

Wheaton-to-Anglican Pipeline: Why Are Young People Turning Anglican?

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Bishop Darryl Fitzwater and his wife Becki greet the congregation after his consecration on Friday, October 4, 2024, at Church of the Ascension in Charles Town, WV. See "Unexpected Anglicanism in West Virginia" on page 9. (Photo courtesy of Missionary Diocese of All Saints)

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COVER: Historic Blanchard Hall on the campus of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Kansas, was constructed between 1853 and 1927. (Photo: Homes.com)

Thirty Years at IRD

This November saw my 30th anniversary at the Institute on Religion and Democracy! I was honored on October 17 by a party attended by colleagues and friends. It's been a wonderful and unexpected journey that is not yet over. My decades at IRD have seen dramatic changes in American religion.

This change was illustrated last week when I spoke to some Christian college students, a dozen young women and one young man. All but two of them were unfamiliar with the concept of “denominations,” which I explained to them. None really knew what “Mainline Protestants” were. I may as well have been discussing a forgotten species of dinosaur. They were all, to my knowledge, church going, but attend nondenominational churches. One young woman attends a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America, to which she felt some loyalty. Another young woman mentioned hers was Assemblies of God (Pentecostal Wesleyan), although she is moving towards Calvinism, illustrated by the book she held by a prominent Reformed seminary president.

I relished telling them about the old days of American religion and how we have arrived at our current moment. Denominations—conservative and liberal—are fading or already faded. Non-denominationalism is the only major growing American religion category. Non-denominationalism, if it were a denomination, would be America's largest Protestant religious body.

IRD spent much of its history focused on denominations. I was hired in 1994 by my presidential predecessor **Diane Knippers** to start and run a program for United Methodists. IRD had programs for Presbyterians and Episcopalians. We worked with renewal groups in the other Mainline Protestant denominations. There was hope of reforming the old Mainline Protestant denominations, even though they had already been in decline for 30 years, and even though their centers of authority were long captive to heterodox influences. The Mainline Protestant battles are now long over. Those denominations have all divided and shrunk drastically. Many will not exist in 10 years. Some conservative denominations will not exist in 10 years. All of American religion is in a churn. If I'm addressing college students in 10 years, there will be much more to review.

Today I was also sharing some of these changes with IRD's last remaining founder, **David Jessup**. Here's an excerpt from *Time* magazine in 1983:

The United Methodist Church, which has lost 1.4 million members since 1968, would normally welcome most converts. But its leaders must rue the day in 1979 when David Jessup, who had become a religious dropout in college, decided to join the Marvin Memorial Church of Silver Spring, Md. Jessup, 42, who works with the AFL-CIO'S Committee on Political Education, began to have questions about organizations that received Methodist funds. The end result of his curiosity is the Institute on Religion and Democracy, which, though small, can justly claim credit for the present furor over Protestant politics.



IRD President Mark Tooley at his 30th anniversary celebration with IRD on October 17, 2024, pictured alongside Pennsylvania Methodist minister Christopher Fisher. (Photo: Karen Royer)

David's curiosity in United Methodist spending was provoked when his children returned from Sunday school raising money for what seemed to him to be suspicious causes. As *Time* reported:

Founder Jessup joined the early Berkeley free-speech movement, and later the Peace Corps as well as black-voter-registration and labor-organizing campaigns. But even in his radical student days he was strongly anti Communist. In 1980 he and his wife, in what became known as the Jessup Report,

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Mark Tooley



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

Virginia Anglican Wrongly Fired Over Pronouns Vindicated in Settlement

There is good news to report on the protection of religious liberty and free speech claims in Virginia.

In 2018, teacher **Peter Vlaming** was fired from his job for declining, as a matter of personal policy, to use pronouns for a student who identifies as transgender. Vlaming has successfully resolved his case in a settlement announced September 30.

In exchange for ending his lawsuit against the West Point, Virginia, school board, Vlaming will receive \$575,000 in damages and legal fees and a change of school district policies, according to Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), the Christian legal organization representing Vlaming after he was wrongly fired for declining to use inaccurate pronouns.

His termination will be removed from his record.

“No government should force its employees (or anyone else) to voice their allegiance to an ideology that violates their deepest beliefs,” ADF stated in a tweet following the negotiated settlement.

The Institute on Religion & Democracy’s **Rick Plasterer** wrote on the case in 2023 after the Virginia Supreme Court granted Vlaming’s petition to reinstate the case that had been dismissed by a lower court. The state Supreme Court remanded the case to a lower court for a ruling in line with the state Supreme Court’s decision supportive of Vlaming’s religious liberty and free speech claims.

Vlaming, an Anglican Christian attending Incarnation Church in Williamsburg, made a direct appeal to religious liberty.

“I was wrongfully fired from my teaching job because my religious beliefs put me on a collision course with school administrators who mandated that teachers ascribe to only one perspective on gender identity—their preferred view,” Vlaming stated. “I loved teaching French and gracefully tried to accommodate every student in my class, but I couldn’t say something that directly violated my conscience.” ✝



Teacher Peter Vlaming was fired in 2018 from the West Point High School in West Point, Virginia, for declining to use male pronouns for a biologically female student who identified as transgender. (Photo: Alliance Defending Freedom)



Image: Mari Loli / Pixabay

Membership in the Episcopal Church fell further in 2023, but attendance partly rebounded post-COVID, according to statistics released November 8 by the denomination's Office of the General Convention

Episcopal Membership Drips as Attendance Rebounds

at the autumn meeting of the church's Executive Council in New Jersey.

