**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

*By Dr. Riley B. Case*

***THE PURPOSE OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT***

These are precarious days for the United Methodist Church. Because of differences over the church’s historic standards on the meaning of marriage and sexual purity, United Methodism finds itself in what appears to be an all-out war on the future of the church.

When it appeared that the 2016 General Conference would re-affirm the long-standing affirmations of ecumenical Christianity on human sexuality, and when it was discovered that some negotiations had already taken place on the possibility of amicable separation within the denomination, a number of bishops and other church leaders with concern about the unity of the institutional church, asked that votes be delayed on issues of human sexuality so that a special commission might work with the Council of Bishops to find a solution that would allow the church to stay together. A special General Conference was set for February of 2019 to deal with these matters.

At the present time the Council of Bishops, working from reports presented to them by the Commission on the Way Forward, will be recommending to the General Conference a plan (“The One-Church Plan”) which is essentially a resurrection of the “Live and Let Live” failed attempts of the last two General Conferences. According to this plan, all negative references to the practice of homosexuality would be removed from the Discipline which would allow individuals, pastors, churches and conferences to decide for themselves what is considered acceptable in regard to sexual practice. The plan says basically that if evangelicals and those who stand for Biblical faith will give up their convictions about human sexuality and Bible authority, the institutional church as we know it (the status quo) can continue as it is.

This, of course, would be a disaster. It is impossible to imagine John Wesley, or any of the reformers, or the New Testament, or any part of the Bible for that matter, advancing a position in which we all decide for ourselves what is true or false or what is right or wrong. The meaning of “revelation” is that God has given to us the authoritative interpretation of His mighty acts in history, and that includes the moral code.

The Confessing Movement, ever since its beginnings in 1994, is one of several evangelical renewal groups working to uphold the authority of the Bible, the historic Wesleyan essentials (Original Sin, the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Atonement, Salvation by Faith, the Work of the Holy Spirit, and the Bodily Resurrection), the high moral teachings of the Bible and the ministry to all people (Salvation is for All).

This emphasis on Biblical and historic doctrine as understood in the Wesleyan tradition is resisted by church leadership influenced by Progressivism. Indeed, not long after the Confessing Movement was started the *Omaha Sunday World-Herald* (a secular paper no less) carried an article by some leaders of the Nebraska Conference that appeared July 12, 1998, which sought to “expose” and condemn the Confessing Movement.

*The Confessing Movement is a fringe group with no official connection with the United Methodist Church. It clearly does not represent our tradition and is declared an opponent of many parts of the official Book of Discipline of our church. It is trying for a take-over….*

*The Confessing Movement has much to say about Jesus, which is nice, but then it goes to a basic premise that there is no other name but Jesus through which one can have salvation. That kind of proof-texting, ignoring other major passages of scripture which give another witness, would block non-Christians from heaven. Jews, Hindus, Moslems, and all who never heard of Jesus are out.*

In one area the Confessing Movement is guilty as charged in the article: the Confessing Movement is built on the basic foundation statement of “Confessing Jesus Christ as Son, Savior and Lord.” There are no other names but the name of Jesus Christ by which we are saved. Another of the accusations in the article, however, is curiously wrong. Is the Confessing Movement an “opponent of many parts of the…Discipline?” This is an accusation on different occasions by critics of the Confessing Movement. The truth is that it is the Confessing Movement which wishes to uphold the *Discipline*. It believes that Discipline when it defines connectionalism as “sharing a common tradition of faith, including Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules” (para. 132). It believes, according to our *Discipline’*s Social Principles, that marriage is between a man and a woman. It believes that bishops should uphold the parts of the *Discipline* which prohibit the ordination and even the election of bishops of practicing gays and lesbvians. It is not the Confessing Movement that is insisting the *Book of Discipline* be changed to conform to progressive standards and modern culture, but the liberals in the denomination, including some bishops.

The Confessing Movement intends to be very much involved in the discussions leading up to the 2019 General Conference. We believe we and other renewal groups represent the greater majority of United Methodists. In this spirit we offer the following statement, recently adopted by the Confessing Movement board, for consideration. If this represents your own convictions we ask you stand with us.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT

*Confessing faith in Jesus Christ as Son, Savior, and Lord, the Confessing Movement exists to help retrieve and celebrate the Church’s classic biblical and doctrinal identity and to live it out together as followers of Jesus Christ.*

*The task is critically important in our relativistic age, which insists that every individual comes to her or his own personal truth, morality, and understanding of righteousness. Within the United Methodist Church, this situation was often led to the promotion of political ideologies and personal agendas overlaid with religious veneers, positions frequently in opposition to the historic biblical and doctrinal teachings of the faith. In this process, as each individual advocates what is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 21), the teaching of Christian truth is often confused or even lost and those whom Christ came to save are instead led astray.*

*The historic Christian faith as read in Holy Scripture, summarized in creeds and confessions, and articulated in the richness of our doctrinal heritage, is not the product of personal opinion but a gift from God. It offers the world something much more life-giving than the limited and transient wisdom of the culture; it offers no less than a transformative relationship with the living God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Confessing Movement is working to re-establish this clarity of purpose within the United Methodist Church*

*Therefore, as United Methodist lay women and men, clergy, and congregations, with one voice we pledge our confident allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ according to the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and seek to renew the Church in the power of this faith. We invite you to join us in this holy and happy work: recalling our beloved United Methodist Church to the fullness of its biblical and doctrinal identity in the Lord Jesus Christ through the renewal of the Holy Spirit!*