



faith & freedom

Reforming the Church's Social and Political Witness

Spring 2022

Prayers for Ukraine

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Bishop Scott Jones of the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church speaks at the Next Methodism Summit Jan. 23, 2022 in Alexandria, Virginia. See story on page 10. (Photo: Mark Tooley / IRD)

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Cover: Civilian refugees cross a bridge between Irpin and Kyiv demolished to prevent Russian tanks crossing into the Ukrainian capital. (Photo: Aris Messinis/AFP)

New York Times Evangelicals

Spanish dictator **Francisco Franco** regularly read *The New York Times* because he amusingly thought it the voice of international Freemasonry, historic nemesis to his preferred rightwing continental Catholicism. The *Times* has long had totemic status often beyond reality. So it's no surprise that **David Brooks'** recent *Times* piece on reformers within Evangelicalism received a wide response. Brooks spotlighted Evangelical dissidents whom some conservative Evangelicals disparage as panderers to the zeitgeist as embodied by the *Times*.

Evangelicals get lots of secular media attention because, in our ostensibly more secular age, they have significant political power as a fairly cohesive voting bloc that often goes 80% Republican. They are almost as cohesive as black Christians, who typically vote 90% Democrat, but white Evangelicals are more numerous.

Coastal elites have disdained Evangelicals and revivalists across 200 years, per **John Adams's** correspondence with **Thomas Jefferson**. They have long seen the backcountry unwashed as reactionary and unsophisticated. Liberal and secular elites especially disdain contemporary Evangelical traditionalist views on human sexuality and abortion.

Recent national polarization naturally has affected Evangelicals as with all demographic groups, especially relating to **Trump**, January 6, "Christian nationalism," the pandemic and vaccine, conspiracy theories, race and law enforcement and populist politics. Some Evangelicals, including many leaders within academia and publishing, including persons whom Brooks spotlights, recoiled from the recent Evangelical politics, which they saw as departing from traditional Christian public concerns during the **Bush** and **Reagan** eras. As Brooks noted, there is also distress about sexual abuse in the church, with some Evangelicals blaming failures of accountability on excessive deference to authority and sometimes misogyny. According to Brooks:

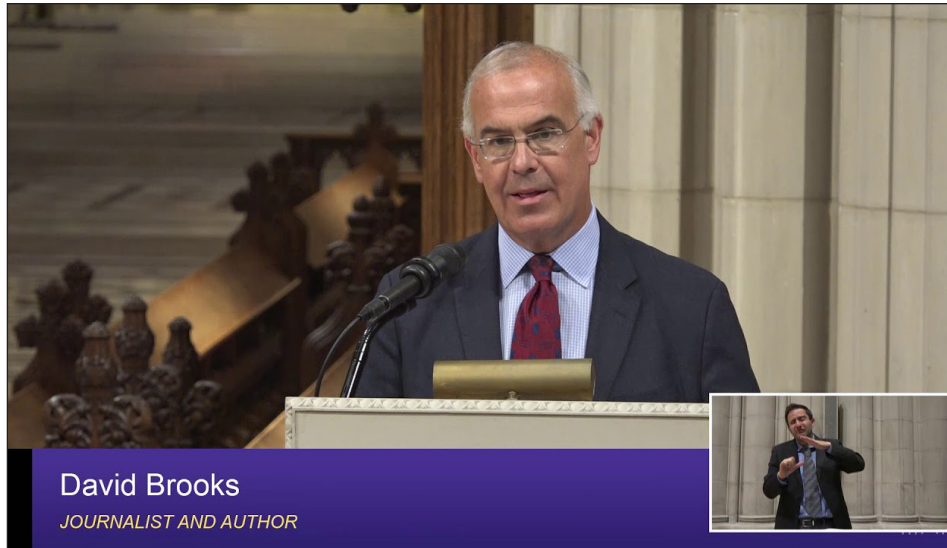
Power is the core problem here. First, the corruptions of personal power. Evangelicalism is a populist movement. It has no hierarchy or central authority, so you might think it would have avoided the abuses of power that have afflicted the Roman Catholic Church. But the paradox of decentralization is that it has often led to the concentration of power in the hands of highly charismatic men, who can attract enthusiastic followings. A certain percentage of these macho celebrities inflict their power on the vulnerable and especially on young women.

And also:

Then there is the way partisan politics has swamped what is supposed to be a religious movement. Over the past couple of decades evangelical pastors have found that their 20-minute Sunday sermons could not outshine the hours and hours of Fox News their parishioners were mainlining every week. It

wasn't only that the klieg light of Fox was so bright, but also that the flickering candle of Christian formation was so dim.

In 2020, roughly 40 percent of the people who called themselves evangelical attended church once a year or less, according to research by the political scientist Ryan Burge. It's just a



David Brooks

JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

New York Times columnist David Brooks. (Photo: YouTube screen capture / Washington National Cathedral)

political label for them. This politicization is one reason people have cited to explain why so many are leaving the faith.

Two important points here. First, non-Evangelicals sometimes assume based on stereotypes that Evangelical churches are hotbeds of political activism. But they very rarely are. Most Evangelical preachers avoid detailed politics from their pulpits. Almost all Evangelical activism originates outside the church. Second, "Evangelical" has become a moniker for political and cultural identity rather than a theological description. Some non-Christians, including Hindus and Muslims, and non-religious people, now tell pollsters they are "Evangelical" because they identify culturally and politically with the movement.

Brooks cites New York pastor and author **Tim Keller's** ideas for church renewal, which include renewed emphasis on church

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Mark Tooley



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

NRSVue Bible Translation to Reflect ‘Modern Sensibilities’

The National Council of Churches (NCC) recently conducted an ambitious update of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Bible, called the “NRSVue” or NRSV Updated Edition.

The new edition makes 12,000 substantive changes out of a total of more than 20,000 revisions. NCC subsidiary Friendship Press states that the update takes into consideration “modern sensibilities.”

Adelle M. Banks of Religion News Service reports that the update changes reflect a decision to avoid identifying people based on their disabilities.

