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# **RENEWAL**



***The Journal of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship in New England***

***Walter Ciesluk, Editor***

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Evangelical Renewal Fellowship is the New England Association of The Confessing Movement within the United Methodist Church

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## **CONFERENCE DISCONNECT**

**Rev. Dr. Thomas Bentum**

At this point it is quite safe to say what the results of the vote on the General Conference amendments will be across the world. The amendment dealing with membership and all the amendments dealing with restructuring the world-wide church will fail decisively. If the amendment on membership passed it would take away the right of the pastor to determine who should be a member of the church. Passing the amendments on restructuring the church would divide the world church into regional conferences to deal with undefined regional issues. In June I urged all of our members to vote “no” on these amendments and to encourage others to do so also.

The world church may be voting “no” on these amendments but the New England Annual Conference along with a few others voted a clear “yes” (as of this printing the results are not yet posted on the conference website). Is this a sign that we have disconnected from the direction of our church? What does this mean for us?

First of all of I should say I am cautiously optimistic about the world-wide vote and the impact evangelicals had on making this happen. I would love to say that Good News and the Confessing Movement have kept us from disaster by their efforts, but I am not so sure. I can think of a number of reasons these amendments might have failed including the lack of leadership behind them to help the church understand why they should not be passed. I have to wonder what would have happened if the leadership of the church truly mobilized and promoted the amendments. Perhaps this is a wake up call to our leadership that the members of annual conference will not just rubber stamp General Conference actions.

Whatever the reason for the defeat of the amendments, it is clear that we as an Annual Conference are out of step with the majority of the church. Whereas we once led the church, especially through the influence of Boston University, each quadrennium our eroding power becomes more and more evident. I applaud the direction our church is taking but I take no joy in the toll this disconnect is taking on our conference and the hurt and confusion we are going through and will go through. Our witness for Christ will be hindered until we are united around his purpose for us.

Across our nation are amazing pockets of renewal. I believe the church and our conference in particular will move out of its confusion when those congregations who are showing true evidence of God’s work in their midst invite others to come along with them. That is the vision of the Church of the Resurrection and we benefited greatly from Adam Hamilton’s teaching at Annual Conference this year. Renewal will not happen from the top but laterally as congregations experience renewal through the power of the Holy Spirit and lock arms with others to move forward.

In a small way each of us can take our congregations forward in this way. Is your congregation experiencing renewal through some program or know of one that is? How about linking with another church and multiplying your efforts. I have done this with programs like Disciple, Alpha and mission trips. As the leadership gap increases in our conference due to diminishing numbers and funds, partnerships are a powerful way to reconnect to Christ's vision in the midst of our confusing disconnect. The old lines of power and influence are diminishing and we need to be intentional about establishing new, healthy patterns of association for the purpose of being an effective witness in New England and beyond.

*Rev. Dr. Thomas W. Bentum is the Executive Coordinator of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship (ERF). He is an Elder in the New England Annual Conference, and pastor of Gray Memorial United Methodist Church, Caribou, ME.*

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## **DO YOU BELIEVE IN INTERCESSORY PRAYER?**

**Robbin R. Grill**

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Studies have been done on the effectiveness of intercessory prayer since 1873. The results have been varied. A recent article in Christianity Today reported that in a study of 1,134 physicians conducted in December, 2008, 70% of the physicians believed that miracles are possible. But only 29% believed that medical outcomes are related to "supernatural forces" or "acts of God."

As Christians we long to see scientific evidence that prayer works, while our critics are waiting for just the opposite. We all know of instances, some in our own lives, where the only explanation for a cure is the divine intervention of God. Studies have been conducted setting up control groups of patients being actively prayed for and patients that were not being prayed for as part of the group. The results have often been disturbing.

