

East Ohio Evangelical Fellowship

Chairperson: Jeff Gindlesberger
Treasurer: Don Lare

Vice Chair: Mike Grant
Past Chairperson: Betty Wilson

February 2020

Chairperson's Word

"Be strong and courageous, because I will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go." Joshua 1:6,7

By now, many of you have heard something of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation. Within this newsletter is a reprinted article by Rev. Greg Stover that lays out some of the implications if such a plan of separation does come to the General Conference and receive approval. Many others have given responses that are worthy of your attention. I hope that you will read, study, and pray, as we see how this document or other submitted plans unfold in the days leading up to the General Conference, May 5-15, 2020.

I imagine that many of us are feeling a bit like Joshua, after the death of Moses. A new venture was at hand. Joshua would be God's man to lead them into the Promised Land. God made some great declarations of what God would do (Joshua 1:2-5). God had given Joshua some fantastic words of favor: "I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you."

With all of that, still Joshua must have been afraid. God calls him to strength and courage at least three times. Joshua was a man of faith. He was one of the two spies who brought back a good report. He said that no matter the obstacles, God would surely give them the land that God had promised. He, along with Caleb, was the only remaining adult that would now receive the land, offered forty years before. He was a man with faith, yet the challenge was great.

God gave to him a word that is repeated throughout the Scriptures, 'Do not be afraid.' Actually, here he says, "Do not be terrified. . ." (Joshua 1:9). Even people of faith can be fearful when faced with a new and pressing challenge. I believe that many of us hear fear knocking on the door. The entrance into a new place may not be as certain for us, but the possibility makes us give consideration.

Can we hear some important words that God gave to Joshua? First, can we hear the call to bring the best of our strength and our courage to bear? Ultimately, for Joshua, his strength and ability was not the primary moving force for the taking of the Promised Land. God would make all victory possible. Yet, Joshua would have a part. Now our part seems to be to pray, to be thoughtful and discerning, and to be people ready to act when the time is at hand. God can and does give strength and courage. I love the words of Isaiah 40:31, "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. . ." The King James Version uses the words, 'wait upon the LORD'. It implies prayer as the means of gaining strength. So we hear the call to bring strength and courage. We do so, leaning into the Lord in prayer.

Second, Joshua was given a reason not to be fearful, "I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you. . . for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go," (Joshua 1:5,9). For all believers in Christ, that is our comfort: that God is with us. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the paraclete, which means 'the one called alongside.' This is the reason for hopefulness and for willingness to go into new territory. I want it to also be true, not chiefly that God goes with me, as that, I would go with God. So I pray, seeking to discern God's direction.

Third, Joshua was instructed to be careful to obey all the law that came through Moses. He was told, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it," (Joshua 1:8). God called Joshua to hold to the Bible, as he had it. I want my life to be conformed to the Bible. I want to let the plain instruction of the Scriptures shape my living. This is always of critical importance. I do so imperfectly. I am definitely in need of the saving grace of the Savior. Yet, I strive to honor Christ, by being obedient to his Word.

In closing, may we be strong and courageous in these days. May we know that God is with us. May we seek to stay true to His Word. No matter what may unfold, these are words to live by in the present and into the future.

Sincerely in Christ,
Jeff Gindlesberger, chair of EOEF



Pressing On: Our Journey to a New Future By Gregory D. Stover

(This article first appeared in the Wesleyan Covenant Association's e-newsletter, Outlook on January 13, 2020. Reprinted by permission)

"Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3.13-14 NRSV).

With these words to the Philippians, Paul poignantly records his longing to share in the power of Christ's resurrection, in his suffering, and ultimately in resurrection to eternal life. In order to pursue these lofty spiritual goals, he determined to put the past behind and strain forward to what lay ahead. Paul is reflecting on his Christian life and service in its totality.

