reported the shuttering of 69 parishes and missions, from 6,622 in 2013 to 6,553 in 2014. Children's baptisms declined 4.8 percent from 25,822 to 24,594. Adult baptisms declined during the same time frame from 3,675 to 3,530, a decline of nearly 4 percent.

The number of marriages performed was a rare bright spot, rising from 9,933 in 2013 to 10,337 couples tying the knot in Episcopal Church ceremonies in 2014. (The church does not report opposite-sex and same-sex marriages separately in its annual table of statistics.) Burials also nudged up slightly, from 28,960 in 2013 to 29,011 in 2014.

The Episcopal Church has established a continued pattern of steady decline since the early 2000s, about the time Gene Robinson of New Hampshire was consecrated as the church's first openly partnered gay bishop. The unbroken downward trend is relatively recent: the church lost only 18,000 members during a plateau in the 1990s. Overall, the church has declined from a high of 3.6 million members in the mid-1960s to 1.8 million today, even as the U.S. population has more than doubled. The church has lost more than a quarter of its attendance since 2003.

In her opening sermon at the Episcopal Church's triennial General Convention meeting this summer in Salt Lake City, Utah, outgoing Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori equated the denomination's condition to Jesus' healing of the bleeding woman and Jairus's daughter in Mark chapter 5:

We have lived for too long like that shamed and bleeding woman. She's

had to endure finger-waggers blaming her for her own illness. Anger and anxiety over membership loss in this church has frequently prompted finger-waggers to use that image of unstoppable hemorrhage—and it's been going on for almost exactly 12 years, since we began to tell the truth about who we were and are and are meant to be. We have consulted plenty of ecclesiastical doctors, without much relief—until we began to find the temerity to reach out and touch Jesus' robe. It's the same Temple-filling hem we heard about on Friday. The bleeding began to be staunched when we found the courage to reach out and touch the face of God, to see God at work in new contexts, and to have the confidence to claim our experience of the divine presence.

At the conclusion of her sermon, Jefferts Schori advised gathered church officials to "Pay no attention to the finger-wagging":

Turn around and look for the hem of Jesus' robe. Go searching in new territory. Reach out and touch what is clothing the image of God. Give your heart to that search and you will not only find healing but become healing. Share what you find and you will discover the abundant life for which all God's children have been created. And indeed, the Lord will turn weeping into dancing. *Talitha, cum.* Get up, girl—and boy, and woman and man—get up and dance! ✠



Jeffrey H. Walton is the Communications Manager and Anglican Program Director at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

The Case against United Methodist Divestment from 'Companies Profiting from the Israeli Occupation'

by John Lomperis

An abbreviated version of the following testimony was delivered in November by UMAction Director John Lomperis to the board of directors of the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church. This denominational agency, which manages billions of dollars of assets and investments on behalf of the church, has been pressed by activists for the Palestinian cause to divest from companies described as "profiting from the Israeli occupation." These activists have already succeeded in convincing some United Methodist annual conferences (regions) to do so.

Activists have lobbied United Methodist leaders to single out companies for divestment that conduct business with Israel, particularly companies characterized as "profiting from the Israeli occupation."

I respectfully express my hope that you will consider reasons why such agendas are morally irresponsible, factually misleading, unrepresentative of United Methodists, and harmful to the church that we love.

I am driven by concern that my church's social witness be thoughtful, well-informed, and devoted to the highest standards of social justice.

The Israel-tied companies United Methodist leaders are asked to boycott—Motorola, Caterpillar, SodaStream, etc.—have all been targeted by the so-called "BDS movement." The acronym refers to a broad and radical campaign of *comprehensive* boycotts, divestment, and sanctions

against Israel, from boycotting *any* Israeli company to getting musicians to refuse to perform for Israeli audiences to even shunning and marginalizing Israeli academics who have been strongly critical of Israeli government policies. BDS is a movement advocating collective punishment that treats *all* Israelis as inherently guilty.

