

Controversial Issues—Positions of the UMC and of Senior Pastor Randall R. Hamill

The following pages address seven controversial issues covered during our sermon series in early 2007: “Confronting the Controversies,” a series based on Adam Hamilton’s book by the same title.

“Separation of Church & State”

(part 1 of sermon series: Confronting the Controversies—01-15-07)

UMC Position

"We believe that the state should not attempt to control the church, nor should the church seek to dominate the state. 'Separation of church and state' means no organic union of the two, but it does permit interaction. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust" (Social Principles, ¶ 164B).

Conclusions

a. Role of the State

- not to take the role of the church
- it occurred w/ Constantine (3rd cent.), it happened in England, it was beginning to happen in Colonial States)
- we are to be an experiment
- promote the public good, including free religious expression, equal access, and equal influence in private and public realms
- state recognizes God-given rights and guarantees non-interference with religious practices
- remains open to influence by all religious groups

- hallmark of church-state relationship is freedom, liberty and neutrality
- if a 'wall' it is must be riddled with holes

b. Role of the Church

- shape the culture (wet cement) w/ values, ethics, hopes, vision
- be the conscience of the nation, thinking through moral issues
- produce capable leaders (vocation)
- pray for our leaders
- not count on the state to do the work of the church
- restraint re: other faiths
- know that pluralism is written into the script of history --Father Jn. Murray

c. My role is _____

- that my faith be more than a cliché on a bumper sticker
- that we realize that demanding space in the public space opens space to those of other religions
- that we must be willing to compete
- that the witness of a life lived for Christ will count for more than all the symbols on a hundred courthouse lawns
- if we succeed in public praying, but lose in private living—we have still lost
- if we win the symbols on the public wall, and lose our children in the home space—we have still lost
- salt and light are more than symbolism, they are agents dissipated into the atmosphere that make a difference for everything they touch--they are diffused, melted, fragmented, used up, shown forth, given away, made anonymous—in order to leave a lasting mark of difference through all the world

“Public sentiment is every thing. Without it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes, or pronounces judicial decision. He makes possible the enforcement of these, else impossible.” -Lincoln

‘America is a state with the soul of a church.’ -Chesterson

‘Without the allegiance of the majority to that constitutional order, such protections are only parchment barriers to tyranny. -J. Madison

“Creation & Evolution In the Public Schools”

(part 2 of series: Confronting the Controversies—01-22-06)

UMC Position

“We recognize science as a legitimate interpretation of God’s natural world. We affirm the validity of the claims of science in describing the natural world, although we preclude science from making authoritative claims about theological issues. We recognize technology as a legitimate use of God’s natural world when such use enhances human life and enables all of God’s children to develop their God-given creative potential without violating our ethical convictions about the relationship of humanity to the natural world.

In acknowledging the important roles of science and technology, however, we also believe that theological understandings of human experience are crucial to a full understanding of the place of humanity in the universe. Science and theology are complementary rather than mutually incompatible. We therefore encourage dialogue between the scientific and theological communities and seek the kind of participation that will enable humanity to sustain life on earth and, by God’s grace, increase the quality of our common lives together.”

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2004. Copyright 2004 by The UMC ced by ignorance or defensiveness on ANY side.

- a. Winning the argument is not important in the long term.
- b. Two main questions are paramount: What do we know with certainty? How shall we then live?
- c. To answer the first, we need both science and faith
 - science is responsible to tell us what, when, where, and sometimes how
 - faith is responsible to tell us who, why and for what purpose
 - ea. should stay w/in their disciplinary bounds
- f. There is Much At Stake
 - exchanging biblical faith with idolatry
 - humanity losing a sense of being wanted, purposeless, an accident of nature
 - living in fear of one another, at enmity with one another, ignorant of one another

Responsible questions for a Christian of science

If either side wins the battle, humanity loses the war

I thank God for scientific discovery,

-for what it has given to humanity in the way of progress,

-I pray that as more is to be learned to make our human journey more fruitful, I'm counting on the scientific community to enlighten me.