A verse in Matthew that previously referred to “demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics,” now reads “people possessed by demons or having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis.” The new edition does not use the word “girl” when referring to a young woman. Mark 14:69 now speaks of a “female servant” instead of a “servant-girl.”

Critics of the update charge that some of the language changes soften New Testament condemnations of homosexual intercourse.

The Greek word *arsenokoitai* has been muted to “men who engage in sexual immorality,” when the actual meaning is “men who have sex with men,” notes retired United Methodist Church elder the Rev. **Arthur Collins**.

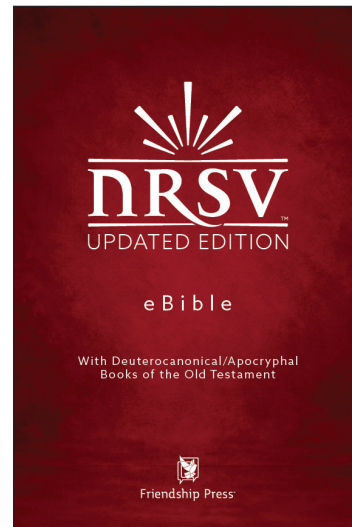
“The revisers say the term in the original Greek is unclear; it isn’t. *Arsenokoitai* was coined by rabbis of Second Temple Judaism (the translators of the Septuagint), and then picked up by Christian teachers. It was coined specifically to refer to behavior that Jews and Christians highlighted as wrong, but which the culture around them treated

in more nuanced ways,” writes Collins, who has an MDiv from Asbury Theological Seminary and a PhD from Indiana State University. “Likewise, the revisers of the NRSV have rendered the NT Greek *malakoi* as ‘male prostitutes,’ which locates the basic wrong not in the sexual behavior, per se, but in its being offered for money.”

Last updated in 1989, the NRSV is itself an

update of the Revised Standard Version, a modernization of the King James Version.

The NCC governing board approved the NRSVue in October. An electronic version was made available this past autumn, and a print version is scheduled to reach bookshelves in May. ✚



Cover of the NRSV updated edition (Image: Friendship Press).

Reformed Church Split Mirrors Mainline Divides, Minus Acrimony

An historic North American church that uniquely straddles Evangelical and Mainline Protestant traditions is undergoing a denominational split exacerbated by disagreement around defining God’s holiness and acceptable human sexual expression. Those disagreements are most recently seen in the presenting issues of same-sex marriage and ordination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

(LGBTQ)-identifying clergy that split Mainline Protestant churches.

Forty-Three congregations of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) are breaking away from the denomination to form a new Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC) with the expectation that others will follow, including additional churches from outside of the RCA fold. The process of separating the church into two may be an instructive example

for United Methodists preparing to vote upon a negotiated split of their own at the General Conference rescheduled for 2024.

Unlike its Mainline peers, the RCA is a small denomination reporting a total of 877 congregations in 2016 and a 2019 membership of 194,064, down from a high of 949 congregations in 1997 and 384,751

Continued at top of next page

members in 1967 (a decline of nearly 50 percent) according to numbers from the Association of Religion Data Archives.

The initial group of departing churches represent about 5% of RCA congregations, and potentially a disproportionate share of both denominational revenue and evangelistic energy. ARC leaders have outlined different roles from the RCA in denominational governance, theological convictions and the funding of mission priorities.

Religion News Service coverage by **Kathryn Post** reports that at least 125 churches from various denominations are in conversation with ARC leaders about joining—some from other reformed bodies including the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and Christian Reformed Church (CRC).

A statement on the ARC web site affirms the Bible as God's written Word,

reading that “those who follow Jesus live under the Bible's authority as written.”

Now the realignment that began in the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is reaching the Dutch Reformed—but without the lawsuits and acrimony that characterized some of those prior splits. Delegates to the RCA General Synod in October approved recommendations that allow transferring churches to retain assets and church buildings.

The move potentially presages how an expected split in the United Methodist Church (UMC), America's second largest Protestant denomination, could



Photo: Fox 17 West Michigan

unfold with a minimum of disruption and rancor.

This isn't the first split in the RCA. In 1857 the Holland, Michigan-based CRC split from the denomination, later adding additional congregations from the RCA in 1882. ✚

Christian Reformed Church Renewal Movement Stands Against LGBTQ Theology

Pastors in the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC), a 200,000-member denomination in the U.S. and Canada, have launched a renewal movement aiming to hold church officials to the historic biblical view of sexuality.

Organized in 2021, the Abide Project seeks “to uphold the historic, beautiful, Biblical understanding of human sexuality in doctrine, discipleship, and discipline” in the CRC.

Once forbidding movies, card-playing and dancing, the CRC has since drifted in a liberalizing direction in recent generations. Across the past decade, a push for affirmation of those persons claiming LGBTQ identities has gained momentum and, in response, prompted the organization of the Abide Project.



The point of contention is a report adopted in 1973 by the CRC's highest body of authority, the Synod. The report states that believers with same-sex attractions are to be fully accepted in the church, but declares homosexuality to be “a condition of disordered sexuality” and “Homosexualism—as explicit homosexual practice—must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.” This has been the official position of the CRC since 1973.

In September 2020, a Grand Rapids, Michigan, congregation ordained a same-sex married woman to the office of deacon, stating: “Our understanding is that all synodical reports and decisions related to homosexuality have been *pastoral advice* [italics theirs] to the churches.”

Concerned CRC pastors began to meet virtually, with successive meetings drawing more people than the last. A steering committee was formed to coordinate efforts. The Abide Project

was chosen for a name to highlight the need to abide in Christ as the true vine.

A denominational committee appointed in 2016 released a Human Sexuality Report presenting the biblical/theological view of sexual identity and activity maintained by the historic Christian church. It recommends for Synod to declare that “the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status.” All CRC ministers, elders and deacons would be required to hold the historic church's view of marriage and sexuality.

Synod 2022 is scheduled to meet June 10-16 in Michigan at Calvin University. The Abide Project's stated goal is to adopt the Human Sexuality Report and hold all church leaders to the historic biblical view of sexuality. ✚

African United Methodist Delegate Vaccination Effort Draws Liberal Opposition

The United Methodist News Service reported in November that two remaining obstacles to holding the long-delayed United Methodist General Conference—according to its organizing

United Methodist leaders in Africa approached fellow United Methodists in the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA), seeking help for their regions' delegates to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to meet U.S. government requirements to enter the United States.