Total membership declined by 37,313, or 2.61 percent, in the most recent reporting year. Total attendance rose by 37,311, or 10.69 percent, while plate-and-pledge, the denomination's metric for tracking giving, rose \$48,579,607 (3.64%) to \$1,384,929,410. The plate-and-pledge figure is undercut by a 4.1 percent rate of inflation across the same year.

The membership loss reported across the past decade continues at 23 percent, while the decline in attendance reported across that period is 32 percent.

The Episcopal Church's triennial General Convention met June 23 – 28 in Louisville, Kentucky, where Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania (Erie) and Western New York (Buffalo) Bishop **Sean W. Rowe** was elected as the denomination's 28th Presiding Bishop with a promise of change and reorganization.

"All trends point to a smaller church, at least in the next decade," Rowe told *The Living Church* in a July interview following his election. "I think my particular role is to help us reposition."

Among Rowe's early decisions was to conduct his November 2 investiture as Presiding Bishop in a scaled-back event broadcast from the chapel at the Episcopal Church Center in New York, rather than the larger service of his predecessors at the Washington National Cathedral. The move allowed large-scale remote participation, but was a nod to the tight financial position that many Episcopal parishes and dioceses face.

Rowe indicated before the Episcopal Church Executive Council Joint Budget Committee on September 23 that he intends to move fast in the General Convention's call for a "structural realignment" in the 2025-27 budget plan approved in June. ✚

Seminary Endowments: Mainline Has Money, Southern Baptists Have Students

Southern Baptists have more seminary students but mostly declining Mainline Protestant seminaries have more money, according to data collected by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in accordance with the Financial Accounting Standards Board.

Seminaries affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA) continue to hold the most long-term investments, just short of \$2.4 billion total across nine seminaries. Remove Princeton Theological Seminary's endowment (\$1.358 billion, more than four times higher than its closest peer, the United Methodist-affiliated Candler School of Theology, with \$315.8

million), and the number shrinks to just over \$1 billion.

Those seminaries affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, however, easily post the highest number of students, with 7,147 Full-time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled in 2023-24, nearly seven times the number at PCUSA schools (the total combined FTE enrollment at PCUSA schools was 1,043 the same year). Southern Baptist institutions—including Southern, Southwestern, Southeastern, Midwestern, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminaries and Gateway Seminary—hold six of the top 10 spots on the list of schools with the most students



Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kentucky (top) and Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey (bottom). (Photos courtesy of the respective institutions)

enrolled based upon full-time equivalent ranking. This is despite those six schools having total long term investments of only \$483.4 million, about one-fifth the investments of the PCUSA schools. ✚



Dr. Ashley Boggan D. of GCAH (above, far left) announced the formation of the Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage at the Postponed 2020 General Conference. (Photo: Crystal Caviness)

Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage Kickoff: A 'Neutral' Shift?

by Davison Drumm

On October 23, the United Methodist Church (UMC) General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH) hosted a kickoff celebration on the New Jersey campus of UMC-affiliated Drew University for the new Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage.

Since the latest UMC General Conference, the denomination has defended its newly permissive sexual ethic as merely a neutral position. Although not forced, members are free, UMC officials insist, to support and engage in LGBTQ activity without violating biblical principles.

Despite these claims, the UMC is decidedly not “neutral” in its approach and celebration of LGBTQ practices.

Summarized by United Methodist Communications official The Rev. **Taylor W. Burton Edwards**, at the 2020/2024 General Conference, delegates lifted mandatory prohibitions in the denomination’s *Book of Discipline*. Yet, “Discretion remains.” Burton Edwards claims the stance to be “neutral” because the UMC “does not actively approve homosexual relations.” It merely allows them.

However, the new LGBTQ center clearly approves of homosexual relations with no semblance of neutrality. Framing the celebration, Dr. **Ashley Boggan**, GCAH general secretary, claims the purpose of the new center will be to “intentionally collect, preserve and share Queer Methodist history.” Furthermore, “We *celebrate* that we are finally living into our *true identity* as people called United Methodists” (emphasis added). That an embrace of an LGBTQ identity can be a *true identity*, that is given by God, is by no means a merely neutral claim.

Instead, the UMC seems ready to discard orthodoxy. Already, only a few months after the General Conference, the UMC’s actions suggest they wish to fulfill **Richard John Neuhaus’s** Law: “Where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed.” The UMC cajoles members by stating the shift as merely an option while not tolerating the option to discourage LGBTQ practices. Returning to Burton Edwards, the current Social Principles for United Methodists “implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay

members and friends.” At the same time it promotes the traditional ethic and the LGBTQ ethic as equal options, it attempts to shield one from criticism. Orthodoxy remains an option only insofar as it does not propose that it is normative for others.

Additionally, the GCAH receives its funding, in part, from church apportionments. Even if you and your local church disagree with the LGBTQ celebration and new sexual ethic permitted by the latest General Conference, your apportionments are being used to promote this celebration. Church members and local churches, then, are not given the choice to support gay marriage; their apportionments are making that choice for them.

If the language and events themselves were not enough to remove any doubt about the UMC’s non-neutral stance, the kickoff also includes a film screening designed to re-write the Church’s sexual teachings. The documentary *1946* asks, “What if the word ‘homosexual’ was never meant to be in the Bible?” From there, it claims to chronicle how a mistranslation “changed the course of modern history.” This screening serves as another example of the UMC attempting to revise church history to discredit orthodox teachings.

Even if granting the film is correct that the word “homosexual” does not belong in its specific New Testament passage, the Christian sexual ethic is not founded merely on the use of one word as the film suggests. The filmmakers and UMC at large would need to confront the Genesis creation account, Levitical laws, Jesus’ teachings about marriage, and numerous other passages throughout both the Old Testament and New Testament. By embracing *1946*, the UMC promulgates the idea that LGBTQ “prejudice” is an ill-founded, modern bias with

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no theological foundation. If desiring to change long-standing doctrines of the church, the UMC ought to confront them in good-faith as presented in Scripture instead of 1946's straw man depiction of the Christian sexual ethic.