I thank God for my faith,

-which helps me know that I am not alone in the universe

-if no Creator, there's no creation

-if no Creator, there are no unalienable rights . . . no 1st Amendment

-if no Creator, no accountability yes . . . but you are also all on your own

-I am more than an accident of nature processes,

-I have a purpose for being, I have a mission for my life, I have a responsibility to my neighbor,

-you were planned for God's pleasure, formed for God's family, created to become like Christ, shaped for serving God, made for mission

-that when I sin, forgiveness is possible

-when I see death, there is the hope of resurrection

-when I see life cut short, I can know that what I see is not the end.

-I learn that it is not the fittest, the strongest, the brightest, alone who are to survive in the Kingdom which is Christ's

-rather, the least, the last and the lost are all of equal value and the object of God's unconditional love ... because they bear in them the very

-image of their Creator.

-I learn that life is no chance occurrence, but a very intentional and precious gift.

And because I know this,

-I live differently, I think differently, I act differently. Yea, I am different.

-I need not fear any amount of learning or discovery from the natural world.

-Learning should be no threat to the Christian. We believe that Truth is what sets us free

-Learning what is true only helps me see better the fingerprint of the One who loves me

-helps me appreciate more and more the awesome complexity and diversity of his creative hand

-and that his ways are higher than my way, that his thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and that he is just "too wonderful for me"

-but I can adore Him, worship Him, bear witness to him by living my life as a reflection of his love, in harmony with my neighbor,

-in caring concern or all his universe

-and in hopefulness of life eternal though Him who loves us. I can truly say, "thanks be to God!"

Closing Prayer

Ps. 139:6 6 This is too much, too wonderful - I can't take it all in! *13* Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. *14* I thank you, High God - you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration - what a creation! *15* You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. *16* Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day. *17* Your thoughts - how rare, how beautiful! God, I'll never comprehend them!

"The Death Penalty"

(part 3 of series: Confronting the Controversies -01-29-06)

UMC Position

"The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes." *From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2004. Copyright 2004 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.*

"When another life is taken through capital punishment, the life of the victim is further devalued. Moreover, the church is convinced that the use of the death penalty would result in neither a net reduction of crime in general nor a lessening of the particular kinds of crime against which it was directed. The death penalty also falls unfairly and unequally upon an outcast minority. Recent methods for selecting the few persons sentenced to die from among the larger number who are convicted of comparable offenses have not cured the arbitrariness and discrimination that have historically marked the administration of capital punishment in this country. We will continue to advocate for the final elimination of this act of barbarism, which has no room in a civilized society, nor in a country that prides so much on its Christian heritage. *Social Principles*, Par. 64a

CJAMM (Criminal Justice And Mercy Ministries)—OK UMC Prison Ministry, Dir. Rev. Dr. Stan Basler
(ministry of CJAMM includes New Day Camp, Exodus House, Redemption Church, J. Wesley Charter School, Kyros, etc)

Dr. Basler (the following are comments received this week for use with this sermon)

-the UMC Social Principles have held the anti-DP position for over 50 years

-a person is not truly "pro-life" if they are anti-abortion and pro-death penalty.

-the toughest challenge I had to my own anti-death penalty position was when I did street chaplaincy immediately following the Murrah Building bombing in 1995. As I stared at the building and remember the morgue nurse talking about headless babies, I wondered about my views. Then it came to me that what I was watching was caused by the reality that violence (Waco) had begot violence and the cycle would never end until someone stopped it and passed on the violence. Secondly, I asked myself what I

envisioned the Kingdom of God might look like? Did it look like a place where those in authority killed others, for any reason? My answer was “No.”

- finally, for those of us who are Restorative Justice advocates, the death penalty is only the crown jewel in a system that has ordained “punishment” as justice. Is God’s justice only about punishment? Is that a Christian understanding of God?
- Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, was born in a manger in a stable. Isn’t the crucifixion, the atonement, the last blood shed to clean up the land?