I have actively listened to divestment advocates within our church, including a conference hosted by Ginghamburg UMC last year, in which speakers pushed the BDS cause and admitted that seemingly narrow campaigns targeting specific companies like Caterpillar were integrated parts of the wider BDS effort. In evaluating the true agenda of proposed United Methodist divestment from companies like Caterpillar over their business in Israel, we should note that *all* the groups within the UMC pushing this—UM Kairos Response, the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), United Methodist Women (UMW), the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS), and the Holy Land Task Force—are members of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, which is a strong supporter of the BDS movement. This group's website, *in its own words*, explains that the anti-Caterpillar campaign "is part and parcel of this international BDS campaign," that it is part of an effort "to isolate Israel economically, socially, and culturally," and that "it will be near to impossible to hurt Caterpillar economically, but that's not the point. This Campaign aims to be a public relations campaign..."

UMAction Director John Lomperis testifies about anti-Israel divestment before The United Methodist Church's pension board in Chicago on November 12 (Photo: M. Colette Nies / UMC General Board of Pension and Health Benefits)

A key BDS leader, Omar Barghouti, admits that some of these specific companies are actually *not* the ones he thinks are the most complicit in Israeli wrongdoing, but are being targeted for divestment due to nakedly political calculations that these were more winnable fights to pick.

So the *primary* impact of giving into these calls for divestment would be less about these targeted companies than about attaching the name of our denomination to a public relations victory for the BDS movement.

The BDS narrative portrays Israel as a Western colonial power oppressively occupying the native land of the Palestinians, building separation fences for spite, and that Hamas rocket attacks are merely a symptom of the root cause of Israeli wrongdoing. The ultimate goal of divestment is articulated clearly: "if Israel would just stop it, then we would have peace!"

I commend those staff who have stood firm against angry pressure from divestment activists. But not only is divestment the wrong *solution*—the BDS movement misrepresents the basic *problem*.

The BDS movement characterizes Jewish Israelis with inflammatory words like "colonial" and "occupation." But not only is this area the historic homeland of the Jewish people, but there has been a continuous Jewish presence there since biblical times. Sometimes they are more careful in narrowly complaining about the lands where Palestinians live, like the West Bank, that Israel has controlled since 1967 (with no mention of the lands Israel has given up since then). But this came about from a war between Israel and several neighboring nations who had recently entered into an ominous military alliance, taken threatening actions towards Israel, and in some cases had openly spoken of wanting to annihilate Israel. Since 1967, Israelis have been no more without sin than any of the rest of us. But they have reached out their hands towards Palestinian leaders in search of a partner for peace, and been left hanging. There remains a lot of support among Israelis for letting

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have their own independent nation, *if only* there could be some basic guarantees that such a new neighbor would not seek to attack or destroy Israel. And yet the charter of Hamas, a governing partner in the Palestinian territories, is openly committed to Israel's destruction.

Those pushing divestment and BDS have said that we need to pursue divestment because the Israelis are driven by greed, and so if we hit their pocketbooks, that will make them stop the occupation.

Not every criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic. But it would be morally irresponsible to ignore the anti-Semitism that taints much of the BDS movement, especially when it blatantly tells us to ignore the facts and just assume that this is the Jews being greedy again. The BDS movement is based on singling out the world's lone Jewish state for de-legitimization, double-standards, and knee-jerk opposition to protections of its people's lives. And it should give us pause when we see hatemongers like white supremacist David Duke endorsing the push for church divestment from the companies we are being asked to disassociate from.

What else might be motivating animosity toward this fragile nation, formally founded a few short years after the Holocaust, regularly facing fanatically genocidal hatred and terrorism, and occupying such a tiny strip of land surrounded by so many nations that refuse to formally recognize its right to exist, and with several of these nations' leaders having openly called for Israel's destruction?