While not entirely a new development, the launch of the Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage again demonstrates the UMC's inconsistencies between idea and application. The UMC urges its members and other churches to believe they are not discrediting orthodox beliefs. Instead, they are simply expanding the teaching to be more

inclusive and loving. Nevertheless, they use apportionments to promote LGBTQ practices, they support a film that attacks the traditional sexual ethic without reference to the ideas forming it, and they tolerate orthodox doctrine only when it does not propose normative beliefs.

Under the guise of neutrality and inclusivity, the UMC chips away at the foundational beliefs of the church. While claiming to provide merely another option that individual churches can decide for themselves, the UMC strongly discourages opposition to the new ethic. At least in their approach, the UMC seem

to be proving Neuhaus's words: "the old orthodoxy that is optional is proscribed by the new orthodoxy, which is never optional." ✚



Davison Drumm is a participant in *The Falls Church Anglican Fellows* program and a recent graduate of Fordham University. Drumm has an interest in American

political history, law, and religious liberty and is an IRD intern for the 2024-25 academic year.

Thirty Years at IRD

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totaled up \$442,000 in Methodist moneys aiding groups he judged to be Marxist or totalitarian, and sent the list to the denomination's financial overseers.

David distributed their report to delegates at the 1980 United Methodist General Conference. There he met new friends. As *Time* reported:

Through his campaign Jessup met folksy Texas Evangelist Ed Robb, 56, a conservative Democrat and a leader in Good News, an evangelical caucus that had long criticized Methodist agencies for overplaying social issues. Good News promoted Jessup's charges in its publications. A few months later, Jessup and Robb set up the I.R.D. in Washington, D.C., to monitor political activity by various denominations. They enlisted a credibility-building board of advisers whose 28 members range from socialist to right-wing on domestic issues but are pro-U.S. on foreign policy.

As David reminded me over lunch, his investigation of spending by the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries prompted that board to investigate David, which included a visit with David's then pastor. The agency also complained to David's employer, the

AFL-CIO, threatening to withhold future political collaboration. David's pastor did not defend him. But the head of the AFL-CIO strongly rebuffed their threat in a letter to the missions board, advising that David's religious activities were not his employer's business.

David's research, and subsequent research by IRD staff, resulted in my own discovery of troubling United Methodist spending and politics when I was my local church's missions chair in the late 1980s. In 1989 I invited David and others from IRD to speak at my local church. I began my own initiative of challenge to the missions board, which resulted in the IRD President's offer of employment. I gladly accepted it 30 years ago.

The United Methodist battles are concluded. But IRD's work continues in new arenas that recognize America's new religious reality. And as at the beginning, IRD vigorously affirms the Christian case for democracy, human rights, and religious freedom for all. Forty years ago, IRD challenged Marxist-Leninists and their fellow travelers in the churches. Today people in the U.S. church on the political extremes still contest claims of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom equally for all.

God gives equal dignity to all persons whom He made in His image. But

fallen human nature in all times defies His wishes and makes prideful claims of superiority for one group over others, justifying coercion and persecution for some ostensibly righteous cause. IRD always encourages churches and Christians to challenge these spurious claims and to model God's justice and mercy for all.

Thirty years ago, I did not expect to still be at IRD in 2024. My work focused on the United Methodist Church, and I assumed it would conclude with the end of that denominational battle. I became IRD president 15 years ago. Today IRD speaks to Christians through different programs: The New Whiggery initiative extols spiritually informed classical liberty, *Providence* (our Christian Realism journal), our "In Defense of Christians" advocacy for persecuted overseas believers, and our John Wesley Institute for theological formation, plus campus outreach and countless events for young professionals in D.C. I'm planning new initiatives to strengthen Protestant Christian ethicists and to create a Christian voice in Washington, D.C., for the free market.

Today, no less than thirty years ago, I remain persuaded that IRD must point to a thoughtful Christian social witness affirming decency and dignity for all. The need is endless, and the work continues. ✚

Wheaton-to-Anglican Pipeline: Why Are Young People Turning Anglican?

by Sarah Carter

For many students, Wheaton College is their first introduction to liturgy.

Three days a week, all undergraduate students attend chapel – a required 45-minute Christian devotional service often including congregational worship songs, call and response, and a 20-minute guest lecture. Within this service many students participate in some formulation of traditional liturgy. Students respond to the Scripture reading with “Thanks be to God,” recite the Lord’s prayer by memory, and participate in corporate confession.

This is a first for many students coming from an evangelical background and may help explain what is commonly known as the “Wheaton to Anglican Pipeline.”

This phrase refers to the peculiar phenomenon where students en masse enroll in Wheaton College and change their denominational affiliation to Anglicanism. This reality is so well known within the student body and by its professors, that those off campus have begun to take note. After hearing that I would be enrolling in Wheaton College, my Presbyterian pastor jokingly warned, “Do not become Anglican.”

An explanation for this phenomenon could be the liturgy of chapel, world-renowned Anglican professors in the Bible and Theology department, or the numerous Anglican churches in geographical proximity to the college. But I believe it points to a larger trend among young Christians in the United States.

As a person in my twenties, I have first-hand witness of growing trends among Christian young people. My time

at Wheaton made it clear: young people want tradition. They are in a pendulum swing away from the free-flowing worship or extemporaneous prayer that characterized much of late 20th century Evangelicalism. Every tradition has its liabilities.



