**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

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**THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT AND THE UPCOMING GENERAL CONFERENCE**

What is going to happen at General Conference? The Confessing Movement, and the other evangelical renewal groups as well, are getting inquiries almost every day. Discussions around gay “marriage,” the church’s stance on celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage, and possible church division, seem to consume United Methodist blogs and web pages.

In one respect the future for United Methodism is not hopeful. The Connectional Table, United Methodism’s highest body, has prepared legislation which would compromise the church’s historic stand on homosexual practice and let individual churches and conference decide for themselves how to deal with homosexuality. The Connectional Table, it is worth noting, should not be considered an elected body. It is a coordinating group composed primarily of institutionalists, bishops, and agency heads--the very good of people who have gotten the church into its present crisis in the first place. It is discouraging when church leaders themselves believe that historic United Methodism is no longer suited for the present day.

There is another plan in which nine progressive caucuses and special interest groups, some of which are funded by apportionment dollars, are lobbying strongly that the church not just compromise but completely reverse its historic stance on sexual purity and be “inclusive” of various sexual expressions, behaviors, and preferences Some of these groups are recruiting numbers of persons to attend General Conference with the goal of mass demonstrations, disruptions, and bullying tactics to convince the delegates to give in to their demands.

What is the Confessing Movement’s response to all of this? The Confessing Movement board met in late September at its annual meeting and in conference call since then and discussed various plans designed to enable United Methodism to “move ahead”--a phrase being used these days that would support legislation that might enable the church to move into the future without disruption. For the most part all of the proposals have problems. Many of the plans fit into the “we agree to disagree” category. Agreeing to disagree amounts to a form of secular diversity in which historic revealed truths no longer matter and all are free do whatever is right in their own eyes.

One recent plan, the CUPlan, endorsed by such persons as Bill Arnold of Asbury, Billy Abraham of Perkins, and David Watson of United, holds much more promise. This proposal will be discussed more thoroughly in a future Happenings article. .

While it is admitted the church is in crisis, the message for the present time is that we must not despair. God is faithful. God has raised up the Methodist movement to accomplish amazing things in the past and we believe He will continue to do that in the future.

Because of this we make the following affirmations.

1) The Confessing Movement, and other renewal groups as well, did not come into existence to fight battles over human sexuality. The concern of the Confessing Movement from the beginning has been to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and to encourage doctrinal and Biblical integrity in the church. We, like others, deplore the fact that the practice of homosexuality has been a major distraction from our mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

2) Having said this, we believe it would be disastrous to change the church’s stance on marriage as a union of man and woman, and on the Biblical teaching of celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage. The majority of American laypersons and pastors support the church’s stance. Our churches overseas overwhelmingly support the church’s stance. No denomination that has officially compromised this position has thrived. The arguments for change are not Biblical arguments. They come from secular culture.

3) Still, like others, we agonize over the pain and rejection experienced by gays and lesbians in our midst. We repent for times when we have not loved or accepted others as persons of sacred worth. We have not loved as we ought to have loved.

4) More and more there is talk of division. Confessing Movement people have not initiated this talk though we find ourselves seeking to counsel many who contact us who believe that some sort of separation is the only resort for the church. There is no contingency plan at the present time in case the General Conference would vote to bless homosexual practice. The church would be in free-fall disarray, especially the overseas church, but we are not anticipating that that will happen. Sometimes the Confessing Movement is accused of divisiveness. That is not fair. It is not evangelicals who have the strategy of disrupt, demonstrate, and divest. The Church of Jesus Christ deserves better than that. If a fair democratic process prevails during the business sessions at General Conference we fully believe the church will stand on the historic revealed truths concerning sexual morality. Either way, if there is divisiveness and disruption at General Conference it will not come from evangelicals.

5) How then shall we live? The Confessing Movement is suggesting regular periods of prayer and fasting in these days before General Conference. God is our refuse and strength, a very present help in trouble.