General Conference 2012 Results in Call to Biblical Obedience

“The derogatory rules and restrictions in the Book of Discipline are immoral and unjust and no longer deserve our loyalty and obedience. Thus the time has come for those of us who are faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to do what is required of us... The time has come to join in an act of Biblical obedience. I call on the more than 1,100 clergy [who have signed marriage initiatives] to stand firm in their resolve to perform marriages for same-sex couples and to do so in the course of their normal pastoral duties, thus defying the laws that prohibit them from doing so.... The time for talking is over. It’s time for us to act in defiance of unjust words of immoral and derogatory discrimination and laws that are doing harm to our LGBT sisters and brothers.” by Bishop Melvin Talbert

These prophetic words were spoken on the last day of General Conference 2012 in Tampa at the Love Your Neighbor Coalition Tabernacle. Bishop Talbert was joined at the dais by Retired Bishops Judy Craig, Violet Fisher, Elias Galvan, Susan Hassinger, Don Ott, Sharon Rader, Roy Sano, and Jack Tuell; and active Bishops Warner Brown, Sally Dyck, Grant Hagiya, Bob Hoshibata, John Schol, and Mary Ann Swenson.

The time has come to join in an act of Biblical obedience.

Annual and Jurisdictional Conferences Vote to Confront a Spiritual Crisis

Since GC2012, the failure to enact inclusive legislation has resulted not in defeat, but in a stronger call to "be the church right now". This issue of Kindred Connection is dedicated to ways various congregation, individuals, annual conferences and Jurisdictional conferences are acting to "be the church right now".

“The Spiritual Crisis Caused by the Requirement to Discriminate” is the title of a resolution submitted by MIND (Methodists in New Directions) — and passed — at the New York Annual Conference in June. Several other AC’s and Jurisdictional Conferences voted overwhelmingly to support similar legislation. The resolution, shortened here, calls disobedience to the discipline and obedience to Jesus’ commandment to love your neighbor. Full text available at: www.mindny.org/mind-initiatives/annual-conference-witness-2012/spiritual-crisis

Whereas, in his sermons "The New Birth" and "The Catholic Spirit," John Wesley taught that as long as we hold in common the essential elements of our faith, and as long as we unite in love, ... not only in word but in deed and in truth, then our hearts are right and we should walk together hand in hand and that differences of opinion ought not to tear this union of hearts asunder; and

Whereas, the forcible denial of rights and privileges to gay and lesbian persons through provisions in the Book of Discipline ... are not only a grave injustice, they strike at our union in affection, challenge our ability to live

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GENERAL CONFERENCE 2012—DID WE MAKE PROGRESS

Well, if you only consider the final votes for Book of Discipline changes for full inclusiveness, you might answer no!

But for those of us who remain deeply committed to carry the banner forward for full inclusiveness by the Church, we have satisfaction that we made some very important moves forward. Certainly not as fast as we pray for, but, never-the-less, forward. Here are some of the moves that made our message even stronger than ever before.

We formed a coalition of like-minded organizations that witnessed as a large ‘caucus’ in many new ways.

We gained more positive votes by percentage, than in 2008.

We had individual demonstrations of support by bishops, clergy, and laity (particularly USA persons) than ever before. This included personal messages, hugs, and participation in our final “ecclesial disobedience” demonstrations. This was so reinforcing and welcoming.

Our joining with RMN, MFSA, Affirmation, Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) and several others into one Common Witness Coalition provided numbers of volunteers and presence that we have not had before. That combination of organizations provided productive communication with GC 2012 leaders as we progressed during the conference.

Our petitions demonstrated a well coordinated effort at change. They represented several annual/jurisdictional conferences, congregations, small groups, and individuals across the nation. Our attendance during these legislative proceedings far exceeded any of those opposing our position (except pre-deposed delegates).

Our witness times had a significant, even emotional impact on many delegates. We called attention to hurtful speeches at the microphone, we stood for long periods at the barrier “bar” between the public and the delegates, in prayer, and finally we literally shut down the business of the conference by entering the conference floor and singing at the communion table for three or so hours. This elicited a beautiful closing prayer by the presiding bishop when reconvening. There were several bishops, clergy, and other delegates who joined us in this demonstration.

Your PRN Steering Committee members covered the costs of their lodgings.

(Continued on page 3)
ing, meals, and other costs as their contribution to this effort. I believe they deserve your praise for their contribution and your prayers for their continued work.