As a result of consultations initiated by African United Methodist leaders, the WCA first approached the Council of Bishops to see if they were planning to help overseas delegates access vaccines. According to WCA leaders, the apportionment-funded bureaucracy had no plans to do so.

The WCA invited unofficial caucuses across the theological spectrum to

help fellow delegates in need access vaccines. Evangelical caucuses accepted this invitation, while more liberal caucuses either declined or did not respond.

For many non-U.S. United Methodist delegates, receiving a COVID-19 vaccine requires extensive travel they cannot afford. The campaign aims to provide funds to help delegates access vaccines.

The WCA states that support is “being made available to all delegates in need without regard to where they might stand on any legislation pending before General Conference.”

Now liberal caucus figures and bishops are denouncing these efforts to provide vaccine equity for non-American delegates. The LGBTQ liberationist Reconciling Ministries Network publicly disparaged the effort, declaring that it “will not participate in or endorse any effort” focused on helping non-American United Methodist General Conference delegates to be vaccinated.

Within a two-day span (January 18-19) a press release from three bishops, another press release from the executive committee of the Council of Bishops, and a denunciation from the liberal Love Your Neighbor caucus coalition, all echoed similar talking points.

Critics denounce the vaccine-access initiative as “inequitable” because it does not help vaccinate people beyond General Conference delegates.

An anti-WCA statement from three liberal central-conference bishops—**Harald Rückert** of Germany, **Rudy Juan** of the southern Philippines, and **Eben Nhwatiwa** of Zimbabwe—asserts that in pursuing this effort, WCA failed to take “some modest time to consult with the church leaders in the Central Conferences.” However, this effort was initiated by African United Methodist leaders, and consultations between American and non-American partners has been ongoing.

The UMNS article amplified accusations of “colonialism” but chose to not quote WCA President **Keith Boyette**’s direct response (sent to UMNS) to such baseless claims. Furthermore, UMNS touted the alleged “appearance of perceived or real influence of the vote of General Conference delegates” but chose not to mention that vaccine-access support is being offered to *all* delegates. ✚



COVID-19 vaccine is administered in Ghana. Liberal Americans are now picking a fight by opposing any effort to bring vaccine access to United Methodist delegates in less privileged parts of the world. (Photo: Wikipedia)

body, the Commission on the General Conference—are COVID-19 vaccines and travel visas for non-American delegates. Both are interrelated, since the U.S. federal government bars unvaccinated persons entry to the country.

Some 61 percent of the global population has been at least partially vaccinated against COVID-19, but availability has been unequal.

Now some theologically progressive officials are criticizing U.S. evangelicals for helping non-American General Conference delegates access those vaccines.



Fr. Marcus Walker (Photo: The Times / Jack Hill)

Church of England Priest Denounces Putin's False 'Christian Orthodox' Faith

Russian President **Vladimir Putin's** military offensive against Ukraine has resulted in wide scale destruction and loss of life. U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency analysts estimated on March 8 that between 2,000 and 4,000 Ukrainian forces and between 5,000 to 6,000 Russian soldiers had been killed, in addition to civilian casualties.

Church of England officials are among those religious leaders delivering forceful statements condemning the Russian invasion. At the outset of the war, Archbishop of Canterbury **Justin Welby** and Archbishop of York **Stephen Cottrell** released a

joint statement condemning Putin, calling his attack "an act of great evil."

Among the denunciations of Putin's actions was a sermon delivered by Fr. **Marcus Walker** on February 27 at St. Bartholomew the Great, the oldest parish church in London and the site of several sermons delivered by **John Wesley**. Walker, a leading Church of England clergyman, made clear that the Russian forces were the unjust aggressors, remarking that "Vladimir Putin resolved to unleash hell on his neighbor."

"[Putin] has seen the Gospel of peace and heard the words of love given to us and given to him by our God, and he has kissed the icons of the mother holding her child, and he has decided to trample untold numbers of children into the

frost and mud of Ukraine and see how many mothers weep at the sight of their dead children," Walker declared.

The Anglican priest, who lived for a time in Moscow as a child, warned of Russian soldiers, "They are enemies and must be fought as such, and will, please God, be beaten. But they are still human. And in the face of the young conscripts, we see the face of Christ." ✝



Russian President Vladimir Putin pictured January 17, 2017 (Photo: Russian Presidential Press and Information Office / Wikimedia Commons)

United Methodist General Conference Further Postponed

An organizing commission that facilitates the governing body of the United Methodist Church has again postponed the global gathering—this time until 2024—citing a backlog of U.S. visas for overseas delegates and ongoing, though rapidly diminishing, COVID restrictions. Originally scheduled to take place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020, United Methodist General Conference was first pushed back a year due to COVID-19 restrictions and again delayed the following year to convene in August 2022.

General Conference delegates are widely expected to vote on the negotiated *Protocol on reconciliation and grace through separation* the next time General Conference meets. The Protocol is a plan for dividing the denomination into two or more churches.

The powerful Commission on General Conference made the announcement on

March 3. Commission members privately described intense institutionalist pressure to prevent the repeatedly rescheduled General Conference from meeting before 2024.

"This decision was extremely unwise and potentially destructive," commented UMAction Director **John Lomperis** in a statement released with UMAction Steering Committee Chair **Martin Nicholas** and IRD President **Mark Tooley**

following the announcement. "It is essentially an extraordinary filibuster of the entire General Conference even as United Methodists across the spectrum agree a negotiated denominational split is needed."

The three added that, "The Commission's majority and those who pressured

them into this destructive path will provoke confusion, more church division, and litigation in which there are no winners."