A major study was completed three years ago – The Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP). It was conducted under the auspices of Harvard Medical School and was considered the most comprehensive study to date. The study spanned ten years and cost \$2.4 million. It consisted of studying patients admitted for coronary artery bypass graft surgery. These patients were divided into three random groups: two groups received prayer from committed Christians who had experience praying for the sick and for healing. Of these two groups only one knew that they were receiving prayer. The outcome was not what we would expect; those who were unsure if they were receiving prayer did better than those who knew they were receiving prayer.

The third group was not part of any specific prayer effort. They were compared with both groups above. The group receiving specific prayers had more complications than the other two groups. This result was disappointing to evangelical Christians. However, looked at another way, the outcome supports our Christian view. The group that was not prayed for seemed to receive more of God's blessings. Doesn't this seem to point out to us that God grants favor without regard to the quantity or quality of prayers... The bottom line: we cannot second guess God! He wants to heal and bless as many as possible. God answered the prayers of the patients, of their friends and relative, and perhaps even of those who may not have known they were praying.

God tells us to pray constantly and that whatever we ask for we will receive. We may not receive the answer when we want it and it may not take the form we want, BUT God does answer all prayers. We don't need to ask if prayer, personal or intercessory, works – we KNOW it works. What we need to ask ourselves is, are we prepared for God's answer???

*Robbin Grill is the coordinator of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship (ERF) prayer ministry.*

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## EVANGELISTICALLY EFFECTIVE CONGREGATIONS

Walter J. Ciesluk

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A few years ago, I participated in an effort to prepare some initial plans for developing a vibrant and effective evangelism ministry at our church. The results of the activity led to improvements in our visitor/visitation ministry; personal evangelism training opportunities; an evangelism column in the church newsletter; media and web-site features to make our church ministries more visible in the community; and an attempt to sponsor periodic special projects/events for spiritual seekers. A resource which was very helpful to us in formulating a evangelism ministry was a recent book, entitled, *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor, A Theology of Witness and Discipleship*. This book was authored by Bishop Scott J. Jones, while he was at the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. In the appendix of the book, Bishop Jones enumerates 20 Components of an Evangelistically Effective Congregation. Since these components can be used by all our churches to help improve their evangelism ministries, I have summarized them below:

1. **Create and Sustain a Missional Culture.** The congregation should have a clearly defined, biblically based, simple and comprehensive statement of its mission which is known and owned by all of its leaders and most of its members. Evangelism must have a high priority in the church's self-understanding and have an impact on all aspects of its ministry.
2. **Create and Sustain a Spiritual Culture.** The congregation should have an organized, sustained, prayer ministry interceding for pre-Christians. We must rely on God's action and understand that the Church is being used by God as a means of grace.
3. **Create and Sustain a Culture of Hospitality.** The gospel is intended to reach all persons everywhere, crossing boundaries of race, age, nationality, gender and other cultural factors. Thus, every congregation should be determining which boundaries it should and can cross in the future. Each congregation must in word and in deed offer genuine hospitality to all persons.
4. **Determine Your Target Population and Learn to Love Them Well.** Given each congregation's social and cultural location and their limited resources of personnel and money, a congregation must focus those resources on a particular target population given to them as a reachable group of people.
5. **Demonstrate Concern for Physical Needs and Justice Issues in the Community.** The congregation as a whole, and especially identified leaders of the congregation, need to be active in the justice issues and physical needs of persons in the community. Attention to the poor and marginalized is especially important. There must be a constantly maintained connection between ministry to physical needs and ministry to spiritual needs.
6. **Empower Laity to Witness Verbally to Their Friends, Associates, Relatives and Neighbors.** All lay persons should understand themselves to be verbal witnesses for Christ (1 Peter 3:15-16). They are in contact with pre-Christian and unchurched persons and they are more effective witnesses than clergy. This witness can simply be talking about their church or inviting unchurched friends to come.
7. **Achieve Visibility Among Your Target Population.** Word of mouth will give your congregation a reputation which should be positive. This is the best method to achieve visibility. Your facilities should be clean and well-kept. Use appropriate advertising.
8. **Use an Appropriate Communication System to Invite Persons to Know Christ.** The congregation must use communication systems that are most effective in reaching their target population. It should use electronic media to reach persons outside the church and to enable authentic worship inside the church.
9. **Provide Adequate Parking, Signage and Facilities.**