We also had many one-on-one contacts with delegates from Africa. Much understanding from each culture resulted. In some cases African delegates heard stories related not only to homosexuality, but also to transgender and intersex persons and their families introducing a level of complexity and diversity many had not considered before.

All in all, we believe we had a very productive effort and made a strong impact on many individuals.

(Continued from page 2)

**Who’s Getting Married?**

"Who’s getting married?" That was the near unanimous question folks at the Greenwood Car Show in Seattle asked as several of our church's senior members handed them a piece of "wedding cake." "Everyone," we replied, "Everyone who wants to. That’s why our church wants you to support Referendum 74."

Like many who attended General Conference 2012, we came home feeling pretty battered, exhausted and angry. Perhaps we had hoped for too much. Perhaps we had done too little. Perhaps we had not been as loving as grace would have us be to those with whom we disagree. No. We did what was right, worked as hard as we could and loved as much as we could. And in Washington State, which comprises most of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, there was lots of support to help us heal. Our AC's overwhelming vote to support Referendum 74, the statewide law guaranteeing marriage equality, was affirming and healing. The AC also passed overwhelmingly, a measure calling for churches and pastors to be Biblically obedient by offering full civil right to LGBT persons and by offering "the ministries and sacraments of the church to all persons on an equal basis".

So, how do we as a congregation live into this Biblical obedience? How can we support Referendum 74?

We served wedding cake to over 900 people at the Greenwood Car Show to take a stance. This car Show typically draws a crowd of about 200,000 car enthusiasts, extending for 1.5 miles along Greenwood Avenue, including right in front of our church. People come from all around and represent a very diverse cross section of Western Washington. Decorated with two plastic brides and lots of frosting, these cakes were offered in very small pieces, for free, to those who agreed with us and to the few who argued with us. We used this brief moment with folks to make it clear that our church wants to celebrate all kinds of marriage and to welcome all kinds of people.

Additionally, we offered tables and chairs for folks to sit and rest for a while, perhaps eat and for kids to color. In this area, we played continuously the excellent Drew Emery film *Inlaws and Outlaws*, a film depicting all kinds of marriage. Another viewing of this film on August 14 attracted many people we had never met. Afterwards, the producer led a discussion of what marriage equality means to all of us.

We think this is Biblically obedient.

Carol Waymack, Woodland Park UMC, Seattle
Touched by Love at General Conference 2012

It was mid-morning break early on during the plenary at General Conference and delegates and volunteers were streaming out for a much needed stretch. A small refreshment kiosk just outside the assembly hall was doing a brisk business—staffed by a friendly young man, probably in his early 20’s, who was graciously interacting with all of his customers. The next morning I noticed he was wearing a reconciling stole, and learned that those of us who were wearing stoles had made an impression on him and he had asked if he could wear one. It seems he had been struggling with his own sexual identity and was deeply moved by the inclusive message the stoles represented and the support of the people who were wearing them. His rainbow stole and his warm smile greeted us each day for the rest of the Conference—and, in spite of the vitriol and negativity we experienced at GC, I knew that we had made a difference in at least one person’s life—and our work was not in vain.

Important Conversations at General Conference

While there is a lot of hustle, bustle and long hours at General Conference, the atmosphere is generally one filled with the grace of knowing that everyone there professes the belief in God and knows that behavior should be guided by kindness. Along the way, I experienced some pain, but also some grace filled conversations which helped me grow. Here is a sampling.

I had just bought an after-lunch coffee at one of the small concession stands in the convention center. I thanked the checker, a handsome young man, for wearing one of our rainbow stoles. He looked me straight in the eye and thanked me for fighting for his rights. I gave him one of our parents’ buttons for his mother. He already had a “Love Your Neighbor” button. (Yes, the same man as above.)

After one particularly difficult committee meeting during which much was said about how destructive of the church it would be to state as principal that the UMC could accept gay, lesbian and transgender persons, a well-dressed woman from Alabama approached and asked me “How are you doing?” She sounded genuinely concerned. Nearly in tears, I pulled myself together and said “It’s tough to hear such condemnation of the people I know and love.” We talked about our views for a few moments. She told me she was not yet decided where she stood, but acknowledged my pain and that the church could not continue its current stance of polarity. She said she had worked hard to rise to the position of being a delegate as a young, female pastor from Alabama, and how she dared not expose her conflicted attitude. She then chastised me, saying I should be careful not to prejudge others by their appearance, dress, age, accent or geographic area. I didn’t think I had said anything to betray my fear that she would have a judgmental attitude, but in my heart, I knew she was right. She had uncovered my prejudice.