Wheaton College (top) in Wheaton, Illinois. Anglican clergy and bishops gather to consecrate Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, Illinois. (Photos: Wheaton College, Church of the Resurrection).

These young Christians are gradually gravitating toward traditional liturgy and established churches with historical continuity, traditional hymnody, church authority, etc.

American Evangelicals include a plethora of Protestant denominations in the United States, among them the Evangelical Free Church in America, the Southern Baptist Convention, some Presbyterian denominations, and many non-denominational churches. These churches, although diverse, often emphasize a

personal (individual) relationship with Jesus, preaching of the Word, and sometimes lack liturgical structure. This contrasts with other classical Protestant traditions including Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists, and some other Presbyterians, where the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is the focal point of the service, there is corporate recitation of historic creeds and confessions, and a liturgical structure. Although I have noticed young Protestants migrating to the latter group of churches, I also see some depart Protestantism altogether for Rome or Constantinople.

Anglicanism both in the United States and globally is recorded to be growing in attendance and membership. I see my peers also increasingly attend traditionalist Lutheran congregations. I can name peer after peer, born into an evangelical Protestant household, who has changed religious affiliations to Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. Those I know born into Eastern Orthodoxy have been switching to Evangelicalism, while those born into Evangelicalism have become Eastern Orthodox.

Despite my pastor’s advice, I too have fallen into this growing trend among young Christians. Born and raised in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), I will attend an Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) parish for the next year.

It is not that my Presbyterian heritage lacks tradition; the Reformed are rich in tradition. From my childhood memorization of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, to owning Calvin’s *Institutes of*

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Anglican Church in North America bishops consecrate Darryl Fitzwater as Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints at Church of the Ascension in Charles Town, WV on Friday October 4, 2024 (Photo: Jeff Walton / IRD).

Unexpected Anglicanism in West Virginia

by Jeffrey Walton

This October I was delighted to attend the consecration of Bishop **Darryl Fitzwater** for the Anglican Church in North America’s (ACNA) Missionary Diocese of All Saints. It was a beautiful service in the High Church tradition bringing together hundreds, including the current and emeritus ACNA Archbishops and members of the diocese as far away as Seattle.

I’ve been privileged to know Father (now Bishop) Darryl for years, first as a postulant for Anglican ordination in my Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic as he studied at Asbury Theological Seminary. As a church planter, he’s been a team player with others as together they’ve formed Church of the Ascension in Jefferson County, West Virginia, in the state’s Eastern panhandle.

I would not have foreseen a successful Anglo-Catholic church plant in rural West Virginia, but God is full of surprises. In a denomination in which most new church starts are in major metropolitan areas or college towns, Fitzwater saw God at work in an area that some of us overlook, and knew that historic Anglicanism offered helpful tools for connecting people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, there has been significant Anglican church planting activity across West Virginia.

First planted in 2017, Ascension has grown, acquired its own church building, and in 2023 reported 121 church members,

most of whom are new to Anglican Christianity. They’ve even partnered in helping launch a congregation 80 miles away in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania. Perhaps this is further evidence that churches are at their most evangelistically active within the first five years of being planted.

The Missionary Diocese of All Saints was formed by Anglo-Catholic congregations connected through the Forward in Faith movement, an early co-founder of the ACNA. It is among the smaller dioceses and comprises mostly small congregations in need of clergy. The diocese also ministers in areas in which no other ACNA congregations exist. In late 2020, I was surprised to discover one such parish while visiting family on California’s Central Coast. The sacramental theology they hold prompted them to meet in-person and share Holy Communion with me at a time when many other congregations were meeting remotely, or not at all. How grateful I am for that worship service! It is a reminder that even our smallest congregations provide much-needed ministry in the communities they are called to serve.

Like more than a few clergy serving in the ACNA, Bishop Darryl served as a pastor in a Pentecostal denomination. He is experienced ministering within a “spirit-filled” context, understanding that the catholicity of the Church places limits on an individual expressiveness that sometimes runs churches off the rails. Darryl

also brought a strong interest in the lives, writings, and doctrines of the early church fathers (patristics). His biweekly Appalachian Anglican podcast “brings the distinct flavor of the mountains and hollers of the Appalachian region to the global Anglican chorus.” I am amused that ACNA facilitated a Pentecostal pastor studying at a historically Wesleyan seminary and entering into Anglo-Catholicism. Considering John and Charles Wesley’s own High Church background, maybe I shouldn’t be surprised.

Charismatic renewal, I have previously suggested, is one “glue” that is holding the ACNA together across different forms of churchmanship. While I am not charismatic, I see evidence all around me of people encountering the person of the Holy Spirit and their lives change. It sounds almost like a trope, but the Holy Spirit *does* move in unexpected ways, drawing new people to the Gospel and the truth of Holy Scripture, revealing God’s heart for his people.

Maybe Anglo-Catholic tradition in West Virginia is just the latest in many examples of the Holy Spirit at work. ✚



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

Nazarene Seminary Promotes LGBTQ-Affirming Faculty

by Elijah Friedeman

The Church of the Nazarene is the largest Wesleyan-Holiness denomination in the world, with 600,000 members in the U.S. and 2.5 million members around the world. The denomination

both the local church and the world of higher education has made me deeply aware of how quickly heretical beliefs in the academy can shape the direction of a denomination.

an unwillingness to hold heretical professors and clergy accountable for their false teachings. The unholy mix of these two factors produced a denomination in which many clergy denied the divinity of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead—and one that now openly rejects the clear teachings of Scripture on human sexuality.

Despite the warnings offered by the long and agonizing history of the Methodist movement in the 20th and 21st centuries, the same problems are at work in the Church of the Nazarene today. While Nazarenes tend to be among the most theologically conservative evangelical Christians—opposing same-sex marriage and abortion at higher rates than even Southern Baptists—some Nazarene educational institutions have been moving

in a different direction.