10. Welcome Visitors With Demonstrated Hospitality Measured by Perception of Visitors. There should be greeters at every possible entrance who are genuinely interested in helping. Following the worship service, laity should intentionally seek out visitors and welcome them.
11. Have an Effective Nursery/Children's/Youth Ministry. The nursery should be brightly colored, inviting, safe and well-staffed with repeated staff people each week. Make ministry with children and youth a priority in your congregation's programming.
12. Worship Indigenously. The three most important factors creating indigenous worship are music, music, and music. Other key factors include the content of the sermon and stories told by the preacher. The bulletin should be user-friendly for pre-Christians.
13. Get Names, Addresses, Telephone Numbers and E-mail. Sometime during each worship service there should be a registration procedure that does not single out visitors but elicits feedback from all persons in worship.
14. Preach Biblically and Evangelistically. For United Methodists, this means in accordance with our doctrine—the way of salvation—creation, sin, repentance, justification, the new birth, assurance and sanctification. Good preaching focuses on the intersection of the gospel with the lives and issues of the people.
15. Communicate Effectively in the Sermon. Because evangelism is based on love, there is no substitute for knowing one's people. Proper use of media and drama may enhance communication of the gospel.
16. Respond Quickly and Appropriately to First-time Visitors.
17. Establish and Maintain Significant Small Groups for Seekers. Establish regularly scheduled program to teach the basics of the faith. There should be multiple discipling groups, including such things as Bible studies, Sunday School classes, Disciple groups, Support groups, mission teams, and food pantry volunteer groups.
18. Give Appropriately Timed Invitations to Commitment. Be sure to ask for a commitment when the time is right, with gentleness and reverence. Communicate the community's expectation of what the Christian life is like in its fullness: moral, experiential, theological, horizontal (baptism, membership), operational (gifts of the spirit), and disciplines (worship, communion, fasting, prayer, Bible study, works of mercy, etc.).
19. Establish and Maintain a System of Discipleship for New Christians and New Members. Have high and clear expectations for membership in the body of Christ. Have formation processes that regularly nurture those attitudes and behaviors with systems of accountability.
20. Establish and Maintain Small Groups for Growth in Discipleship and Service. Every believer should be involved in an intentional small group activity to continue discipleship growth. Each group should understand its function in relation to the missional culture of the congregation. Each small group must play some role in the missional tasks of evangelism, nurture and service.

This summary of the 20 components makes it clear that the whole church needs to be committed and involved in evangelism. It can also serve as a goal toward which all our churches can chart a course for eventually implementing all 20 components of an evangelistically effective congregation. Let us all pray, that from these efforts, many UMC churches may become shining examples in New England of what evangelism is all about.

*Walter J. Ciesluk is the coordinator of the Evangelical Renewal Fellowship (ERF) communications ministry. He is a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Chelmsford, MA.*

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## THE DEEPER ISSUES OF UNITED METHODIST RENEWAL

Rob Renfroe

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Whenever a therapist listens to a hurting family, there are always presenting issues and the deeper issues. Fourteen-year-old Timmy is cutting class and piercing body parts, and sixteen-year-old Suzy is not coming home at night and when she does, there's alcohol on her breath. The parents say to the counselor, "Timmy's the problem; fix him, and everything will be ok again." Or, "Suzy's drinking is tearing our family apart, help her to stop and we'll be whole again." But the therapist knows those behaviors are only symptomatic—the presenting issues. The presenting issues must be separated from the deeper issues in order to help the family deal with them openly and honestly. Quite simply, the deeper issues cannot be ignored.

It's the same in the hurting family that we love called the United Methodist Church. For example, there is a widely-held misconception that homosexuality is the issue that divides our denomination. If it were, that would be enough of a challenge. However, it is only the presenting issue.