Another delegate with connections to the Good News and the Transforming Movement (two quite conservative organizations), reminded me that these groups are spewing so much hate that they will soon lose public support and that the Common Witness with the Love Your Neighbor message need do nothing but offer love.

One day, while wearing a “My child is of sacred worth” badge, I engaged two men from an African country. I offered a packet of brochures from PRN. He said he didn’t want my brochures, but would like to talk to me. Wow! We spent the next 15 minutes in intense conversation about our views. We obviously disagreed on many points and I learned a lot about their perspectives and they about mine. We experienced frustration, sadness, but also some agreement, joy and laughter. We parted agreeing to disagree, but shook hands with smiles on our faces. In the end, one of the two said he would read the brochures I had offered.
From August 3-5, 2012, I attended the Gender Odyssey Family Conference in Seattle, WA. During that time I met several families who are supporting their gender nonconforming or transgender child, many under the age of 12. One of the most painful situations is that these families have lost their communities of faith, or found that they are not completely supported by their faith communities. Gender Odyssey was the first time that many of these families found a support system.

I had to ask myself, where is the Church for these families? There are many churches who are Reconciling, Welcoming, or Open and Affirming, yet there is still not support for these families. They are left adrift in a world that doesn’t understand or accept them or their children. The Church, in not stepping up to create a safe place for these families and children, are allowing these children to grow up in a world where they’re not welcome. During the showing of the film “Trans – The Movie” one little girl, seven years old, states that God made a mistake when she was created. This was the second time I’ve heard such a statement from a child about her being. It is our responsibility, as followers of Jesus, to step in and speak the truth of God’s love for these children – that they are wonderfully made and loved, no matter what.

I was honored to help start an organization that provides a place for the children to play freely as they are, and a space for parents to meet one another. My Purple Umbrella is a play group that meets once a month and provides time and space for the families to be themselves. The children find kindred spirits and blossom as they play fully as themselves, without worry of judgment or exclusion. My Purple Umbrella is not affiliated with any church or faith, yet there are families who seek that connection in their life. Again, where is the Church? Where is the sacred space for these families to feel the love of God and fellowship of believers?

It is simple for a church to open their doors one day a month for such a group, and it makes a definitive impact on the welfare of the families and well-being of the children. By this simple act the Church can counter the hurt and often hate that the world expresses toward these children and their families. We can show that we are not conformed to the thinking of the world but have transformed our minds to show the love of God to all.

There may be issues that need to be addressed - some of human fear and some of practical matters, but these are surmountable and pale in the face of helping a child know that they are loved and special. Churches can start by singing the hymn, “Strong, Gentle Children” by Dan Damon. Words and score are available online at www.hymnary.org. Search by hymn name.

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PLEASE HELP ME!

I don’t understand

by Robert (Bob) A. Swing, First UMC, Oak Ridge, TN

- If GOD led the Jews from oppression,
- and, he led them through their human trials,
- and, saved Jonah and so many more from death,
- and, Jesus, sent by God to teach us what the core values of the Old Testament were meant to teach, because the people of his time were not understanding the lessons of the Old Testament,
- and, he therefore taught us to accept and love the downtrodden, shunned, ill, and hurting,
- and, his direct command was to love our neighbors as we love ourselves,
- and we, the whole Church profess to believe all of the above:
- and, I can’t find anywhere where he said all who professes to follow him, except when they are incompatible.

Then why do we United Methodists remain divided on a contemporary question of who is created in the image of God?

And what Christian presumes to judge that some Christian people are incompatible with Christian teaching, but they are not?

I just don’t understand. Can you help me?
I was baptized in the United Methodist Church in 1960. My parents pledged, on my behalf, to fulfill the baptismal covenant, including acceptance of “the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” I confirmed my personal commitment to that vow in 1972. My baptismal vow has been foundational to my marriage vows, the baptismal vows I took on behalf of my two children, and my ordination vows. So what are we to do when the evil, injustice, and oppression we encounter exists within our own denomination? How can we, or should we, uphold the Book of Discipline when it stands in contradiction to our understanding of ourselves as disciples of Jesus Christ? Is it more important to be a disciple or a United Methodist?