Adam Hamilton’s Observations

- this issue is not addressed directly in the New Testament
- according to the Law (Torah), all of us deserve to die, bar none
- most early Christian leaders were legally executed by the state: 10 apostles, John the Baptist, Stephen, Jesus, St. Paul

Personal Observations

a- Truly, humanity desperately needs redemption! After several days immersed in this subject, having learned more, seen more, felt more than I wanted, I am sobered at the dark side of our human capacity.

b- The DP seems to evoke the worst dimensions of our human nature (our lesser angels) in the mode of retribution, vengeance, prejudice or hatred. Many hands become tainted with blood from lives cut short by the choices of others.

c- All are sinners deserving death. Human guilt is only a matter of degrees. When the sin of our neighbor looks comparatively worse than our own, we have yet to come to terms with the depravity of our own sinfulness, hopelessness without God’s amazing grace. -D. Bonhoeffer

d- The DP blurs the Christian message of grace, sounding a trumpet with an unclear signal.

e- The DP is a short term solution with long term consequence, for the executed, AND for the executioners. Taking a life affects all life—for one dies, and something within the life-taker dies as well

f- The DP is something other than war, self defense, defense of others, or property. It is something other than restitution to the wronged, paying a debt to society, or necessary for the removal of an offender from the public domain. It is a willful, elective, premeditated, calculated act of society to end the life of someone, just because . . .

g- The DP appears not to serve a clear, positive purpose for their victim, the victim’s family, to society at large, and certainly not for the executed.

h- If I risk error, I must err on the side of life in every case—beginning of life, and ending of live. All else is too great a risk.

i- I can no longer reconcile DP with my theology of grace, with my understanding of God’s unconditional love, or with my own experience of receiving God’s tender mercy, God’s unending love, God’s tender forgiveness, and relentless acts of reconciliation toward me. I cannot reconcile or justify willfully ending the life of another for no justifiable reason, for no conclusive public good, other than to satisfy a sense of justice that I certainly hope is not leveled against me, or for vengeance in which I do not believe, or for a brazen desire for blood, which is abhorrent and anathema to the God of creative life and love. May God have mercy on all our souls.

“Once there was a holy place, Evidence of God’s embrace, And I can almost see mercy’s face, Pressed against the veil
Looking down with longing eyes, Mercy must have realized, That once His blood was sacrificed, Freedom would prevail.
And as the sky grew dark, And the earth began to shake, With justice no longer in the way,
Mercy came running Like a prisoner set free, Past all my failures to the point of my need,
When the sin that I carried Was all I could see. And when I could not reach mercy, Mercy came running to me”

-“Mercy Came Running,” by Phillips, Craig and Dean

“Jesus said, be kind to one another, tender hearted , forgiving, even as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you.”

Being a non-believer in the DP does not necessarily mean being soft on crime, nor does it mean that receiving God’s mercy translates to no accountability. It does not.

- Forgiveness by God does not include being excused by society, of responsibility for one’s actions.
- And that’s what Restorative Justice is all about—an effort to ‘right’ some of the wrong that was done in crime;
 - it is about doing restitution to those who have been harmed;
 - it is about giving back to the culture something for what you have taken
 - it is about redeeming the offender to a better and more productive life
 - none of this can begin to happen if the offender is dead

Broken system: Dept. of Corrections has become the Den of Iniquity

- our cultural philosophy is “you do the crime, you do the time,”—it is punishment, not restoration

“Euthanasia”

(part 4 of series: “Confronting the Controversies”—02-05-07)

UMC Position

“While we applaud medical science for efforts to prevent disease and illness and for advances in treatment that extend the meaningful life of human beings, we recognize that every mortal life will ultimately end in death. Death is never a sign that God has abandoned us, no matter what the circumstances of the death might be. As Christians we must always be prepared to surrender the gift of mortal life and claim the gift of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Care for dying persons is part of our stewardship of the divine gift of life when cure is no longer possible. We encourage the use of medical technologies to provide palliative care at the end of life when life-sustaining treatments no longer support the goals of life, and when they have reached their limits. There is no moral or religious obligation to use these when they impose undue burdens or only extend the process of dying. Dying persons and their families are free to discontinue treatments when

they cease to be of benefit to the patient. We recognize the agonizing personal and moral decisions faced by the dying, their physicians, their families, their friends and their faith community. We urge that decisions faced by the dying be made with thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel. We further urge that all persons discuss with their families, their physicians and their pastoral counselors, their wishes for care at the end of life and provide advance directives for such care when they are not able to make these decisions for themselves. Even when one accepts the inevitability of death, the church and society must continue to provide faithful care, including pain relief, companionship, support, and spiritual nurture for the dying person in the hard work of preparing for death. We encourage and support the concept of hospice care whenever possible at the end of life. Faithful care does not end at death but continues during bereavement as we care for grieving families.