I have been part of numerous dialogue sessions within the Texas Annual Conference in regard to the denomination's stance on homosexuality. I have listened and I have been heard. During these dialogues, I heard the deeper issues beneath the presenting issue of homosexuality. They are the same issues I have heard at recent General Conferences. In reality, there are four issues dividing our church that cut to the very heart of what it means to be a church family. They deal with truth, Scripture, revelation, and Jesus Christ.

### **1. The Nature of Moral Truth.**

Is moral truth determined by the unchanging character of God? Or is it determined by the ever-changing experiences of human beings? Does the character of God determine what is right and wrong? Or do we conduct surveys and decide that a particular behavior is to be celebrated if a certain percentage of persons in a given culture engage in it?

This is compounded when the people engaging in such conduct are good people, people who go to church and care about justice. Some of them may be people that we love, maybe even our brothers and sisters or our sons and daughters. Are those reasons enough for us to change our views of what's right and wrong?

This is exactly what our African brothers and sisters were told on the floor of General Conference several years ago after one of their delegates spoke in favor of the denomination's position on homosexuality as found in The Book of Discipline. An American delegate rose and dismissively stated: "Obviously homosexuality is more of a problem in some cultures than it is in others." The implication, of course, was that the practice of homosexuality is not the same kind of problem for those of us who are more enlightened. And one day it won't be a problem for the Africans when they have progressed and matured the way we in the West have.

Let me be clear. The historic faith of Christianity has always held that moral truth is determined by who God is and what he has done, not by who we as fallen human beings are or by what we do. And because we are fallen in our actions and in our thinking, we do not believe that we will discern moral truth using nothing more than our reason, experiences, and traditions. As the Scriptures say, "There is a way that seems right, but in the end it leads to death." It is possible to believe sincerely that something is right and good; but, in reality, it leads us away from the God of life and truth. We believe God determines what is true. And for us to know that truth, it must be revealed.

### **2. The Authority of the Scriptures.**

Do they speak truth to all people in all cultures at all times? Or were they wrong when they were written, culturally determined in their declarations, and hopelessly out of date for persons enlightened by the truth contained in the latest sociological surveys?

At General Conference in 1988 a United Methodist pastor from Iowa spoke in favor of changing the current language regarding homosexuality in the Discipline. In a moment of honesty, he explained why he felt comfortable with his position by stating, "We don't go back to the Bible for the last word on anything."

Though few are so open about their willingness to dismiss the authority of Scripture for faith and practice, this pastor is not alone. In 1995, the Rev. Tom Griffith, a pastor of a Reconciling congregation, wrote an article, titled “Give a Cheer for our Evangelical Brothers and Sisters,” in the now-defunct *Open Hands*. “Now it is our turn to get honest. Although the creeds of our denomination pay lip service to the idea that scripture is ‘authoritative’ and ‘sufficient for faith and practice,’ many of us have moved far beyond that notion in our own theological thinking,” he wrote. “We are only deceiving ourselves—and lying to our evangelical brothers and sisters—when we deny the shift we have made.... We have moved far beyond the idea that the Bible is exclusively normative and literally authoritative for our faith. To my thinking, that is good! What is bad is that we have tried to con ourselves and others by saying, ‘we haven’t changed our position.’” Though I differ with him, I say: Hooray for Tom Griffith’s honesty and willingness to talk about the deep issues that must be resolved if unity is to be a possibility for our church.

In 2004, the Rev. J. Richard Peck wrote a particularly helpful and insightful article, titled “Church Should Examine the Reason for its Differences,” for the *United Methodist News Service*. He is a retired clergy member of the New York Annual Conference and a former editor of *Circuit Rider* and *Newscope*.