In 2023, a book was published entitled *Why the Church of the Nazarene Should Be Fully LGBTQ+ Affirming*. The volume was co-edited by **Tom Oord** (a Nazarene elder and former professor at multiple Nazarene universities who in July was stripped of his preaching credentials and expelled from membership for his heretical positions) and featured essays that advocated for the full embrace of LGBTQ identity and practice. Among the contributors were a group of seventeen ordained Nazarene elders, a number



The campus of Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri (Photo: Nazarene Theological Seminary)

is known for its conservative positions on theology and lifestyle standards. However, in recent years Nazarene Theological Seminary (NTS), the denomination's only seminary in the U.S., has made a pronounced progressive shift by hiring LGBTQ-affirming faculty.

As a 31-year-old clergy member in the Church of the Nazarene, I am concerned about the direction of the denomination. I grew up in the Church of the Nazarene, have spent my ministry serving local Nazarene churches, and hope to die a Nazarene. In addition to being a Nazarene pastor, I have also served as a vice president at Wesley Biblical Seminary. My time in

For current and former members of mainline denominations, this is an all-too-familiar story. The liberalization of educational institutions has played a primary role in the theological downfall of denominations like The United Methodist Church. In his book *The Rise of Theological Liberalism and the Decline of American Methodism*, **James Heidinger** outlines how the theological drift at seminaries created scholars and clergy who no longer affirm the central teachings of the Bible—like sin, the incarnation, and the resurrection. The liberalization of higher education institutions was matched by

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of whom were current or former professors at Nazarene higher educational institutions. Perhaps the most prominent of the contributors was **Steve McCormick**, who had retired from NTS in 2022 after an 18-year teaching career. After the book's publication, McCormick participated in a pro-LGBTQ conference where he confirmed his long-standing views in support of LGBTQ identity and practice. Despite his unbiblical views, McCormick remains the emeritus Greathouse Chair for Wesleyan-Holiness Theology at NTS.

The NTS administration has refused to disassociate from McCormick, despite his wholesale affirmation of LGBTQ identity and practice. The truth here is sobering. A premier Nazarene theologian at the denomination's only seminary in the US, who trained Nazarene pastors and academics for decades, had been affirming LGBTQ practices for much, if not all, of that time. And over a year after he has made his views public, NTS has done nothing to remove his emeritus status.

NTS is not the first evangelical institution to deal with emeriti faculty who are LGBTQ-affirming. Asbury Theological Seminary, an evangelical seminary in the Wesleyan-Methodist tradition, was faced with its own errant emeritus professor. In 2015, **Steve Harper** publicly embraced an LGBTQ-affirming position. Harper, who had been a longtime Asbury professor and had also served as a vice president at the institution, became a vocal proponent of LGBTQ identity and practice. In response, Asbury removed his status as an emeritus professor. The willingness of Asbury to remove Harper's title contrasts starkly with NTS's refusal to distance themselves from McCormick by removing his emeritus status.

The problems at NTS are not only with former professors but also with those who are currently teaching at the seminary.

Michael Christensen, Professor of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship for the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at NTS, openly affirms LGBTQ identity and practice. As far back as 2016, Christensen was publicly posting on Facebook about his support for allowing people who have embraced LGBTQ identity and practice to

be pastors. In 2019, Christensen described himself as someone "who has advocated for full inclusion of gay and lesbian sisters and brothers in the life of church since I was in college over 40 years ago." To his credit, Christensen has been open about his stance on full celebration and inclusion of LGBTQ identities and practice. NTS has repeatedly turned a blind eye towards these views, allowing him to continue to teach at the institution. As recently as this spring, Christensen was teaching a DMin course at NTS.

Frank Thomas was the featured speaker at the NTS preacher's conference in 2022. And this past fall, he was involved in the DMin program at the seminary. As of June 19, he was still listed as a Guest Lecturer in African American Preaching and Rhetoric at the seminary. (Thomas is not currently listed, perhaps in response to recent pressure on the

seminary from those in the denomination.) On X, formerly known as Twitter, Thomas has written posts supporting abortion and denouncing the senators who opposed enshrining same-sex marriage in federal law. He shared a post from Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) that celebrated "open and affirming" churches "where everyone belongs just as they are." The post included a graphic that said, "CTS LOVES TRANS KIDS" and was accompanied by the hashtags #pride, #translove, and #transvisibility.

Despite public statements in support of the denomination's stance on human sexuality, NTS President **Jeren Rowell** has allowed Christensen and Thomas to train students at the seminary for years. Even those on the affirming side have recognized the discrepancy between Rowell's

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the Christian Religion during my teenage years, I know that the Reformed Presbyterian faith has the same characteristics of historical continuity and deep theology that many young people are looking for.

What attracted me to Anglicanism were its traditions outside the Puritan regulative principle of worship and its upholding of beauty. I was fascinated by traditions including the procession of the cross, adherence to the liturgical calendar, and the unified liturgy across churches. I saw beauty within the church that enlightened a respect for art in the church as an outlet to glorify God. Useful tools like *The Book of Common Prayer* only added to my interest as I saw the Anglican tradition historically rooted, beautiful, and communal. Now, being a Fellow with The Falls Church Anglican Fellows program, I have decided to commit myself to an ACNA church for the next year and serve within the youth ministry.

Although I may not be able to name all the reasons why I have witnessed this growing trend of young people becoming Anglican and affiliating with other historic, liturgical traditions, I can say that it is a pressing reality among Christian youth.