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Personal Observations

a- The stories that began the sermon—were real (or real to life).

-the 45 yr. old man was the son of a saintly woman in my former church. I visited them many, many times during those 40+ days in ICU.

When he refused dialysis and asked for my perspective, (after swallowing hard) I told him I understood and supported his decision. (he and I were the same age) Was I giving consent to euthanasia? Or letting nature take its course?

-the older man's story was told me by Dr. Riggs, as a very typical case scenario seen many, many times in medical practice.

(the patient) "requests that it (life support) be discontinued; all of his family agrees. In this situation the physician does not know whether we are talking about a life expectancy off of the ventilator of minutes, hours or several days. The family says their very sad good byes and he is taken off of the ventilator. His breathing is labored and uncomfortable and the family looks at you and says, 'can't you do anything to relieve this suffering.' You know that sedation does not relieve pain, and the best analgesic to relieve his labored discomfort is morphine. But to give morphine (or any other narcotic), even in small doses will suppress his respiration, eliminate any verbal interaction with his family, put him into a coma. What are you going to do? Is the morphine a form of euthanasia? Is removing the ventilator a form of Euthanasia?"

b- I believe in life and am an advocate for life—whether the issues are related to the beginning of life, middle of life, or life's ending.

-My bias will always be toward preserving, maintaining, and giving LIFE. Any different conclusion/action will come only after much soul-searching, fervent prayer, godly counsel from others, long-suffering and grappling with issues and options—and as an act of faith.

c- I cannot support the work of a Doctor Kevorkian, even if a patient is asking for the services.

-but I acknowledge that the lines between right and wrong are often blurred by reality and the advances of medicine.

-“rights to life” vs. “rights to dignity and merciful sparing of suffering” are the conflicting values, not always distinguishable.

d- I have learned from others, that even in suffering and decline, life can be lived with beauty, garnished with dignity, honored with reverence and respect. It is an expression of God's *agape* (unconditional love). People in our church like Lamar and Louise Keith have taught me much about love, marriage, dignity of life, and self-giving, and finishing well (see Lamar's book, *Half Way Home, Alzheimer's Precious Care*). Lamar lovingly cared for his wife at home for seven years, followed by a short stay in nursing care, and her death a few days ago. Lamar writes, “Treat them with love, patience, dignity, because the responsibility is all yours—not theirs.” When life is honored in this way, all humanity is honored, all life is lifted to higher planes of sanctity, all are challenged to live up to that standard, and life is lived as “presenting our bodies as living sacrifices unto God, wholly acceptable, which is our reasonable act of worship” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

What You Can Do

A-Invitation to the seminar on “end of life” issues. (See the bulletin insert)

-we are blessed with capable medical, legal, ethical professionals for guiding you in making informed decisions

-why would we not want to learn and grow in our understanding of these matters?

-information is key to good stewardship of the life (body, soul, spirit) that is given us by God as a sacred trust

B- Invitation to faith in Christ

-only the living can address issues of faith

-legal counsel encourages you in making a will, to direct now the disposition of your things or care of minor children

-medical counsel encourages making an AD, to direct now the care of your body if you become incapacitated.

-spiritual counsel encourages making a decision now for the care and destiny of your soul beyond death and the grave

-nothing can separate us from the love of God Paul: “I'm absolutely convinced that nothing--living--or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable--absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”

A Prayer

Lord God, thank you that my life is a gift from you. I want to live for you and place myself in your hands. I receive Christ as my Lord and Savior, and place my whole trust in his grace. Help me to follow a path that faithfully cares for my body, that my life will be a living witness for you. Give me wisdom to know the way to affirm life, in decisions with others, and with myself. Give me grace, that even in issues of death, my life will praise you. In your name I pray. Amen.

“Prayer In the Public Schools”

(part 5 of series: “Confronting the Controversies”—02-12-06)

UMC Position (Tradition)

Look at this highlight from the UMC Book of Resolutions.