Since the specific targeted companies are not the main issue for activists pushing divestment, I don't want to spend much time on them. But too often our denominational discourse has been limited to "given that we all agree that Israel and these companies are doing horrible things, is divestment the best tool to get them to change?" But when is it ever just for anyone, let alone a Christian church, to simply accept a severe accusation against someone else without hearing their side of the story?

Some have pushed our church to boycott SodaStream because of a factory in a West Bank Jewish settlement that is allegedly not good for Palestinian and Bedouin workers. But this ignores how the West Bank factory was providing appreciated employment for hundreds of Palestinians in

areas where unemployment estimates range from 22 to 30 percent, and that the plant is in a Bedouin city whose mayor has strongly encouraged and welcomed SodaStream as "a symbol of hope and cooperation."

Pro-BDS groups say we should divest from Caterpillar because its products are involved in building a "separation barrier." But this mostly wire and chain-link security fence was built to stop the wave of Palestinian suicide bombings targeting Israeli civilians, and has been credited with stopping a lot of attacks. Israeli deaths from terrorism have dramatically declined as more of the security fence has been built.

Support for Israel is the mainstream position of *both* major U.S. political parties.

For our church to echo rhetoric that the fence is evil and must be torn down with no alternative, as a GBCS resolution does, would convey the message that the lives this fence has saved are inconsequential.

This divestment push is riddled with moral inconsistencies. Pro-divestment groups profess concern for Palestinian Christians, but this cynically treats these brothers and sisters as rhetorical props when they are silent about these same people's mistreatment by Palestinian Muslims. While encouraging sanctions and divestment against Israel, the GBCS is submitting another General Conference resolution calling for *removing* sanctions and promoting economic *investment* in North Korea while being silent about that dictatorship's brutal oppression of Christians.

In the U.S., our denomination is in a membership crisis and this is ominous for our financial future. My office hears regularly from people leaving our church in direct response to learning of agencies using our church's name to support political agendas they see as far-left and out of touch.

United Methodists pushing divestment garner attention, but they account for a tiny fraction of church members, most of whom do not favor this agenda.

Despite lobbying and receiving attention, the last General Conference rejected their agenda by a 2-1 vote. Church agencies continuing to push the wider BDS movement breach trust and hurt their credibility.

There's more. A Pew survey found that 46 percent of American United Methodists lean Republican while 42 percent lean Democratic. Support for Israel is the mainstream position of *both* major U.S. political parties. This year, legislatures in the left-leaning states of Illinois and New York adopted position statements broadly opposing the BDS movement. In the words of the New York resolution, "punitive economic measures targeting Israel undermine dialogue, economic cooperation, and political reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, which is the necessary foundation for a lasting peace in the Middle East."

Recent polls show that the majority of Americans sympathize more with Israel while, depending on how the question is worded, as few as two percent to no more than 16 percent sympathize more with Palestinians.

Of course, as Christians, we need to care about *all* people. But the pro-divestment groups have said, as one speaker put it at last year's pro-divestment conference, that we should not have "a neutral standpoint," but rather side with the Palestinians.

At a tense, divided time in the life of our denomination, do we want to worsen mistrust, give people another reason to not be United Methodists, and alienate all but a small portion of our North American mission field?

The push to divest from companies doing business with Israel is fundamentally unjust, factually misinformed, morally inconsistent, and out of touch with much of our grassroots membership and our North American mission field. I invite all who are concerned for our church's unity, vitality, and moral authority to work to defeat these agendas at all levels of our beloved church. ✚



John Lomperis directs the UMAction program at the Institute on Religion & Democracy.

An Evangelical Woman's Liberation from the Pill

by Chelsen Vicari

(Editor's note: The following is an abbreviated version of Chelsen Vicari's remarks on November 7, 2015, at the Springtime of Faith Foundation Summit in Rome, Italy.)

In 1971, a Southern Baptist Convention resolution encouraged congregants to “work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.”