Even for Christians, young people want to be a part of something bigger. Young people want tradition. ✝



Sarah Carter is a participant in The Falls Church Anglican Fellows program and a recent graduate of Wheaton College. Carter has an interest in Kuyperian political theology and the intersections of faith and public life in the United States. She has extensive experience in campus ministry, Pro-Life activism, and is an IRD intern for the 2024-25 academic year.

Nazarene Seminary Promotes LGBTQ-Affirming Faculty

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public stance on human sexuality and his private actions.

A former NTS employee named **Isaac Petty Pierjok** publicly shared his story of working at the seminary. Pierjok had openly embraced a gay identity and was LGBTQ-affirming at the time of his employment. He has since married another man. In Pierjok's recounting of the situation, Rowell began to be pressured by Nazarene leaders because Pierjok was an openly gay employee. Rowell, Pierjok writes, "continued directing his subordinates to encourage me to re-closet myself online in an attempt to decrease those calls." The seminary administration made clear to Pierjok "that pressure needed to be taken off the president." When Pierjok refused to acquiesce, the NTS administration finally fired him. Rowell was willing to do the right thing and remove the employee only under intense pressure from denominational leaders.

All of these situations point to a deeply concerning dynamic at NTS. Although the seminary's leadership affirms the denomination's stances on human sexuality in public, they seem to be unwilling to take hard actions behind the scenes until a situation becomes public and uncomfortable.

For many Nazarenes, the problems at NTS can seem far removed from local church ministry. However, every Nazarene who gives to their local church is financially supporting what takes place at the seminary. Every Nazarene church is expected to invest 5.5% of its income in the World Evangelism Fund (WEF). WEF supports the denomination's global missions program and ministry infrastructure. But \$1.1 million is given from WEF each year to NTS. When NTS hires an LGBTQ-affirming professor or employee, the institution is doing so in part with money that local

churches have sacrificially given for world evangelization.

In sum, NTS has a track record that extends back for years and continues to the present day of accommodating professors who embrace LGBTQ ideology and support abortion. The refusal of the seminary's administration to confront these issues raises some challenging questions for Nazarene churches, leaders, pastors, and laypeople.

When NTS hires an LGBTQ-affirming professor or employee, the institution is doing so in part with money that local churches have sacrificially given for world evangelization.

1. **Why is NTS so out of step with local churches and pastors that they welcome LGBTQ-affirming professors?** Rank-and-file Nazarenes who learn about NTS are deeply concerned. They have trouble believing their denomination's seminary hires professors who are LGBTQ-affirming.
2. **Why are local churches forced to support NTS?** Despite NTS tolerating LGBTQ-affirming professors, local churches are still required to give the seminary \$1.1 million each year through WEF. Why are local churches forced to financially support faculty members with views that run contrary to the Bible, the denomination's theology, and the values of most Nazarenes?
3. **Why does NTS president Jeren Rowell only respond to outside pressure to do the right thing on human**

sexuality issues? Rowell has defended LGBTQ-affirming faculty and has resisted calls to remove them. His intransigence puts Nazarenes who are concerned about the seminary in a challenging situation. Even if the seminary were to remove those who have already been public about their LGBTQ-affirming positions, how can we have confidence that other faculty don't privately share the same perspectives? Additional faculty not mentioned in this article have made problematic public statements and continued to teach at NTS. I am not casting doubt on any faculty member, but I am pointing out Rowell's failure to lead well on this issue.

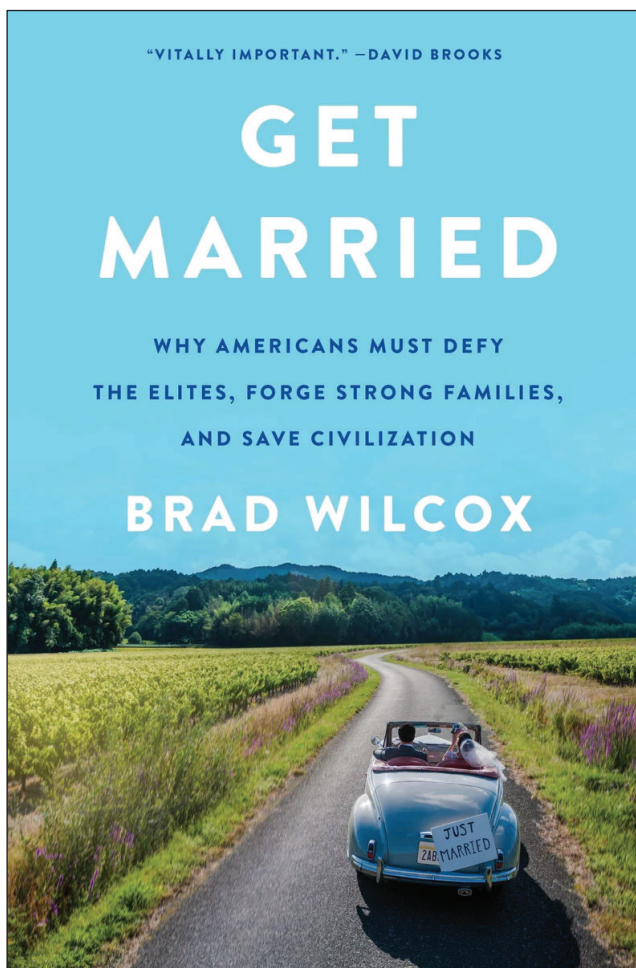
4. Who is responsible for NTS?

This is perhaps the most consequential question of all. Due to the denomination's decentralized structure, the Church of the Nazarene doesn't have direct control over NTS, and last year the board of NTS unanimously re-elected Rowell to a new four-year term. If NTS will be reformed, who should lead the way—who *can* lead the way?