“...The state should not use its authority to promote particular religious beliefs (including atheism), nor should it require prayer or worship in the public schools, but it should leave students free to practice their own religious convictions. The state should not prohibit the free exercise of voluntary prayer in public schools ...” -Social Principals of the UMC, 2004

Personal Observations

a. As Christians, we believe that prayer is a powerful force for change, an avenue for praise, a means of receiving God's grace and guidance. Our lives are to be a living prayer. Prayer should be a very big part of our lives wherever we are.

b. “Effective” prayer can neither be prescribed by the state nor denied. Prescribed prayer can accomplish little more than symbolism, a perfunctory rite, a feel-good ritual, self-sanctioning what we are going to do anyway. Effective prayer will always emanate from the faithful hearts of God’s children. And no law or rule of humanity can harness it, direct it, prompt it, or halt it. It is of a higher realm. Are we fighting over symbolic prayer to the neglect of substantive prayer? Exchanging the weakened form, for genuine faith?

Thinking back over some of the prayers I’ve listened to at sports events, to non-Christians, or to those not of the denomination of that person praying, it must have sounded a lot like what I heard standing on a rooftop at twilight in Bethlehem in 2001. As the sun sat and I soaked in the wonder and beauty of the lights coming on across that ancient city, I was met by the loud wails of traditional Muslim evening prayers, played from the spires of a half-dozen area mosques, simultaneously. I was having a sacred, peaceful, quiet, prayerful moment. But now I was invaded by something that excluded me, in language, in music style, and in a faith I do not embrace. They did not speak for me, inspire me, nor did I want them to continue. But I was in another land, under other law. I endured.

Now is that the kind of witness that will effectively reach non-Christian and nominally-Christian people of our community, or the students of our schools? An “in your face” message with a “get-em told” attitude, ‘whether you like it or not’ post script? Our message is called the Good News, but it is often heard by outsiders as the “bad news.”

c. Many would like required prayer in school if they could choose the religion, denomination, theological persuasion, and the individual school official leading it. That is to say, if it’s just like me!

d. We cannot roll back the clock to 1957. Mrs. Jackson is no longer there. We live in a different culture, a different time, when the church cannot expect the state to do the work of ministry. It’s time we owned that.

e. One thing remains the same in America—LIBERTY, as defined by the First Amendment. When it comes to speech and the free exercise of religion, the law protects the individual against the overrunning of the many. Our forbears came here, a religious minority, to escape religious persecution by the European majority state churches. The 1st Amendment protects the minority to freely exercise their faith and speech. With state mandated prayers, what happens to your rights when you become the minority? Are you ready to have your children be taught a daily lesson from the Koran? A Muslim prayer offered over the intercom? This will happen if we get “religion back in the schools” as some would advocate.

f. Do parents and the church really want to relinquish teaching our children about God? And to pray with them? We as parents, and we as the church must take our rightful responsibility to tell them the story, to stand by them when others have let them down, to give them hope and models for living. That is, after all, the calling of parents and of the church.

g. We already look to the school to transport, feed, medicate, educate, character form, leadership train, counsel, do therapy. Do we also want the school to be their church? The parents? The pastor? The Sunday School teachers?

What You Can Do

a. Affirm public school teachers for the fine work they do with our children.

Will all public school educators and administrators, past and present, please stand that we may affirm you. (applaud)
Thank you for what you do in molding and caring for our children. You are on the front lines of culture.

b. If you’re really an advocate for school prayer—begin by praying for schools

- some of our youth pray every Wed. morning before classes at the High School
- join ‘Moms-In-Touch’ who pray every week for the school students, teachers, etc.
- why settle for a symbolic, watered down prayer read over the intercom, when you could be praying as Jesus described—quietly, fervently and effectively
- commit to praying for a particular class every day
- pray for teachers/admin. whose calling it is to serve by caring for kids
- your small group or class can adopt a school for whom you will offer targeted prayer and other support

Here’s the deal for me: I am a strong advocate for prayer in the public schools, BUT only the prayer that fits the model of Jesus, and the principles of religious liberty in the 1st Amendment. Any other kind risks not only being constitutionally unlawful, but spiritually irrelevant!