Today, faithful Evangelicals humbly admit we got abortion wrong in the past. So, is it far-fetched to consider we are getting contraception wrong today?

Contraception is a touchy subject that many Evangelicals find extremely difficult to discuss. It is almost as if Protestants were sworn to secrecy when it came to discussions about chemical and hormonal contraception (a.k.a. “the Pill”).

In 2011, I began to question the secrecy. After a bit of research I was surprised to learn that until 1930, Catholics and Protestants shared the same concerns over contraception. Then during the 1930 Lambeth Conference, Anglican Communion bishops passed a resolution permitting married couples in grave danger to use contraception upon necessity. However, something seems to have gotten lost in translation because Protestants eventually swallowed a “hook, line, and sinker” acceptance of a contraception mindset—especially the Pill.

I humbly submit that it is time for a serious reexamination of contraception by Evangelicals.

Safety

Many Evangelical women just do not know that some methods of artificial contraception can be harmful. But we all share a concern about health safety. We know how important it is to eat right, exercise routinely, and prevent toxins from entering our bodies. So why do we insist on consuming chemical contraception?

In her article for *Ethika Politika*, author Chrissy Wing comically points out

that many of us obsess over our health, yet aren't concerned over chemical contraception's impact on our health. Wing writes:

It is possibly the most common paradox I have seen. Eat the meat of a cow that has consumed synthetic hormones? No! Take them yourself via a highly concentrated white pill? Yes, please, but I can only wash them down with organic juice. Chemical free.

It was during graduate school at Regent University that I first realized how many of my single Evangelical girlfriends were on the Pill. Over dinner, several of my friends spoke candidly of the Pill's harmful effects on their bodies. One friend casually said a brand made her constantly nauseated. Another shared how she felt depressed and experienced serious mood swings. But each young woman was determined to continue bouncing from brand to brand searching for “the right Pill for me.”

The medical and pharmaceutical communities aren't helping. They make light of chemical contraception's serious side effects and pressure young girls as young as 12-years-old to take birth control with lame excuses like clearing up acne.

In reality, the physical side effects of the Pill are enough to cause Evangelicals and anyone concern. They include:

- Breast, ovarian, liver, and skin cancer
- Increased risk of heart attack & diabetes
- Irregular menstruation complications
- Inflammation of the gums
- Strokes ▪ Epilepsy ▪ Asthma
- Pleurisy ▪ Arthritis ▪ Urticaria
- Ulcers ▪ Depression ▪ Nausea
- Skin rashes ▪ Breast tenderness
- Eczema ▪ Urinary tract infections
- Fatigue ▪ Migraine headaches

Women do exist who have medical conditions requiring them to take the Pill in order to survive. For example, my friend Lisa would hemorrhage to death if she did not take the Pill. However, Lisa will tell you her condition is extremely rare. She is the exception, not the rule.

Society

Have you heard of “Tinder”? Or how about the more obscure hook-up apps like “Bleep,” the forthcoming “Thrinder,” which is the “Tinder for threesomes,” and “Pure” which is described as the “Uber of dating apps.” Blame the Pill.

Anglican author C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “Contraceptives have made sexual indulgences far less costly within marriage and far safer outside it than ever before, and public opinion is less hostile to illicit unions and even to perversion than it has been since pagan times.”

The author of *Grand Illusions*, George Grant, wrote that early feminist heroine Margaret Sanger was not concerned with women's health. She founded Planned Parenthood in 1922 in order to regulate the reproduction of minorities, or what she called, “benign imbeciles who encourage the defective and diseased elements of humanity in their reckless and irresponsible swarming and spawning.”

Today the Pill still presents a harmful social agenda. Responsible for birthing the sexual revolution, chemical contraception altered society's moral standards and diminished women's value by men. Mary Eberstadt, author of *Adam and Eve After the Pill*, explained that the sexual revolution “destigmatized and demystified” birth control, making it easier for businessmen to objectify women's once-cherished sexuality.