As with all denominational issues, when leaders do not take biblical stands, the responsibility falls to Nazarene pastors and laypeople to speak up, share their perspective, and provide healthy accountability to leaders. My hope is that Nazarenes can support our seminary by holding it accountable to the teachings of the Bible and the doctrine of our church. If we want to thrive as an orthodox and missional denomination, we must ensure our educational institutions remain theologically grounded. ✝



Elijah Friedeman is an ordained elder with the Church of the Nazarene serving as Lead Pastor of Foundry Church in Flowood, Mississippi.



Brad Wilcox is Professor of Sociology and Director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia. He is author of *Get Married: Why Americans Should Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families and Save Civilization* (Harper Collins, 2024). (Photo: University of Virginia)

Marriage, Family, and Happiness

by Rick Plasterer

Marriage and the family have historically been the bedrock of society, but for many today, encouraged by elite opinion, they are regarded as optional extras.

Brad Wilcox, Professor of Sociology at the University of Virginia and Director of the National Marriage Project, spoke at the Faith and Law forum on Capitol Hill on July 19 regarding the importance of marriage and the family to American happiness. The deterioration of marriage and the family has greatly exacerbated the decline of flourishing in the United States in recent years, he believes. His new book

Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy the Elites, Forge Strong Families, and Save Civilization, lays out the case for the superiority of a marriage culture.

Wilcox said that America is failing at the objectives laid out by **Thomas Jefferson**, which are “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” His book focuses on the last objective. Surveys indicate that happiness has recently been in decline. But the barriers to happiness are “not about things like race or inequality or poverty,” Wilcox believes. Instead, it is about “the closing of the American heart,” referring to the fact that fewer and

fewer younger Americans look to marriage and the family as the natural and desirable course in life.

Wilcox said that the marriage rate has come down markedly since 1970. At this point “about 1 in 3 adults in their twenties ... will never marry.” This is a new situation for American society. The 2023 fertility rate was 1.62 children per woman (down from 1.67 in 2022) of child-bearing age. What this means “is that about one in four” Americans will never have children.

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Marriage, Family, and Happiness

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There will be “a profound level of kinlessness.” For example, the book describes a man in his mid-thirties in the metropolitan Washington area who has “a graduate degree, owns his own home,” and is employed by a defense contractor, who nonetheless testified to lack of purpose and satisfaction in life. He suffered from “loneliness, sadness, and ... anomie.” Wilcox conceded that married people can be unhappy, and unmarried people can thrive, but overall, he believes, married life is more likely to be happy. He points to the research of **Sam Peltzman** of the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business showing that marriage may be the most important factor in achieving happiness.

Self-Centered versus Family-Centered Culture

Why is the American heart closing? The first reason, Wilcox believes, is the “my-ness mindset” of the American elites, which they are communicating to the American public. This viewpoint holds that what is important in life is focusing on “your education, building your own brand, and oftentimes your work, your career.” This has displaced a mindset focused on marriage and the family. It is suggested, particularly to young women, that marriage and family are a dead end. Wilcox points to articles in prestigious publications that maintain that a married life for women leads to a dead end, less prosperous life, in contrast to stories about single and childless women “who were living their best life.” Similarly, some commentators on the right increasingly say that marriage is a bad alternative for men. These anti-family narratives increase skepticism toward marriage among many young adults. The basic message is that meaning and value in life is achieved through “career, and not through marriage and family life.”

Wilcox says research shows that the “number one predictor” of happiness is

a good marriage, not money or career. Additionally, the majority of young men don’t have a college degree, and are much less likely to be connected to a single line of work than their fathers or their grandfathers. In fact, “one in four men in their prime who don’t have a college degree are not working full time.” Such men are much less likely to get married and if married, to stay married. He pointed to Harvard research showing that when a wife loses her job, there is no increased risk of divorce. By contrast, when a husband loses his job there is a 33 percent increase in the risk of divorce.

Public Policy Barriers

Wilcox cites research that reveals many working class young adults have not gotten married because of marriage penalties that effectively exist in law and public policy, including non-tax policies. Data from the American Enterprise Institute shows that 80 percent of working class families “are hit by marriage penalties.” Among them, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) reduce poverty but also penalize marriage.

Wilcox then reviews the problematic aspects of policies advocated by both the Democrat and Republican parties. Republicans may use strong pro-family and pro-marriage rhetoric, but their actual policies involve limited government. Policies specifically supportive of families in, for instance, tax credits, are thus minimized. The “health of the market” is considered more important than “the health of the family.” Also, getting parents into the workforce takes precedence over allowing parents to remain at home sufficiently to maintain family life.

On the Democrat side, “statism” and “workism” are problems. Statism tends toward a belief that families benefit when family functions are outsourced to the state. However, Wilcox says that research

shows that children in paid childcare are “more likely to experience social and emotional problems.” This is especially true for children in childcare at very early stages in life.

“Workism” is the belief that parents should be at work on weekdays, which results in no parent being available for children. Finally, “for a variety of ideological and coalitional reasons” it is hard for Democrats “to talk about marriage today.” The Democrats’ alliance with the sexual revolution, which pits them against social conservatism, makes it hard for them to adopt policies that favor marriage and family life.

To have good pro-family policies, educational, institutional, and cultural foundations for marriage need to be emphasized in public policy. Neither the state (for the Left) nor the market (for the Right) should be made a substitute for the family.