Other major denominational assemblies and international conferences remain scheduled to meet in person this year, including the Episcopal Church General Convention in July, which draws

deputies from 17 nations, and the Anglican Communion Lambeth Conference, which invites bishops from more than 40 Anglican provinces. (Many Global South bishops,

however, do not plan to participate in the Lambeth Conference due to Archbishop of Canterbury **Justin Welby** inviting U.S. and Canadian bishops who are in same-sex marriages.) At least half of U.S. United Methodist annual conferences have returned to meeting largely in person. ✝





In an exclusive *Vanity Fair* interview, Jerry Falwell, Jr. and his wife Becki discussed what led to his resignation as president of Liberty University. (Photo: WSLs)

Jerry Falwell, Jr.'s Sad Story

by Bart Gingerich

Recently, **Jerry Falwell, Jr.** and his wife, **Becki**, were interviewed in the pages of *Vanity Fair* about their precipitous fall from grace. The former president of Christian college juggernaut Liberty University drew ire for his vociferous support for **Donald Trump** as President, often reliant upon social media bombast.

Not all Falwell critics were secular. Many conservative evangelicals found his conduct unbecoming of a Christian. Eventually, his wife's marital infidelity (plus other scandalous behavior) came to light, resulting in his ouster from both Liberty and the wider evangelical community.

The story itself is sordid, and the writer betrays progressive biases in its myriad digs at the Moral Majority and the Religious Right. One worries that the Falwells are attempting a rebrand. Their words betray a desire to put some daylight between themselves and conservative church-going Christians, with **Franklin Graham** cast in a villainous role, excommunicating the Falwell family from the evangelical movement.

Periodicals found in the shelf of grocery store check-out aisles are to be taken, not with a pinch, but with an entire

ocean's worth of salt. However, important themes came to the fore in reading the interview.

For one, a man not well-established in his faith was tasked with leading a large, important evangelical institution. Falwell goes to some lengths to express how he was a bit of a spiritual free-spirit and how he finds "institutional religion" distasteful. He does recount a sort of conversion experience, but his frustrations with religious "fuddy-duddies" is made prominent and apparent. He comes across as shackled with the legacy of his father, among the most prominent religious and political leaders of the late 20th century.

Revealingly, Falwell admitted to the interviewer, "[P]eople think I'm a religious person. But I'm not." I would hazard a guess that many Christian critics of the younger Falwell threw up their hands in frustration and responded, "Oh, don't worry, we knew! At least after a while."

Regardless of what one thought of his political sensibilities or skills as a college president, the man's public words and actions were not in keeping with mature Christian leadership. This is not to dismiss him, his wife, or their family. Everyone is a sinner; everyone needs to repent of sin;

sin is destructive; we must forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us. But there is no shortage of folly and willful ignorance when it comes to this story, especially when it comes to Falwell's enablers.

There are at least two takeaways for traditional Christians. First, Falwell was upsettingly consistent with the "it's a relationship not a religion" mantra repeated in the interview. Religion entails virtuous conduct and holy living, calling into question our habits with regard to alcohol, sex, speech, money, and how we speak of dead parents. Yes, teetotalist culture has dysfunctions, folks misfire on biblical principles because they are foolish, and plenty of groups wrongfully suppress Christian liberty. But intemperance, dishonoring parents, uncontrolled speech, a neglected marriage, and a whole spate of other failings are huge problems that can destroy our lives and the lives of others, regardless of whether or not we're a Christian college president.

Our identity as adopted heirs in Christ makes a demand upon us. It's not merely a static thing we think about or agree upon as a matter of opinion. It entails a certain kind of life—one of holiness and wisdom, almost always marked by frequent repentance for our many sins.

Thankfully, as **Joshua Gibbs** has pointed out, evangelicals are inconsistent with their language. They talk good sense about wisdom and morality, at least until a Bible opens. Then, suddenly, we are incapable of holiness, even though it's actually what we've been made for and what God's indwelling grace makes possible. It doesn't take long before a sort of despairing antinomianism takes over, with church attendance serving as an emotional therapy and coping mechanism for this insubstantial spiritual life. This sort of rhetorical double-mindedness needs to be abandoned. We do well to recover a language of virtue and confident exhortations to practical holiness, all without ineffective school-marmishness.

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Prayers for Ukraine

by Mark Tooley

Church pronouncements about international affairs often are detached, anodyne, and sometimes surreal. Russia's attack on Ukraine is no exception. Vacuous statements came from the National Council of Churches, Anabaptists, Mainline Protestants, and in the pages of the Evangelical Left magazine *Sojourners*.

Helpfully, the National Council of Churches website included a link to a considerably more vigorous statement from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. Here are some meaty excerpts:

The scare and intimidation tactics with the presence of the armed vehicles and over a hundred thousand of soldiers around the borders of Ukraine combined with systematic cyber-attacks at all levels of life in Ukraine can only be interpreted as terroristic threats that target innocent lives of Ukrainian citizens. They seem to be instigated by an extremely low sense of self-esteem among the leadership of what has become the aggressor nation of modern times—which creates a very dangerous set of circumstances.

And:

Ukraine—the geographic reality—with its own sovereign borders has always been coveted by neighbors from anywhere beyond those borders because of the expanse of her natural resources... It was and is this land that so many other countries have attempted to annex, dominate, subordinate and benefit from not only in modern history, but throughout the early Kyivan-Rus' history.

And:

It is no secret that Russia, under the guise of the "Soviet Union" wanted

not only the rich natural resources, but just as importantly, a buffer zone between itself and the rest of the Western world. Further, Ukraine, as a blossoming democracy inspires surrounding nations. Therein lies the key to comprehending modern Russian and other earlier invasions. In seeking to control the land, the resources and the political system, hardly a thought has ever been given to the real people who live in that land. These people are the "nation" of Ukraine, and that nation possesses a self-identity that is impossible to annihilate.

And:

Through centuries of invasions the "nation" was unimportant to the invaders. Thus, the "nation" bore the loss of millions and millions of victims to genocide, most atrociously under the former Soviet Union and

OF THE PRECIOUS LAND AND RESOURCES OF THE COUNTRY OF UKRAINE. STRENGTHEN THE PEOPLE AS THEY FACE THIS GREAT DANGER, TURNING TO YOU IN THE IMMEASURABLY DEEP FAITH, TRUST AND LOVE THEY HAVE PLACED IN YOU ALL THEIR LIVES. SEND YOUR HEAVENLY LEGIONS, O LORD, COMMANDED BY THE PATRON OF KYIV, ARCHANGEL MICHAEL, TO CRUSH THE DESIRES OF THE AGGRESSOR WHOSE DESIRE IS TO ERADICATE OUR PEOPLE.