Peck correctly stated that before we can understand our differences on homosexuality, we must understand our differing attitudes toward Scripture. “Conservatives view Scripture as a single entity,” he wrote. “They believe every book in the Bible is the inspired Word of God. They quote Leviticus and the letters of Paul with equal certainty; they are likely to assert: ‘The Bible says....’”

Later in his article he states: “Nearly all conservatives say the Word of God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. No scientific claim and no change in social standards can alter the fact that there is no passage in Scripture that supports homosexual practice, and every mention of homosexuality within that holy book is negative.”

He then describes how liberals (his term) view the Scriptures: “Liberals, on the other hand, view the Bible as a library of books with different levels of inspiration and truth. A quote from Leviticus carries almost no weight with liberals. Liberals are not as quick to dismiss the letters of Paul. They well know that Paul wrote some of the most insightful and inspirational passages in all of Scripture. At the same time, they know that he was a product of his times.”

When I read statements like that I always wonder if liberals ever stop to think that maybe they believe what they believe because they are a product of their times—a time and a culture that is highly secularized and overly sexualized; a time where theology, as one of our bishops has said, goes little deeper than “God is nice and we should be, too.” In our contemporary culture, the highest virtue for liberals is tolerance, except when it comes to tolerating views that disagree with what their hearts tell them is right.

“Liberals place Paul’s teachings about homosexuality into the context of a time when lifelong committed homosexual relations were unknown,” continues Peck. “While liberals value the words of Jesus above all other teachings, even here they will distinguish between the early writings of Mark and the later and more theological writings of John. If there were teachings by Jesus in any of the Gospels about homosexuality, liberals would find these compelling and debate might be ended.”

“Debate might be ended”—if Jesus had said what they have determined Jesus would have and should have said. In other words, Jesus must be the Jesus they want him to be and his words must agree with their desires if he is to be valued as a source of truth. It reminds me a bit of the statement, “In the beginning God made man in his image, and ever since we have tried to return the favor.”

Amazing, isn’t it, that 21st-century liberal theologians look back 2,000 years and discover that a first century apocalyptic Jew named Jesus was actually a 21st-century liberal theologian who had the same views they possess.

We in the evangelical reform movements know that there are parts of Scripture that are difficult to interpret. We do not claim infallibility in our understanding of the Bible. And we humbly and gladly admit that we need the counsel of the entire Body of Christ rightly to divide the Word of Truth. We need the witness of the historic Church and we need the insights of our contemporaries, those who agree with us and those who do not.

However, we do not believe that the Scriptures point to the Word of God. We do not believe that the Scriptures contain the Word of God. We believe they are the Word of God. We believe the Scriptures are more than the witness of godly men and women to God. We believe they are God's witness to us.

That means if the Bible contains it, it's not our job to correct it. If the Bible teaches it, it's not our prerogative to twist it. And if the Bible states it clearly and consistently, we don't need this month's copy of Psychology Today or the latest Gallup Poll or some self-appointed pontificator of political properness to tell us why the Bible got it wrong and how enlightened folk, the new Gnostics, now got it right.

We choose to stand under the authority of the Bible, not over it. And we will not sacrifice truth for the sake of unity; because we know that if we do, we will end up with neither.

### **3. The Revelatory Work of the Holy Spirit.**

Is it always in accordance with the Scriptures? Or can it amend and even contradict the Scriptures?

Let me quote again from the Peck article. "Liberals may agree with conservatives that God's Word is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow," he observes. "However, they believe the Word of God is contained in the words of the Old and New Testaments and one must use reason, tradition, and experience to find that Word within the words. Liberals also believe that a living Christ offers new insights into God's Word."

Peck's article is well-written, seemingly well-intended, objective, and honest. However, I take exception with the last statement. It is a little unfair to state that liberals believe in the value of interpreting Scripture using reason, tradition, and experience without indicating that most conservatives do, as well.

But my real concern is with the statement that "liberals also believe that a living Christ offers new insights into God's Word." Everyone believes that. The most conservative Christians believe that it is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to illumine the Scriptures, reveal more of their meaning, and show us how to apply the eternal Word of God to the issues of our contemporary time and culture.