As Paul's words percolate within me, they also express my thoughts, attitude and longing as I have reviewed the "Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation," released on January 3, 2020. The protocol outlines a proposed path for separation of The United Methodist Church into two or more denominations. The mediated proposal was hammered out and signed by sixteen individuals, including eight UM bishops and other UM leaders representing the broad diversity of theology in the church. I am excited to support the protocol and urge others to do so. The protocol appears to me to be a profoundly hopeful opportunity for those who are orthodox, evangelical Christians seeking a renewed Wesleyan church. Thanks to all who have brought us to this point.

Much to Commend

Many others have written about the positive aspects of the protocol, so I will simply note a number of benefits it brings. It...

- Identifies and acknowledges the deep roots in divergent understandings of "interpretation of Scripture, theology, and practice" behind our five-decade conflict within the UM Church;

- Provides a clear path to end the conflict in a way which provides grace and leaves open the possibility of future positive relationships in new denominations;

- Has the support of eight bishops (including two central conference bishops and the President and President-elect of the Council of Bishops), as well as top leaders from advocacy groups which here-to-fore have been at loggerheads in our on-going debate;

- Focuses on providing freedom for various groups to pursue the primary mission of making disciples guided by their respective biblical and theological understandings;

- Provides a means to effect separation without the difficult process of constitutional amendments, and without years of costly litigation;

- Allows central conferences, annual conferences, and the local church to choose to affiliate with a new "traditional denomination" taking their buildings and assets with them;

- Provides for continued pension security for pastors and an equitable way to address future pension liabilities;

- Calls for a significant distribution of undesignated UM Church reserves to support a new traditional church while signaling support for Africa University and racial/ethnic ministries with a large set-aside of reserve funds for these ministries; and,

Offers the strongest likelihood of passage at the 2020 General Conference of any of the plans offered to date.

Addressing Some Concerns

Nevertheless, the protocol has generated its fair share of anxiety and angst. Rightfully so! Historic and profound decisions are before us! I confess my own points of anxiety (e.g. as a recently retired clergy member I have no congregation to bring to a new church and wonder what place I will have in a new Wesleyan denomination, although I long to be a part of it). Right now, there is both hope and much uncertainty about the future. Yet, to use a well-worn phrase, "We know who holds the future."

Let me offer some thoughts in response to a few concerns and objections I have been encountering.

1. "Traditionalists are the ones who have been faithful to Biblical teaching and have won the vote at General Conference. Let's just stay and win the battle!"

The first statement is true. It grieves my heart to think of evangelicals leaving. Timothy Tennent, President of Asbury Theological Seminary, with his own heavy heart, supports the protocol, but has written an insightful article about why traditionalists need to leave and what unique aspects of this leaving history should record (here).

The second plea is a “pipe-dream.” While it is true traditionalists have won the day at every GC for 47 years, many of our bishops and other denominational leaders and boards have thwarted the implementation of true accountability again and again. What was once disagreement from progressives has become a tsunami of resistance. These things will not change in time to avoid a spiritual and temporal disintegration of the UM Church.

2. “Central conferences desire to retain the name United Methodist.”

I appreciate the positive value the UM Church name in the central conferences and their desire for all of us remain together in the UM Church. I confess I do not know how to solve this dilemma. As for us in the U.S., the incessant demands of centrists and progressives for change, and the refusal of numerous leaders to uphold the decisions of General Conference, are forcing our Gospel partners in the central conferences to make difficult and inconvenient decisions.

At the same time, I would urge our brothers and sisters in central conferences to remember that for them to hang on to the name (and for evangelicals in the U.S. to hang in there with them) will require U.S. evangelicals to continue in an untenable and destructive situation. If we continue to fight, we might reaffirm the UM Church’s teachings at the 2020 General Conference, but resistance will continue and even intensify. We will spend untold hours and money trying to bring about accountability that will never come. If we capitulate to the proposed U.S. Regional Conference Plan, the U.S. region would immediately liberalize the UM Church’s teachings on its sexual ethics, definition of marriage, and its ordination standards. Either possibility leaves us stranded for years, perhaps decades, in a continuing struggle with no realistic hope of resolving the impasse.

3. “If the protocol passes, some may for a time be caught in a changed UM Church. And, there are so many other questions about the future church.”

Yes, but only for a brief season. These should be viewed as matters of transition.