Wilcox's Proposals

Wilcox proposes five policy principles:

1. “Maximize financial benefits and minimize penalties” for marriage
2. “Make childbearing and child rearing more affordable”
3. Develop policies that encourage positive and diminish negative interactions within families
4. Maximize the time parents have with their children
5. Educate the rising generation about the value of marriage and the family, counteracting the negative messages received from the news media, entertainment industry, and the wider culture generally

Wilcox notes that marriage penalties for affluent families have been addressed by Congress, but affluent families are

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more stable. For working class families, marriage penalties still pose problems. Regarding childcare (point 2), Wilcox expects action in 2025 to expand the child tax credit (CTC).

On the quality of family life front (point 3), policy should aim at “restraining the hold that big tech has over our kids.” Gaming and online betting by teenage boys must be addressed.

With respect to point 4, many states are moving forward with school choice. This allows parents to use public money for educational options other than public schools. Private schools have been shown to support values more conducive to positive family formation than public schools.

On point five, Wilcox said that we need to renew a culture of family life. Young people need to be educated in the “success sequence,” which is (1) attain at least a high school degree,” (2) “work full-time in your twenties,” and (3) “marry

and have kids.” Following this sequence, Wilcox said, means that the odds of being poor are 3 percent, and the odds of being in the middle class or above are 86 percent. Young people should also be taught that people in middle age are likely to be less lonely if they are married with children. Especially married mothers “are markedly happier than women who are single or childless.” They are also markedly better off financially than single women heading toward retirement. These facts are not generally known to the public, Wilcox observes. The government needs to make sure that they are known. Above all, young people need to be informed that opting for marriage and family is the most likely route to happiness.

Conclusion

The “me-centered” culture (or rather anti-culture) that developed from the counterculture of the 1960s revolution

is difficult to overcome because it offers the allure of gratification at the expense of traditional responsibilities. It is also difficult to challenge because mass media and educational elites continue to advance self-centeredness and anti-family messages. A variety of strategies to repair and protect marriage and family-based culture, advanced broadly and with perseverance from the grass-roots and assisted by those within the educated classes who wish to see marriage and the family culture revived, will be necessary to ensure a flourishing marriage-based society for future generations. ✚



Rick J. Plasterer is a staff writer for the Institute on Religion and Democracy

Reflections on My Closed United Methodist Church

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hymns, bluegrass, and gospel songs that I learned through its ministry. I will always stand on my tiptoes when I sing “Love Lifted Me.” The music ministry at my church, particularly its choir, was an excellent example of intergenerational ministry. Those relationships are essential for keeping young adults connected to their faith, and they certainly helped as I grew in mine. I will miss how joyful people were as they participated in our music ministry, an important demonstration of using our talents for the service of God. I will miss standing at the piano with our pianist and worship leader, learning songs, and enjoying one another’s company while preparing for Sunday morning. And I will always be grateful for the investment they made in teaching me to read music and to sing.

Also impactful was the reverence with which I saw members of my church take communion. Cradling the bread in

their hand and whispering “thank you, Jesus.” Those simple, discrete acts of devotion demonstrated to me a deep and winsome faith on the part of its members.

Most of all, I am grateful for steadfast devotion to God that I saw the members of my church live out in their daily lives. Members experienced tragic events, the loss of homes, and the loss of children, and yet they demonstrated a deep-rooted trust that God was with them in the darkest moments. He was their source of comfort. Part of that comfort was provided by the steadfast loving presence of their fellow church members, who faithfully lived out their covenant vows to care for one another. They also demonstrated this devotion in the ministries of the church. Prison ministries, ministries to shut-ins, and most of all our children’s ministries. And they practiced those incarnation-ally, engaging with people in person for

the sake of the gospel. I consider myself blessed to have grown up participating in the ministries of my church to children.

My church is now closed and the building purchased by another congregation. But the long-term impact of its ministry will always be a blessing to those who had the opportunity to encounter it, and it will continue to bless those with whom its laity interacts. I will always be grateful to my church for helping me to love Christ and love His bride the Church. For this and for so many other blessings, thank you! ✚



Sarah Stewart is Director of Campus Outreach and Events for the Institute on Religion and Democracy.

Reflections on My Closed United Methodist Church

by Sarah Stewart

Current and former members of the shuttering Seventh Street United Methodist Church in Parkersburg, West Virginia gather for a final service on August 25, 2024 (Photo courtesy of Sarah Stewart)



To experience a great love is a great gift. Mine happened to be my local church.

In late August, Seventh Street United Methodist held its final service. Facing shrinking numbers and sweeping changes made at this year's General Conference, the decision was made for the church to close after more than 100 years of witnessing to the gospel on the corner of Seventh and Bryant streets in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

I grew up with Seventh Street UMC as did my mother and her brothers. My grandparents and great-grandmother attended there. I want to express gratitude and love for my church one final time.

It is important to allow people the opportunity to grieve for their closing churches. People often say the “church

isn't the building,” as though we should be able to readily detach ourselves from the places in which we meet. After all, if we are too attached to our church and its interior life, we may neglect to go out and share the gospel. And while we should go out and share the gospel, this mindset ignores something profoundly important: buildings matter. People spend decades serving God together in those buildings, and the gifts they have donated for use of the church—in many cases the gifts they have labored and sacrificed to make—were for the service of God. And now, in the case of my church, they and the building were auctioned off.

When I return home, I will miss my church building. I will miss the freedom to enter it and sit in its pews and pray and know that I had a place where I was always welcome.

Even more than the building, the people who attended there have been one of the great blessings of my life. They have loved me and shown Christ to me and that is a great gift. I am quite certain that I will never be so deeply loved by so many people as I was by my church. To be loved so intensely is a blessing, and by loving my church and being loved by my church, it became a living witness to me that deeply impacted my ecclesiology. It taught me to love, serve, and treasure The Church. Despite its imperfections, my church was a small witness to the blessing that Christ gives us in the church universal.

My church also helped to foster my love for music, and I will cherish the

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