But liberals, at least the more radical liberals, go much further than that. They believe that the living Christ not only offers new insights into the Scriptures but that he also corrects, amends, and even contradicts the Scriptures. And it is the church's right and responsibility to recognize and codify these new revelations.

As one retired elder in my annual conference said to me, "The church created the Scriptures so we can re-create them."

This is where the battle will be fought in the coming years. Did the church create the Scriptures and therefore now has every right to recreate the Word of God? Evangelicals do not believe that the church created the Scriptures. We believe the church received the Scriptures. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, (and yes, it was a messy process) the church recognized what God gave to his people to be the canon, the measuring stick by which all claims of spiritual and moral truth are to be tested and judged. And we believe God is consistent. He is true to his nature and he is true to his Word. And we believe he got it right the first time.

We do not believe that when God revealed his Word in the Old Testament, he was in his spiritual infancy. Nor do we believe that when he revealed his Word in the New Testament, he was in his spiritual adolescence. And we most certainly do not believe that God—2000 years later, now that he's all grown up and mature—has finally determined what he really believes and is ready to amend his former writings.

Yes, God does new things. Of course, the Holy Spirit has new insights for the people of God. But they will always be consistent with what he has revealed in the past.

### **4. Uniqueness of Christ.**

Do we confess him as the only-begotten Son of God, the unique Savior of the world, and the supreme Lord of the universe? Or can he be particularized to our experiences, relativized for a Western culture, and trivialized into just one of many ways to God?

To confess “Jesus is Lord” is to affirm nothing less than the absolute uniqueness of our Christ in a world which is full of cosmic competitors.

In the South Central Jurisdiction, we interview Episcopal candidates. Candidates respond in writing to our questions, we review their responses, and then we have an hour of dialogue with each one. When one candidate was asked about the importance of witnessing, he responded that some of his students did not feel comfortable telling others about their faith. He stated they feel that to do so is “religious and cultural imperialism.” He continued, “But I tell them that they can tell others about their faith; simply because a man says to his wife, ‘You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,’ it does not mean that other wives are not sunshine for their husbands.”

I looked around the room and some delegation members were nodding their heads. I raised my hand and asked, “Are you saying that in the same way Jesus brings light and truth into our lives, other religious leaders do the same for others?” “Yes,” he answered. I pressed him, “So when I say that Jesus is the Savior of the world, really I’m saying that he is the Savior of my world?” Again the answer was affirmative. And then he said: “God is wholesale. Jesus is retail.”

Let me translate for you. God is Tommy Hilfiger. And you can get Tommy God at Jesus JCPenney’s or Buddha Bloomingdale’s or Mohammed Macy’s. It doesn’t matter where you get Tommy Hilfiger, it’s still Tommy. And it doesn’t matter where you get God, any retail outlet in the mall of universal truth will do—it’s still God.

The good news is that this candidate was not elected to the Episcopacy. The bad news is that he is a professor at one of our UM seminaries, teaching men and women how to preach the gospel and save the lost.

Is Jesus just one of many—one of many guides, one of many lights, one of many teachers—to be considered as we determine the truth about God, the nature of reality, and morality?

When you talk about Jesus, you are talking about the one who suffered thirty-nine lashes, his back torn apart with a cat o’ nine tails studded with bone and glass and metal, and then nailed to a cross to die the most painful and shameful death the Roman Empire could devise.

And he did this so our sins could be forgiven and so our hearts could be changed. He did this so the curtain would be torn in two and we could walk into the presence of God, washed in his blood and appearing holy in the Father’s sight. When you talk about Jesus, you are talking about our Lord and our love and our life.

There is no treasure, no threat, no promise, nor power that can cause us to deny a single word that the Scriptures teach about who he is or what he has done for us. He is not one of many guides. He is not one of many voices. He is not one of many teachers. He is not my sunshine. He is the sunshine. He is the way. He is the truth. He is the life. He is the one who reconciles a sinful world and my sinful soul to God. Jesus Christ is not one of many. He is the one and only.