“And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production ...making a show out of ...prayers ... Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God...as simply and honestly as you can ...The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. (Matt. 6:5-6:5)

Closing Prayer

Dear God, forgive us when we’ve a complaining people, not praying people. Forgive us when we have shifted to others what you called us to do, as the church. We ask your blessings on public school teachers/administrators today, and offer our continued prayer support. Bless the children, that despite our feeble efforts and flawed modeling, they may find faith in You. Give us wisdom to know how to exercise our faith before the world without making a mockery of you, or doing more harm than good. Give us humility of spirit, love for one another, and a desire to share your love with all the world. In your name I pray. AMEN.

“Abortion”

(part 6 of series: “Confronting the Controversies”—02-19-06)

UMC Position

The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence. While individuals have always had some degree of control over when they would die, they now have the awesome power to determine when and even whether new individuals will be born.

Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion. But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother, for whom devastating damage may result from an unacceptable pregnancy. In continuity with past Christian teaching, we recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection.

We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life. We call all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may warrant abortion. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth. We particularly encourage the Church, the government, and social service agencies to support and facilitate the option of adoption. (See ¶ 161.K.)

Governmental laws and regulations do not provide all the guidance required by the informed Christian conscience. Therefore, a decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.

We urge local pastors to become informed about the symptoms and behaviors associated with post-abortion stress. We further encourage local churches to make available contact information for counseling agencies that offer programs to address post-abortion stress for all seeking help.

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Personal Observations

a- Human life is a precious gift, emanating from the creative, loving hand of God. It is sacred because it comes from God and bears his image (*imago dei*)

b- Christians hold human life as a sacred trust-- we're stewards on behalf of God. Human life is not ours to squander frivolously, whether legal, socially acceptable, or not.

c- It's impossible to pinpoint the issues with exactness of timing-- of legal 'personhood,' spiritual 'ensoulment,' medical viability, or the ethical correctness to the many related questions. We must proceed cautiously, prayerfully, open to learning, eager to forgive and be forgiven.

d- We cannot be pleased with having aborted 40 million of our pre-born children, potential American citizens, potential workers in the church, potential "Adams Hamiltons!"

e- Simply overturning "Roe" would not make all our other problems go away. Making criminals of child-bearing women might reduce abortion numbers, but would undoubtedly create a host of other social, ethical, medical and legal dilemmas.

- our more basic problems go beyond abortion (abortion law is symbolic of cultural crisis of the devaluation of life, family, marriage, and of kids
 - devaluation of human life
 - lost value of marriage
 - diminished sense of family
 - devaluation of children, motherhood
 - to take desperate young women, w/ two bad life choices, and then make them criminals, felons, prisoners, and somehow expect them to emerge from that experience as more loving, caring mothers?
 - it is to "shoot our wounded"
 - i.e. the "child playing in traffic"

f- "Overcoming Roe" seems a much better option--with an activist, compassionate, ethical affirmation of all life—for that of the unborn, and for the dignity and care of expectant females. These are the only possible solutions to simultaneously reduce the wholesale extermination of our young, support poor, single women, and counter the general devaluation of human life as expendable for being "unwanted."

g- Are we as the church willing to make the necessary commitments to help a young girl in trouble; to take in a poor, expectant mother; sponsor a child who has been born in less than desirable circumstances, and truly be advocates for all dimensions of life?

- maybe we need to lead the way in Del. Co. in providing a comprehensive network of support
- a wonderful example in Deaconess Hospital in OKC
 - where almost all other contacts only reinforced the stupidity of choices & encouraged abortion only
 - these folks took the posture, "we are only here to help you, support you, love you"
 - we will offer our services w/o strings; support w/o pressure; love w/o an agenda; choices w/o condemnation
 - placed 5000 children for adoptions since 1900
- Methodist Mission Home, San Antonio
 - placed 9000 adoptions

h- Are we willing to support public policy that encourages (helps) women to carry their unborn children to term? Give them real options to keep or adopt? Make carrying a child to term a desirable option rather than it becoming the "end of life as they know it."

Adam's Story

"Yes my life changed dramatically due to the pregnancy prior to marriage but to this day, that child has been the greatest blessing to me and thousands of others ... I am so proud of the husband and father that he has become. So many times when I look at him, I think that this incredibly kind-spirited person could have ended up aborted, but ... he was a gift from God. I look back sometimes at the college that I missed, the experiences that "could have been," and thank God that I chose God's way. My life is different than it could have been, but I wouldn't change it for anything. Thank you, Adam, for being my "gift from God." There can be no greater gift than that of a child that God wants to be born. I never dreamed thirty-six years ago while I was carrying you that you would have the impact on God's people—and me—that you do. You are my pastor, my confidant, and my best friend. I love you, Mom.