You know a prayer is serious when heavenly legions and the Archangel Michael are summoned.

The Ukrainian Church in the USA obviously is praying for their brethren in the homeland, and so their supplications are more explicit and fervent. They recall



its Holodomor. Throughout all this history of terror, the self-identity of the "nation" survived—in the hearts, minds and souls of the people. It is with the people that we are desperately concerned as we write these words. It is for them, our brothers and sisters, that we ask you to join us in prayer.

And finally, the prayer, all in caps:

OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, LORD, ARE ONCE AGAIN THREATENED BY AGGRESSORS WHO SEE THEM ONLY AS OBSTACLES BLOCKING THE PATH TO THE COMPLETE DOMINATION

the history of Russian aggression against and exploitation of Ukraine. They pray for the survival of Ukraine and crushing the "desires of the aggressor whose desire is to eradicate our people."

In contrast, the National Council of Churches urges "diplomatic tactics instead of warfare," commends "export control focused on Russian industries," applauds "reassurance that the Ukraine will not be joining NATO in the near term," and calls on "formal agreement prohibiting nuclear weapon placement by either NATO or Russia."

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Methodist Theologians Convene in Historic Summit

by Mark Tooley

Sixty traditionalist Methodist theologians convened earlier this winter to draft a declaration of Wesleyan doctrine. Here's their news release:

Over sixty Wesleyan scholars from various theological disciplines met in Alexandria, VA, for the Next Methodism Summit, Jan. 21–23, 2022. The Summit was sponsored by The John Wesley Institute under the direction of Dr. **Ryan Danker**. Scholars to this invitation-only gathering gathered to write a document entitled “The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness.”

Keynote speakers for the event included Dr. **David Watson** and Bishop **Scott Jones**. Preachers during the four worship services of the Summit included: Dr. **Maxie Dunnam**, Dr. **Mathieu Gnonhoussou**, Dr. **Joy Moore**, and Dr. **Michael Pasquarello**. Worship leadership was provided by Bishop Jones, Rev. **Jessica LaGrone**, Dr. **Jonathan Powers**, Rev. **Tesia Mallory**, and Dr. **Stephen Rankin**.

Scholars were invited to participate from around the country and the globe. Covid-19 restrictions hindered most international guests. Those gathered were

primarily from the United Methodist Church but included participants who are Anglican, Episcopal, Nazarene, Salvationist, and Church of God, Cleveland.

Sessions for the Summit were primarily dedicated to working groups where portions of the larger document were composed in dialogue. Dr. **Kenneth Collins** has agreed to write a shorter and accessible version of the larger document. Both documents and videos of addresses will be released soon.

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Sixty-five traditional Methodist theology scholars gather January 20-22 at Washington Street United Methodist Church in Alexandria, VA for The Next Methodism Summit. Their work signals a bright future for the intellectual and spiritual vitality of the Wesleyan movement. (Photo: Mark Tooley / IRD).



Theologians at the Next Methodism Summit participate in a service of Holy Communion Jan. 21, 2022 in Alexandria, Virginia (Photo: Mark Tooley / IRD)

One address came from United Theological Seminary Dean **David Watson**, who said:

This is a gathering of scholars who in one way or another find themselves among the “traditionalists” in our neck of the Christian woods. Some people don’t like the name “traditionalist.” I do. I like tradition. Some don’t like the word conservative, but I think we would all acknowledge that there are important aspects of our tradition that we need to conserve. I should also note that there are excellent scholars who are not here this weekend, some because they can’t make it, some because they represent other theological positions and camps. Our gathering here is not to diminish them, nor to exalt ourselves over them, nor to neglect the significance of their scholarship. It is to gather as a group of scholars who share some important commitments, and to think about what the future of Methodism might look like in light of these commitments.

And:

The saltiness of the church is that which sets us apart. It is our inherent distinctiveness. It is what makes us, us. Christians should be different. We should be a peculiar people as the King James Version renders 1 Peter 2:9, and the people called Methodist should be a peculiar subset of this peculiar people.

And:

We in the West are going to have to recognize that the Next Methodism will not be primarily a Western or white phenomenon. And as scholars of

the next Methodism, we are going to have to learn to speak and write and listen across cultures. We would do well intentionally to collaborate with people from the majority world. It cannot simply be the colonial model of us teaching them. They will also teach us. We are going to have to make our work accessible to people who make less than \$100 a month. We are going to have to think about post-secondary and seminary education according to new paradigms. All of this will require not just conversation, but genuine relationships of Christian love and fellowship. It will require humility and vulnerability. Majority-world Christianity is here. These brothers and sisters in Christ have already begun to

re-evangelize the West. And the question for us is, “How can we, as scholars, serve this burgeoning global church, preserving and passing on those beliefs and practices that are most central to our Methodist identity?”

The summit also included the release of a new book *The Next Methodism: Theological, Social, and Missional Foundations for Global Methodism*, with chapters of counsel for future Methodism by 36 Methodist thinkers, including myself. Most of the authors were at the summit.

I attended the summit, which I smilingly called a Methodist “Council of Dort,” as an observer. Its collection of great minds committed to orthodox Methodist theology and spiritual vitality was magnificent. Its impact may endure for decades and even centuries, perhaps ultimately equaling the Council of Dort’s impact for global Calvinism over the last 400 years.

If God be for it, who can be against it? ✚



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

Prayers for Ukraine

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The Geneva-based The World Council of Churches, in its Ukraine statement, cited the “mad progression towards war” and prayed for “de-escalation, and for dialogue instead of threats,” noting that “God’s people—and members of the ecumenical fellowship—find themselves on both sides of the current confrontation,” obviously referring to the Russian Orthodox Church, which is a prominent member of the WCC. Perhaps no statement at all would have been preferable.