Soon our photo-shopped bodies were plastered on the front pages of *Cosmopolitan* and *Hustler*, pornography became a \$10-billion-dollar industry, emergency contraception became a sex trafficker's best friend—and out the door went men's accountability.

Continued on page 7



Chelsen Vicari directs the Evangelical Action program at the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

Paris, ISIS, and American Responsibility

by Marc LiVecche

President Obama was right to acknowledge in his G20* speech that Paris is not the only great city whose streets have run wet with blood at the hands of ISIS. In the month prior to the attacks in Paris, ISIS operations killed the innocent in Turkey, Bangladesh, Lebanon, and downed a Russian passenger plane over Egypt. American and Western sorrow extends to victims of terror wherever they are. It is heartening that Obama has ordered closer collaboration with the French, aiding our ally with intelligence and support, and it is encouraging that such support has already resulted in French airstrikes against important ISIS targets including a recruiting center, ammo dump, training camp, and command center.

But despite these laudatory efforts, the simple fact that there was a command center, training camp, ammo dump, and recruiting center around for the French to bomb calls into question the President's continued claim that his goal is to "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS. He has been insisting this for more than a year, but if he were serious even the desultory air campaign he's commanded might have considered an ammo dump worth hitting.

While Obama stubbornly insisted that ISIS had indeed "been contained"—as proved by the fact that they now control less territory than they once did—he ought also to have admitted that whatever the value of achieving a relative stalemate on the ground, the ability of ISIS to export terror has apparently not been compromised. The spectacle of their ability to strike abroad added to the fact that even a stalemated "Caliphate" remains a "Caliphate," shows that ISIS retains its capacity to inspire recruits, operate training facilities for *jihadists* from around

the world, and to maintain a fighting force. Suddenly the notion that one might "degrade and destroy" terrorism through stalemate is proved imaginative to the point of being hallucinatory.

Moreover, because ISIS holds land under violent occupation, the refugee



President Barack Obama speaks at the two day G20 summit in Antalya, Turkey, on November 16, 2015. (Photo: Whitehouse.gov screen capture)

problem is tied to this land remaining under the control of ISIS. If the Paris attacks taught us anything, it is that the refugee crisis has become what many have predicted—a crisis for more than just the refugees. Obama has done his best to insist that screening and security measures can mitigate the dangers of large inflows of fighting-age men, but if such measures could not protect the French, we are fools to believe they can protect us. The moral horror of having to choose between compassion for our foreign neighbors and security for our local ones is probably not going to be a choice we can live with—morally or literally.

But this is the free world's fight, not just America's. Obama's insistence on finding local partners capable of bringing the fight to ISIS, such as the Kurds, seems

right in principle. Some commentators, Max Boot in particular, have pointed to our strategy in Afghanistan as a model. There, instead of a large conventional invasion we sent a proportionately small number of high-end Special Operators and CIA paramilitaries, backed by massive air power, to coordinate operations with the Northern Alliance.

In Iraq and Syria, Boot and like-minded thinkers see in the Sunni population another such potential partner. If we were able to mobilize and support the Sunni in an uprising against ISIS, it would give us a valuable local ally while depriving ISIS of one. This later point is crucial. Especially in light of the U.S. nuclear deal with Iran, the Sunni might believe they are being forced to choose between the tyranny of either ISIS or Iran. We can give them a third option.

What is becoming increasingly clear is that whether concerning the export of terror, the refugee crisis, or the dangers of the maintenance of the caliphate, the only foreseeable end to this crisis is to see the end of ISIS. This carries with it an obvious burden. Naturally, any such undertaking will require significant amounts of careful diplomacy to work out the political knots, not to mention the military commitments. If, however, it is right to eliminate ISIS, then someone is going to have to do it, regardless of the difficulties. The United States is an indispensable leader, whether we like it or not. This might mean doing and spending more than we want to, but if we have the power and the capacity we, by default, have the responsibility. ✚

This article originally appeared in The American Spectator.