Un-Adam Story

But what of the woman who did abort her child? Who either by her own preference, or the impossibility of circumstance, or the influence of others, found the end to her overwhelming life crisis, in an abortion? What then?

- some of those women are worshipping with you today, living in your neighborhoods, attending your small groups, are co-workers of yours
- how do you minister to and with those persons?

What You Can Do

- a. **Kindness** -- "Let the one without sin, cast the first stone" of condemnation
 - we can only engage the issue in helpful ways with an attitude of humility, kindness, compassion
 - few other voices will ever be heard

- b. **Support** your local Crisis Pregnancy Centers
 - info. will be at a table in the entry areas
 - see how you can help expand services and lists of resources
- c. **Promote** the adoption option
 - encourage families who can open their homes to children
 - educate yourself and others about "open adoption"
- d. **Treasure** the children
 - follow Jesus' model of setting them in places of importance, making ministry with them a priority
- e. **Support programs/initiatives/public policies** that are supportive (financial, emotional, spiritual) of single, poor mothers
- f. **Inform, educate, share, speak the truth IN LOVE**
 - help our children understand their bodies are gifts from God, to be cherished
 - help our children know that sexuality is also God's gift best shared in the safe context of marriage
 - help our children know that when they fail (or others fail them), they are still loved, and we are here to help
- g. **Reach out** to ALL wounded by abortion with God's healing and forgiveness
 - "be ye kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32)

Luke 7:36-50 "... (Jesus) went to the Pharisee's house and sat down at the dinner table. Just then a woman of the village, the town harlot ... came with a bottle of very expensive perfume and stood at his feet, weeping, raining tears on his feet. Letting down her hair, she dried his feet, kissed them, and anointed them with the perfume. When the Pharisee ... saw this, he said to himself, "If this man was the prophet I thought he was, he would have known what kind of woman this is who is falling all over him." Jesus said to him, "Simon, ... Two men were in debt to a banker. One owed five hundred silver pieces, the other fifty. Neither of them could pay up, and so the banker canceled both debts. Which of the two would be more grateful?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one who was forgiven the most." ... he said, "Do you see this woman? I came to your home; you provided no water for my feet, but she rained tears on my feet and dried them with her hair. You gave me no greeting, but from the time I arrived she hasn't quit kissing my feet. You provided nothing for freshening up, but she has soothed my feet with perfume. Impressive, isn't it? She was forgiven many, many sins, and so she is very, very grateful. ..." Then he spoke to her: "I forgive your sins..."

"Homosexuality"

(part 7 of series: "Confronting the Controversies"—02-26-07)

UMC Position

Regarding church membership

¶ 4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church. The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition. Amended 1992, 2000.

Regarding the ministry of the ordained

¶ 304.3 While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. "Self-avowed practicing homosexual" is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual. See Judicial Council Decisions 702, 708, 722, 725, 764, 844, 984, 985.

¶ 341.6 Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

Regarding the General Council on Finance and Administration

¶ 806.9 The General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality. The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic. (From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2004.)

Human Sexuality

"...sexuality is God's good gift to all persons... We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfillment of themselves, others, and society in the stewardship of this gift. ... sexual relations are only clearly affirmed in the marriage bond. ... We reject all sexual expressions that damage or destroy the humanity God has given... We believe that sexual relations where one or both partners are exploitative, abusive, or promiscuous are beyond the parameters of acceptable Christian behavior and are ultimately destructive to individuals, families, and the social order. We deplore all forms of the commercialization and exploitation of sex... We insist that all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured. We recognize the continuing need for full, positive, age-appropriate and factual sex education opportunities for children, young people, and adults. The Church offers a unique opportunity to give quality guidance and education in this area. Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all, and we will seek to live together in Christian community. We embrace families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons. --Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2004.

Marriage

"We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social

norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman." --The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2004.

Personal Observations

a- Every opinion about homosexuality is biased. Mine is no exception.