A church statement on evil actions is fairly useless if it can’t name the evil actions and must instead adopt a neutral stance. Of course, sanctimonious saber-rattling prayers are also unhelpful, but

the Ukrainian Church opened its prayer with:

*WE YOUR SINFUL CHILDREN
TURN TO YOU WITH HUMILITY
IN OUR HEARTS AND BOW OUR
HEADS LOW BEFORE YOU. WE
BESEECH YOUR LOVING KIND-
NESS AND ABUNDANT BLESSINGS
UPON THE NATION—THE PEOP-
LE—OF UKRAINE DURING THESE
DAYS OF GREAT DANGER TO
THEIR SAFETY AND WELL-BEING.*

This prayer’s core message was: yes we are sinners, and we need YOUR help, Lord, as our nation faces potential conquest and destruction. We all can pray for the Lord to answer this prayer with His angels. And may the Lord also deliver us from and forgive us all for vacuous pontifications and prayers. ✚

Evangelical Left Panel Condemns Pro-Life Movement

by Hope Rawlson

People have, want, and need abortion for a variety of reasons, and they are all valid,” asserted **Elaina Ramsay**, founder of a Christian pro-choice abortion clinic and Executive Director of Faith Choice Ohio, an affiliate of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC).

Ramsay, alongside six panelists, condemned the anti-abortion movement in the United States during an October

movement.” Schenck described meetings with political strategists who promised: “You give me something that makes your people fearful, makes your people angry, and I’ll get the voters to sign anything you want them to sign.”

Like Schenck, **Jerushah Duford** criticized the church for its approach to abortion. Duford, a granddaughter of the late evangelist **Billy Graham**, stated that

when women considering abortion discover she is a Christian, they anticipate “shame and judgment” from her as a representative of the church.

“That’s not my Jesus, that’s not how he would respond,” Duford affirmed, but added, “I cannot say that’s not how you would be treated.”

Duford hopes that women will “come to the church like a hospital,” rather than flee to an abortion clinic.

While Duford appeared to maintain a pro-life position, most panelists articulated a pro-choice belief.

Freedom Road founder and president **Lisa Sharon Harper** echoed Ramsay about the validity of abortion, stating that abortion is a “gray area” in Scripture.

Harper quoted Exodus 21:22-23, which describes penalties to someone who harms a pregnant woman causing her to miscarry, as an example of a biblical law that treats the life of the born and the unborn differently. Exodus chapter 21 states that a man causing a woman to miscarry will be subject to a fine. However, if a man causes a woman to lose her life, then he shall be killed. Harper claims this law proves the lives of the unborn child and the mother are valued differently.

Schenck built on Harper’s argument by appealing to Jewish teaching on abortion. He said that there is an “absence of any reference to [abortion] by Jesus.” However, Schenck states, knowing that Jesus was Jewish, Christians can assume that Jesus “held the same belief on this subject as all other Jews at that time.” The former pro-life activist described Judaism as not rejecting abortion, but rather teaching that the fetus “is of a different status than the breathing.” While the life of the unborn does possess worth, “if there is a question between the life of the mother and the life of the developing human in the womb, there is a moral obligation to abort the pregnancy.”

Theologian and social activist **Ron Sider**, author of *Completely Pro-Life*, sought to broaden the meaning of the term “pro-life” beyond opposition to abortion. According to Sider, a true pro-life Christianity addresses “racism, poverty, environmental issues, and so on.”

The panelists hosted by Red Letter Christians and Freedom Road fall into a broader category of progressive Christianity. While they offer insightful criticism of the pro-life movement, the condoning of abortion for any reason is not within the historic Christian tradition.

As Christians, we are called to a pro-life position, which need not end at birth.

In Matthew chapter 25, Jesus tells of a king speaking to those entering his kingdom. “For I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited

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Elaina Ramsay, Andrea Lucado, Jerushah Duford, Tatiana Torres, Ron Sider, Randall Balmer, and Rev. Rob Schenck participate in an October 25, 2021 town hall on abortion and reproductive rights moderated by Lisa Sharon Harper of Freedom Road and Shane Claiborne of Red Letter Christians. (Photo: Zoom screen capture).

25 town hall discussion on Christianity and abortion hosted by Evangelical Left groups Red Letter Christians and Freedom Road.

Author and minister the Rev. **Rob Schenck** advocated for pro-life causes on Capitol Hill across 25 years before developing a more pro-choice view. On the panel, Schenck described witnessing politicians use the issue of abortion as a tool for political gain.

The first time Schenck heard a senator say “abortion is murder” on the floor of the U.S. Senate, Schenck felt the senator was thinking not of “babies or moms,” but “of the victory that was for our



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Bishop Clark Lowenfield of the Houston, Texas-based Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast (right) is joined by Bishops Steven Tighe (Diocese of the Southwest), John Guernsey (Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic) at the Anglican Prayer Service preceding the National March for Life on January 21, 2022 in Falls Church, Virginia (Photo: Heidi Reichert / Anglican Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic)

Anglican Bishop: Don't Get Comfortable as Court Revisits Roe

by Jeffrey Walton

Anglicans Christians praying to uphold the sanctity of human life and for an end to abortion can be encouraged by recent legislative and judicial developments, but shouldn't grow comfortable, according to a bishop of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA).

"I'm comfortable with how close we are getting, if God so wills, to redirect and correct what was done in *Roe v Wade*," shared Bishop **Clark Lowenfield** of the Houston, Texas-based Diocese of the Western Gulf Coast. But, "I learned a long time ago that I need to be wary when I become comfortable."

Lowenfield was joined by Diocese of the Southwest Bishop **Steven Tighe**, Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic Bishop **John Guernsey**, and Deacon **Georgette Forney** of Anglicans for Life. Forney also spoke and led prayers at the January 21 service held at The Falls Church Anglican in Falls Church, Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C. Following the service, participants boarded buses that took them to the National March for Life in Washington.

"If you want a religion to make you feel comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity," Lowenfield said. "Inherently, I think the Christian life is supposed to make you uncomfortable."

The Texas bishop stated that the default of American culture "is that every day we are to be comfortable, happy. We often lose touch with reality [believing that] the discomfort the Christian faith calls us to must be for someone else."