Not small matters

The nature of moral truth, the authority of the Scriptures, the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit, and the uniqueness of Christ are the deeper issues—the real issues that divide and disturb the United Methodist family. These are not small matters that can be ignored or denied for the sake of unity. They must be addressed or true unity will be impossible.

We will not be made whole by singing “Blessed Be the Tie that Binds” every four years on the last day of General Conference. I wish that would work, but it won’t.

We won’t be made whole by denying our differences with nearly unanimous votes at General Conference that proclaim our unity of mission when sizable segments of the church are committed to breaking the covenant that holds us together. Such votes, like a couple of aspirin, may make us feel better for the moment, but they do not bring long-term health and wholeness.

We won't be made whole by people misquoting and misusing Wesley's sermon on the "Catholic Spirit" to buttress their belief that beliefs don't matter.

We will not be made whole by institutional responses by company men and women, regardless if they are called bishop, district superintendent, or pastor, because what we are facing is more than an institutional problem.

Furthermore, we won't be made whole by getting the language right in the Discipline, because what we are facing is more than a language problem.

Neither will we be made whole by getting the right judicial decisions, because what we are facing is not a judicial problem.

As important as the Discipline and the Judicial Council are, getting them right will not be enough to make us whole. The people called Methodist are facing a spiritual problem and we need our leaders to provide spiritual solutions. We are facing the most important doctrinal issues that any church can face and we need our leaders to guard the faith and give doctrinal answers. The problem we are facing is a question of faithfulness, and we need our leaders to give a response that worries less about being inclusive of every view and worries more about being faithful to the Scriptures.

In the past, some of our leaders have acted as if they are charged with accommodating the faith instead of contending for the faith. We have had leaders who accept every view no matter how radical.

Some of our leaders seem to believe that they cannot take a stand or speak out on the controversial issues of the day because they represent "the whole church." Some of our bishops have intoned the mantra that they must represent all views because they are bishops of the whole church. But for that very reason they must speak and they must speak the message of the church.

They do represent the church—the whole church. They represent the church in Africa that has told us that if we change the traditional morality of the Scriptures we will eviscerate their ability to speak to a continent that is being courted and intimidated by the ideology of Islam.

If they represent the whole church, surely they know this means they represent the historic church with its 2000 years of teaching and tradition. They stand in the line of the apostles and have been given the charge and granted the authority to guard the apostolic faith.

You never save a troubled institution by refusing to talk about what's wrong. You save an institution by doing what's right. You don't save a hurting institution by maintaining the status quo. You save an institution by changing its present dysfunctional reality. And as important as it is, you don't make a divided church whole simply by engaging in dialogues. You must at some point provide courageous and, if need be, costly leadership that others will follow.

Like a good counselor, the one thing our leaders must not do is to ignore our deepest issues or act as if they do not matter. They must lead us to those issues and they must speak truth to the Church so that, with a unified voice, we will speak truth to the culture, that the world may believe.

Where are we? We are in a place where band-aid solutions, denial, and institutional responses will not save us. We are in a place where we need leaders to lead and we need people of biblical faith to be people of courage and character.

*Prior to becoming the President and Publisher of Good News, the Rev. Rob Renfroe served as the President of the Board of Directors of The Confessing Movement. He is the pastor of adult discipleship at The Woodlands United Methodist Church in The Woodlands, Texas. For the last several years, he has been speaking to various United Methodist renewal and reform groups throughout the denomination. This article is an adaptation of that message, a version of which appeared in a previous issue of Good News.*

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### **Purpose Statement**

*Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord, the Confessing Movement exists to enable the United Methodist Church to retrieve its classical doctrinal identity, and to live it out as disciples of Jesus Christ*

#### **ERF Executive Team (1 July 2009-30 June 2011)**

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