Marc LiVecche is IRD's Scholar of Christian Ethics, War, & Peace. He serves as Managing Editor of Providence: A Journal of Christianity and U.S. Foreign Policy.

* "G20" refers to the Group of Twenty, an international forum for governments and central bank governors from 20 major economies.

IRD Diary

by Muriel Truax

I write to you as a young and very new participant in IRD's work.

Still a student, I am in my senior year at Patrick Henry College. My education in political theory and intellectual history has lent itself to an interest in observing and analyzing conversations between religion and politics in the public sphere. Faith and devotion to the Church have given me the desire to learn from an organization like IRD about the Church's current activities. Having the goal to pursue the study of political philosophy at the graduate level, while not separating myself from the world outside of academia, the opportunity to work for IRD has been rewarding. I looked for an organization that would teach me effective networking and blogging skills, help me connect to other organizations with relevant voices in the public conversation, and give me a foothold in that world.

I've learned from the examples of friends and past IRD staff Matthew Maule and Bart Gingerich. Both are committed to intellectual integrity and honest critique of political and religious institutions, without becoming bitter or cynical. Our hope does not come from this world, but from Christ who has entered the world to make it new.

My time as an IRD intern has been enjoyable and I have learned so much, from sharpening my writing skills to familiarizing myself with America's transgender clergy. I appreciate the opportunities to meet fascinating people in the world of DC think tanks and advocacy groups and learn from the

IRD staff who the players and agendas are in the world I am preparing to enter.

The value of IRD's work is its diligence to keep Christian voices in the public square accountable to the Gospel and orthodox teaching that has been passed down through the church, a mission defined as championing: "transparency,

Our hope does not come from this world, but from Christ who has entered the world to make it new.

renewal, and Christian orthodoxy." We are not trying to create something new, but to remind the public of the ideal role the Gospel and the Church are supposed to play in the public arena.

My adventures have included trekking through DC to cover events; blogging on issues such as climate control, reproduction, the Pope, African bishops, racial equality, John Wesley, and Oprah; and enjoying the friendship and conversation of the staff.

Most recently, I have been encouraged by witnessing the publication of *Providence Journal*. An effort to add Christian Protestant and Evangelical voices to issues of statecraft demonstrates the integrity of IRD and the Philos Project to put their words into action.

As an Episcopalian, it has been troubling to see the part my denomination has chosen to represent in the public square. I

am not pessimistic, however. My status as an Episcopalian gives me a greater interest in addressing and challenging the positions—often blasphemous and damaging to the souls of its members—that Episcopal Church officials have chosen.

Whether we acknowledge it or not, theologies of time shape human motives and actions. Although I don't subscribe to a particular eschatology, I believe that God keeps his promise of making all things new and will bless our belief in that. The current state of our world is dark and troubling, and the continuation or end of our institutions, our movements, and our nations is uncertain. We are, however, called to be faithful without worrying about the repercussions to ourselves. I think the proper attitude is that of the character Donnie Darko, who said in the eponymous 2001 film before he sacrificed himself to renew time and space, "I hope that when the world comes to an end, I can breathe a sigh of relief, because there will be so much to look forward to."

Merry Christmas! As you enter this season of remembrance, participate in the Church's purpose as a gift of compassion and renewal to the world. Show your neighbors the Love of Christ and maintain the purity and beauty of his Church. God bless all of you! ✝



Muriel Truax is an intern at the Institute on Religion and Democracy and a student at Patrick Henry College.



The Institute on Religion & Democracy

We are Christians working to reaffirm the church's biblical and historical teachings, strengthen and reform its role in public life, protect religious freedom, and renew democracy at home and abroad.

Support IRD by adding us to your will today!
www.theird.org/give