Lowenfield voiced gratitude for Forney's efforts transitioning the Anglicans for Life ministry from "not just anti-abortion" and into wider ministry around the sanctity of human life from conception until natural death.

In asking what participants' response would be if *Roe* is overturned, Lowenfield sought to root the group in the importance of "learning God's purpose for your life."

"It's not about you. It's about God. It's about his Gospel movement in this world. It's about his son Jesus and his Holy Spirit now working among us," Lowenfield summarized, proposing that abortion is a failure of Christian discipleship.

"The Christian Church, if disciplined, would never put up with something like abortion," Lowenfield insisted. "For us, maybe as you march today, and maybe as you contemplate what a post-*Roe v Wade* world might be, are you prepared to not look for the next cause, but rather are you prepared to ask God 'what do you want me to do in discipling someone else?'"

In reading Psalm 139, regularly quoted in the Pro-Life movement for the verse "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb," Lowenfield asked: "Do you believe it? and why? You have been taught to believe God's word—someone taught you. No matter what purpose you have in the years ahead, you must teach someone you love that this is God's word, and you must believe it, and you must live by it."

The prayer service followed a January 20 youth summit and preceded a day-long conference on January 22 co-hosted by Anglicans for Life and the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic. The annual summit included presentations to equip local churches to oppose abortion, support pregnant mothers and their children, oppose euthanasia, and witness for the sanctity of human life.

Lowenfield spoke at the same time as Pro-Life activists believe they have seen growing legislative and judicial momentum in the past year. A novel Texas law banning abortions after the detection of a fetal heartbeat effectively halved the number of abortions performed there. The decision of the U.S. Supreme Court to permit the Texas law to remain in effect pending legal challenge in lower courts has given Pro-Life Americans encouragement that a separate case, a 15-week abortion ban in Mississippi, will potentially be upheld. Such a ruling would chip away at—or overturn outright—the court's 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision that invalidated state-level abortion restrictions.

In noting the Texas anti-abortion legislation, Lowenfield encouraged the marchers, "Let's keep going." ✝



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Jerry Falwell, Jr.' Sad Story

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Evangelicals used to be—and, in some circles, still are—good at this sort of thing. We'd do well to recover and maintain this.

Second, churches, Christian schools, and ministries must be discerning in leadership. Christians may feel pity at the Falwells' attempts to put on an act while assuming leadership at LU when the family patriarch passed away. Jerry Jr. exhibited great entrepreneurial gifts (particularly when it came to distance learning in the age of high-speed internet), but was holding the office as president necessary for him to exercise those gifts to Liberty's good? The Falwells did not speak up about their sense of inadequacy and poor fit for the role right after Jerry, Sr. suddenly passed away. But one wonders if the "father-to-son" dynamic couldn't have been questioned and reevaluated by the Board of Trustees and other university leaders. It

may be that Jerry Falwell, Jr. wouldn't have engaged in such public, embarrassing examples of self-sabotage; it may have left Liberty in a better position and state of spiritual health. These are hypotheticals, but the Falwell implosion was very real. Ministries must take such an example under advisement.

It's painful to see scandal afflict the church. It's also painful to see those who profess Christ fall into destructive life choices that hurt not only themselves but

many others. Schadenfreude is not the appropriate response to the Falwell scandal. Repentance and vigilant sober-mindedness are. ✚



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From the President: New York Times Evangelicals

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planting and campus ministry, better catechesis, shaping intellectual leaders in academia, and creating a "Protestant social teaching," similar to Catholic public theology, but "Protestant versions might share 75 percent of its ideas, while being perhaps less hierarchical and more individualistic."

Keller's citing evangelism is most important. Christianity is demographically declining in America even as it grows globally. Every American church should be evangelistic, which is not only countercultural in society but increasingly countercultural within American Christianity. The word itself is often discomfiting. But winning lost souls is the church's first goal in every time and place.

Also important is Keller's citation of catechesis. Evangelicals must, to survive, uphold sound doctrine. Mainline Protestantism's inexorable decline evinces the bitter and deathly fruits of theological liberalism. *The New York Times* rarely spotlights Mainline Protestants because they have made themselves societally irrelevant. Lest there be any doubt, recent Evangelical congregations that, with much

ado, abandoned traditional Christian sexual teaching quickly imploded. Cleaving to historic Christian ethics is deeply controversial. But discarding them is disastrous for the church.

To my knowledge, only one of the personalities whom Brooks cites has publicly indicated any move away from traditional Christian sexual teaching. If she follows that journey, she will have left Evangelicalism for liberal Protestantism. A renewed Evangelicalism must stick with universal Christianity on doctrine and ethics while stressing traditional Evangelical strengths of evangelism and pragmatic entrepreneurship. Evangelicalism is growing globally, and it is growing among immigrants in the U.S., by stressing personal dynamic faith in Christ with traditional doctrine.

New York Times and other secular coverage of Evangelicalism, favorable or not, recognizes that Evangelicalism remains a major dynamic force, even in a less formally religious America. A robust, strong and healthy Evangelicalism serves the interests of everyone who cares about a robust, strong and healthy American democracy. ✚

Evangelical Left Panel Condemns Pro-Life Movement

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me into your home," the king says. The righteous ask the king when they served him in that way. The King responds, "When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me."

Christians are called to help needy and suffering people in all aspects of society, including unborn children and their mothers. Pro-life Christians should care about the unborn, the homeless, the trafficked, the prisoners, the elderly, the wounded, the persecuted. Christians should be a voice for the voiceless, from the beginning of life until death. ✚

IRD Diary: How Did United Methodists Get to This Place?

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promoting supposed missions at the expense of connectionalism and unity.

The Judicial Council was asked for a ruling on one of the proposed amendments as a test to clarify what would happen if it were passed: “Would it give every region the latitude to change its particular stance on human sexuality, and, therefore, most everything else?” The Judicial Council came back and said, “Yes.” Nevertheless, the shift toward loosening our prohibitions had gained traction, so the amendments passed GC by the requisite 67%. The amendments were sent back to the annual conferences for ratification, where they were soundly defeated approximately 75% to 25%, pretty much the exact opposite of General Conference. By then, people had figured out that the whole effort to regionalize the church was a ploy for the church’s left wing to get its way. Thank God for Bible-believing folks in annual conferences who could see through the efforts to regionalize our standards for ordination and marriage!