During our recent Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, this question was raised to our Episcopal candidates. Considering the vow required of ordained clergy in our denomination to uphold the BOD, it is not that surprising that 75% of the 15 candidates who came before that group chose loyalty to the BOD over their understanding of themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ. Perhaps that speaks to and informs us about the current leadership in our denomination, and moreover, the leadership at our recent General Conference. Maybe we should reexamine the moral dilemma we present to all the ordained when we ask them to uphold the BOD (a document that changes every four years and actively requires clergy to discriminate against “practicing” gay and lesbian members in the areas of marriage and ordination) over their calling as followers of Jesus Christ. More importantly, what would your response to that question be? What do you expect from leaders in our United Methodist Church?

“Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”

The UM Hymnal, Baptismal Covenant 1,2,4
Kindred Connection—Summer 2012

PRN HILTON AWARD

Periodically, the Parents Reconciling Network selects persons for this prestigious award. They are selected based upon their work as social activists on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.

The PRN Steering Committee has selected Reverend Doctor Reginald and Barbara Olson as co-recipients of the award to be presented at UMC General Conference 2012, on Sunday April 29, 2:00pm, in the Coalition Tabernacle. They have emulated the Hilton’s example. Reginald has multiple degrees, is an educator, author, institutional director, and pastor. The Olson’s have been mediators and conflict resolvers in family, business, educational, and religious settings. They were instrumental in forming a PFLAG chapter. They have also served as members and Co-Chairs of the Parents Reconciling Network Steering Committee for several years. Their accomplishments for human rights are extensive.

HISTORY OF THE HILTON AWARD

In 2003, PRN wanted to present an award to persons who make significant contributions to the goals and mission of the Parent’s Reconciling Network, and to the cause of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex people, in general.

Bruce and Virginia Hilton were selected to be named for the award because of their long-standing efforts as activists in Civil Rights movement. Additionally, they had been founding members of the Parent’s Reconciling Network.

Virginia and Bruce died in 2007 and 2008 respectively, before they were able to see the great strides we made in the 2008 UMC General Conference.

Ever felt that Christmas is too full of STUFF? Ever wish you could give a gift that really honors who that person is, but doesn’t end up collecting dust on a shelf? This year consider giving a donation to the Parent’s Reconciling Network in honor of or in memory of a family member or friend. Perhaps your gay son or trans-son. Perhaps the aunt who gave you courage to accept your lesbian daughter. Perhaps your accepting pastor. We’ll send you back a small ornament that your loved one can hang on the tree each year. We would also like to print the names of donors and honored persons in the Winter 2012 issue. Please use the form below to make contributions. Also indicate your permission to print your name as a donor and the message you want on the ornament. You may need to include a separate note for all this.

Help keep these inspiring stories coming to you by making a donation today to the Parents Reconciling Network.

Name: (Printed) __________________________________________ Email: ______________________________________
Address_________________________________________________ Phone: _____________________________________
City/State/Zip________________________________________________________________________________________
Church Affiliation_____________________________________________________________________________________
YES! We support the Parents Reconciling Network with a total gift of $____________________
We will fulfill our pledge through:
¨ A single gift    ¨ Monthly installments of: ¨ $50/month ¨ $20/month ¨ $10/month ¨ Other $________
Optional: Gift in honor of / in memory of __________________________________________________________________
Please choose a payment option:
¨ Check enclosed (Pay to the order of Parents Reconciling Network) 
¨ Visa ¨ Amex ¨ Discover ¨ MasterCard: _______________________________________________________________
Exp: ______ / ______ Name of card: _________________________________________________________________
Date: ______/______/______ Signed: ____________________________________________________________
Send donations to: Parents Reconciling Network, c/o Reconciling Ministries Network, 3801 N Keeler Ave Fl 3, Chicago IL 60641
Reconciling Ministries Network is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. Your donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.
In December, we hope to publish a newsletter celebrating the joys and sorrows that the Christmas season brings. Christmas brings families together or makes separations painfully notable. Often children return back to their parents after periods of absence for college, jobs, travel. Those homecomings can be difficult as both parties may have changed. Extended family may have a difficult time accepting who your child has become. Sometimes our families surprise us with the gift of great acceptance and love. We would love to hear your stories of Christmastime joy and sorrow and possibly publish them in our next issue. Send stories, photos, poems, and your thoughts to me by November 10 or earlier at carolwaymack2@yahoo.com.

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