The Exodus account provides a helpful paradigm. Even after Pharaoh released the Israelites from Egypt, they still needed God’s miracle at the Red Sea to escape; had to endure the hardships of the wilderness; faced many temptations and fell into sin; ended up wandering for 40 years in the wilderness and then had to fight their way into the Promised Land. The full promises did not come overnight or in a few days. Yet, from the moment of release the Hebrews were in transition to a new future. The hope of the Promised Land stood before them.

I am not suggesting that our journey will be nearly so long or hard, but we will be challenged between here and there. Some will not be free of the UM Church as quickly as they would like, but they will be on the journey to a new day.

Let’s not imagine that building a new denomination will be easy; that we will get everything right the first time; or that we will not face real challenges. The journey will have seas and mountains to cross and enemies to face. The task before us is complex. Let’s do believe that God is leading us to a new place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be lifted with renewed passion and energy; where we will not have to debate basic orthodox teaching over and over; and where we have freedom to live into the hope before us.

I served 43 years under appointment and have been retired just over three years. The struggle over sound Christian doctrine and around human sexuality has book-ended my entire ministry. The protocol gives us an opportunity to step beyond the conflict and allow the Lord to build a church faithful to the Scripture and the Gospel. My heart grieves for the people and the things left behind. My heart rejoices at the new day which lies ahead. Let’s rally together, be steady and trust God that a new and better land is over the horizon.

PRAYER FOR GENERAL CONFERENCE 2020, MAY 5-15

I hope you are praying for General Conference in May. 2019 General was bathed and covered in prayer and it is time to do the same for this General Conference. We are in the process of setting up a 72 hour prayer vigil for May 1-3 and you will be able to sign up for half hour or hour time slots to pray during that time in your home or your church if you choose to do so. We are hoping to fill all the time slots and pray earnestly for God’s will for this General Conference. More information will be available soon and there will be a guide for prayer posted for you.

We also hope you are praying daily for General Conference and our delegates. Names are listed below;

Clergy: Gary Henderson, Andy Call, Dan Bryant, Matthew Laferty, Armando Arellano, Benita Rollins and alternate Cara Stultz Costello

Lay: Jerry Rinehart, Ellen Burrows, Martha Banks, Betty Wilson, Bob Wagner, Holly Grant and alternate Connor Prusha

I am praying for the anointing of the Holy Spirit for guidance and for us to be in His Will and for revival of His Church. Please join me!

Betty Wilson. Delegate

CYF—HIGH SCHOOL CAMP + CONFERENCE

Sunday, June 21-27, 2020

Malone University—Canton, Ohio

CYF Camp: for students entering grade 9 in the fall of 2020 through 2020 High School graduates.

Place: Malone University — Canton, Ohio

Each summer, for one incredible week, teenagers come together at Malone University in Canton OH to join together in creative worship, intense prayer, passionate service, lifelong relationship-building and compelling Bible study: in short, authentic Christian community.

Need more information? Contact Rev. Joe Burkhardt, Executive Director of CYF, Senior Pastor of Wedgewood UMC: jburkhardt1976@gmail.org or 330-733-8707.

VISIT <https://mycyf.com/>

Jr. High CYF -Bible Bowl

Jr. High CYF -Bible Bowl this year is August 2-7 and will once again be at Camp Wanake. It is for grades 5-8. We are listed in this year's camp brochure under 'Other Opportunities' or on the East Ohio Camps website. If you have any questions feel free to email Erin at emmahaf@gmail.com

East Ohio Evangelical Fellowship Banquet at Annual Conference

The EOEF Banquet will be held in St. Joseph Catholic Church, 822 Barclay St., Marblehead, Ohio, Monday, June 15th. Our Guest Speaker will be **Rev. Tom Lambrecht**, Vice President and General Manager of Good News

EAST OHIO EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP

204 N. Main Street

Minerva, Ohio 44657

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organ.

U.S. Postage

PAID



EAST OHIO EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP

440-417-8075 | revharleywheeler@hotmail.com eoeffboard.wordpress.com/