In 2012, at General Conference in Tampa, there was a two-pronged approach to loosen our stance on homosexuality. One effort was from the Council of Bishops to have a set-aside bishop to supposedly keep wayward bishops in check. That effort failed because many felt that the main purpose of a set-aside bishop was to increase the power of the Council of Bishops, so they could do what they wanted to do. They also worked to stop “Plan UMC,” an effort led by conservatives who wanted to rein in the church’s General Agencies. In the denomination’s agencies liberals have historically outnumbered conservatives, and the agencies push a pro-homosexual ordination and marriage agenda. Plan UMC passed in Tampa, but was shot down at the last minute by the Judicial Council. However, because the issue was pressed, every agency except the Board of Church and Society willingly reduced their numbers of directors. Accountability was somewhat regained, and church law still dictated that no local church



LGBTQ activists rally around the central Communion table at the close of the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, OR. (Photo: Mike DuBose/UM News Service)

monies could be spent by any general church agency to promote the acceptance of homosexuality as compatible with Christian teaching.

Then at the Portland General Conference in 2016 protests ramped up, more liberal delegates and bishops were elected, including **Karen Oliveto**, who is a married lesbian in direct contradiction to our BOD. Most delegates were ready to once again vote the same way they had since 1972 against condoning the practice of homosexuality, but a semi-compromise was struck to create a Commission on a Way Forward (COWF) to craft legislation for a special session of General Conference to be held in 2019. The Commission was stacked with liberals and “Progressive” bishops were over-represented. Some United Methodists have lately begun calling themselves “Centrists,” advocating that everyone compromise their values for the sake of unity, as if unity is more important than Christian teaching. You either uphold the Bible and the *Discipline*, or you don’t.

The Commission gave their report in St. Louis at the called special session of General Conference in February of 2019, and they presented their preferred legislation called the “One Church Plan.” This

plan allowed various groups and churches to choose to do what they wanted, and we would still be called “United” Methodists? Thankfully, GC 2019 upheld historic Christianity in an alternative “Traditional Plan,” albeit by a close vote of 53 percent to 47 percent. However, if approximately 31 more persons from more orthodox Africa had been given their visas, the Traditional Plan may have been approved by as much as 58 percent to 42 percent. When it became apparent that the liberals were going to run out the clock by making multiple amendments to the Traditional Plan, the Lord made a way for a conservative delegate to call for the vote and the Traditional Plan passed.

In this brief synopsis, one sees the progression of things from small disobediences to larger ones. Covenants and vows have been cast aside, so it makes a person wonder, “Can we live together?” There are bishops, annual conferences, Boards of Ordained Ministry, and others who are still disregarding what we have voted in favor of since 1972.

We need to be in prayer for [the next] General Conference and for all the delegates who will be a part of it. May the Lord give them wisdom and discernment in what He would have them do. ✚

IRD Diary:

How Did United Methodists Get to This Place?

by Cindy McClendon

In 1972, due to the liberal influences of the time, the delegates to the United Methodist General Conference felt the need to pass legislation that would state that we stand on biblical principles regarding the practice of homosexuality. It has been included in our *Book of Discipline* ever since. However, through the years the battle has been ongoing.

General Conference 1996 in Denver was the first time that Bishops openly declared their defiance of the *Book of Discipline* they had committed to uphold at their consecration. Fifteen Bishops broke ranks with the *Book of Discipline* (BOD) and the Council of Bishops (COB). Plenty of clergy, mostly in the US and Europe, had already broken their vows to uphold the BOD. Gay rights groups somehow found out where every delegate was staying in Denver, and put door-mats at their hotel rooms that said, "We'll open the door for you, if you'll open the door for us." Well, the vote didn't go their way by a 65-35% margin, so they barred the exits at the convention center, and, finally, when the delegates were able to push through, they were indiscriminately slapped and spit upon.

In 2000, General Conference was held in Cleveland, Ohio. Once again activists opposed the historic stance of the Church, the one throughout Christendom's history. More bishops were openly aligned on the side of the protesters, as were many delegates, but

once again their efforts failed. One young woman even climbed on a ledge over where the South Carolina delegation was sitting, saying she would throw herself down as a protest against our denomination's stance. Wisely, Bishop **Dan Solomon**, appropriately named, said for

down, but more delegates and bishops stood with them in protest, even though they had promised in their ordination, consecration, and membership vows to uphold the denomination's beliefs.

In 2008 tactics changed at the General Conference in Fort Worth. The more liberal side tried to come at the presenting problem from a subtle, devious angle. Thirty-two Constitutional Amendments were proposed that would allow each geographic section of the church to write its own *Book of Discipline*, supposedly based on each region's particular missional needs. It was, in reality, a way to defeat the traditional side of the church with a "live and let live" take on human sexuality. Various conferences would no longer be called Jurisdictional (in the U.S.) or Central Conferences (outside the U.S.),

but were to be renamed as "Regional Conferences" everywhere in the *Book of Discipline*. It was an attempt to promote the One Church Plan years before the Special Session of 2019 by

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The Rev. Will Green lies on the floor of the 2016 United Methodist General Conference in Portland, OR, with his hands and feet bound to protest the denomination's policies on human sexuality. Delegates returning from their lunch break passed protestors lying on the floor and lining the entryway to the meeting area. Green officially led his New England congregation out of the United Methodist Church in 2020. (Photo: Mike DuBose/UMNS)

everyone to keep their heads down and pray. The woman was rescued and hundreds were arrested as they stormed the convention hall.

At the 2004 General Conference in Pittsburgh protesters were emboldened to ratchet up their tactics. The presiding bishop, as if on cue, heard a drum beat and said, "We have guests among us." The pro-gay protesters marched in and harassed the delegates, taking up time for about \$20,000 a minute, and did the unthinkable when they went by the stage. One of them picked up the pottery communion chalice and hurled it to the floor, where it shattered. Once again those who wanted to change our BOD were voted



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