- my first bias as a heterosexual is that I have not dealt with this personally, nor had an immediate family issue
- my second bias is my theological heritage and my high regard for scripture and of the Christian tradition
- third, the pendulum has swung so far so fast in just 40 yrs. of our long history, we do not know long all that is at stake
- fourth, therefore I am not ready to completely redefine the church, the culture, the family, or all of Christian thought

b- Each person is given physical life traits-- which has nothing to do with fairness or God's will

- some are tall and balding; some are short with lots of hair
- some are born in privileged America, others in the squalor of the third world
- some are born with high intellect, artistic talent; while others struggle to make a contribution
- some seem to be 'wired' with homosexual tendencies, which we are yet to either know for sure or to understand
- still others are 'tilted' toward homosexuality by the influence of environment, trauma, or other experience
- we are as we are—by birth and environment and are affected by both. What now?

c- Life involves accepting the "hand" we're given, making responsible choices, and making those choices work

- some say the responsible choice is to acknowledge "who they are" by inclination/desire, and let that define their lifestyle
- others say the responsible choice is to "deal with who they are" (gay inclinations) in order to live a different lifestyle (as a non-gay)
 - one ministry puts it this way: "we do not see gayness as a disease to be cured, but as a condition to be dealt with, much like the condition of alcoholism or any other tendency. We deal constantly with the condition in order to successfully live a different way."
- still others say they have tried and prayed to change their lifestyle unsuccessfully, yet hundreds witness to living successfully another way

d- We must know that all choices have consequences

- the choice of a person with a gay identity to hide or deny that identity, is to adopt a form of hypocrisy, live a lie
- the choice toward gay promiscuity is to engage a very high health risk, and to that of others
- the choice to monogamous gay living will produce a lower health risk, but risks isolation from some family & heterosexual friends
- the choice of a gay person to receive ministry to live a "straight" life, also risks hard work and the displeasure of other gays

e- The more important questions for all include:

- What is God's best and highest purpose for my life?
- How may I best live my life as an act of worship to him?
- How may I best bear witness to his love, his mercy, his grace?
- How do I reconcile my life choices with the Biblical witness and 2000 yrs. of Christian Tradition?

f- For those personally uninvolved in this issue, are your "opinions" based more on conviction or prejudice?

- do your words and actions bring healing, hope and help to anyone?
- or have you simply brought hurt, division, ridicule, condemnation?
- is your demeanor that of Jesus, who loved the person, even when he saw their choices as destructive?

g- If you view the behavior of others as sinful, is it more sinful than your sins?

- D. Bonhoeffer: "If you see the sin of another as more abominable than your own, you have never come to terms with your own depravity apart from God's grace."

What You Can Do

a- Prayerfully separate Godly convictions from personal prejudices, and live your Godly convictions!

- there is no room for hateful, hurtful behavior that results in "gay-bashing" or other means of personal destruction in the name of God
- neither is there place for gay-rights activists to harass or denigrate those persons choosing to leave the gay culture
- it is necessary to ask what would full sanction of homosexuality in culture would mean for the church, the culture, the law, the family?
 - honestly raising those questions is not homophobia, but responsible stewardship of life
- pray and support all means of ministry seeking God's grace, love, redemption, a hope and a future!

b- If you are not dealing with this issue in your personal family, that is not a reason for self-congratulatory pride.

- neither does it let you off the hook of love, for it is an issue in your "faith family." Humbly embrace that.
- know that if you live long enough, your time for more personal involvement may come!

c- Be compassionate toward families in the throes of these issues.

- be a friend even though you don't really understand.
- are you aware that your 'grandchildren bragging' can cause pain to those who will never have grandchildren, because their child is gay?
- are you aware that because of your uncompassionate opinions, your friends can't share with you about their children, because they fear the hurt you will inflict upon them---again?
- have you any idea the pain you cause your friends by thoughtless/remarks, that wounds them because of their own children?
- repentance is appropriated, to God and to those wounded

Prayer God forgive us when we fail you and one another, when we fail even to try in understanding our brothers and sisters. Forgive us when we have failed to honestly address the heart of these issues, but have been comfortable allowing our circumstances, our feeling, or our prejudices to speak as our faith. Bring us to know what you would have us do, and who you would have us be, and to know our place of responsibility to the world, the culture, the church, the family, and lastly, to ourselves. AMEN.