2015 RICHMOND CORRESPONDENCE

This is a log of the correspondence sent to churches in 2015. In some cases it is in reply to the 2014 correspondence received or is a follow up to that correspondence. Reading the document for the 2014 section on the web page give back ground. The correspondence to the Historic Richmond Foundation is on its own page. There were return mailing addresses in the original but they are omitted here.

LETTER TO THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH LEADER SHIP

This letter was sent by certified mail, and identical letters were also sent by certified mail to Don Crain, Associate Regional Missionary for the Central-East Region, and Steve Bradshaw, Regional Missionary for the Central-East Region. The Central-East Region includes the Richmond area.

|  |
| --- |
| February 14, 2015  Edward H. Sebesta  edwardsebesta@gmail.com  Dr. Brian Autry  Executive Director  Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia  4956 Dominion Boulevard  Glen, Allen, VA 23060  Dear Dr. Autry:  The Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) are planning to hold their 2015 National Reunion in Richmond, Virginia. They have a web page on this upcoming reunion at <http://www.jebstuartcamp.org/jebstuartcamp.org/2015reunion/>. I am writing you to request that Southern Baptist churches not lend the use of their facilities to the SCV.  I enclose a copy of an article from the *Richmond Free Press*. In it you can read how St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, despite their long history of lending their church to neo-Confederate groups, decided to stop lending their church to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This article is available online at <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2014/nov/07/confederates-hold-service-downtown-church/>.  I do investigative research regarding the neo-Confederate movement. My research has been published by university presses, peer reviewed academic journals, as well as by *Black Commentator*. See my curriculum vitae which is online at <http://www.templeofdemocracy.com/curriculum-vitae.html>. In an online article about the SCV I document what I think is clearly the racism and extremism of the SCV. I enclose a copy. The free guest pass URL is <http://www.blackcommentator.com/526/526_confederacy_sebesta_guest_share.html>.  I regret to report that the Ashley River Baptist Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, hosted an event for the 2014 National Reunion of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV). It is reported in the July 30, 2014 issue of the *Times Examiner*. I enclose a copy, and the article can be read online at <http://www.timesexaminer.com/historical/1914-2014-national-reunion-of-sons-of-confederate-veterans>.  When churches lend neo-Confederate groups the use of their facilities they not only give them support through the use of their facilities, but additionally they lend the prestige and credibility of their individual church and denomination to that group. The church is also party to the enabling the agenda of the neo-Confederates.  I am disappointed in the Ashley River Baptist Church actions. The Southern Baptist churches have had a record of not hosting the national conventions of neo-Confederate groups. For national conventions from 1990 to 2014 only one Southern Baptist church had hosted the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which was First Baptist Church of Columbia in South Carolina. For 1990 to 2013 I don’t find any record of a Southern Baptist church hosting the national convention of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. I enclose tables of hosting churches and bar graphs of the hosting by denomination. This information can also be found online at the web page <http://www.templeofdemocracy.com/churches-of-the-confederacy.html>.  I had had written the four denominations leading in hosting neo-Confederate national convention services not to host the SCV: Episcopalians (both factions), United Methodist, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics (See again enclosed bar graphs). There were indications that the SCV was having difficulties finding a church.  I did not write any organizations of Southern Baptists in South Carolina since I thought Southern Baptists wouldn’t do such a thing. The Southern Baptist church had seemed to be moving forward on the issue of race with such notable actions as the 1995 apology for slavery (<http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899>). It had seemed that the Southern Baptists comprehended that Christianity was a global effort with no one race or nation privileged over another. Yet this doesn’t seem to be the situation. When a Southern Baptist church hosts a neo-Confederate group I am compelled to doubt the sincerity of resolution 899.  The neo-Confederate movement besides bringing back into print nearly every antebellum book defending slavery and have also been publishing some modern theological defenses of slavery.  The neo-Confederates have been condemning the Southern Baptist Convention for their apology regarding slavery since the resolution was passed in 1995. The notorious *Southern Partisan* had two condemnations published. [2nd Quarter, Vol. 15, 1995, pp. 7 Wesley Pruden; 3rd Quarter, Vol. 15, 1995, pp. 56 Samuel Francis. Documentation enclosed.]  Though the Sons of Confederate Veterans has not directly condemned the Southern Baptists for their resolution, they have strongly promoted and praised the writings that have condemned the Southern Baptists.  Gary Lee Roper has written a book, “Antebellum Slavery: An Orthodox View,” 2008, advocating a pro-slavery theology, in which on pages 281-82 he condemns the Southern Baptist apology and calls those who passed it “pompous ignoramus.” I enclose documentation.  This book is promoted and praised by the Sons of Confederate Veterans in their publication Chaplain’s Corps Chronicles of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. In the April 2008 issue the SCV Chaplain’s Corps praises the book and tells the readers it is a “must read.” Documentation enclosed. (<http://www.scv.org/pdf/chaplains/2008_Apr.pdf>).    The book has been offered for sale in the SCV catalog, SCV’s online store, and in their official publication *Confederate Veteran*. I enclose documentation.  Walter D. Kennedy has written a book “Myths of American Slavery,” Pelican Publishing Company, 2003. The Southern Baptists are denounced for their apology on pages 88-96 in a section titled “Radical Influence in the Southern Baptist Convention,” in a chapter titled “Abolitionism Versus Christianity.” On page 89 the author states:  “The passing of the so-called Racial Reconciliation Resolution by the assembled delegates defamed and otherwise slandered the good name of Southern Baptists of the past 150 years. The resolution is nothing more than liberal double-speak for an act of cultural genocide against the South.”  Elsewhere on page 89 the resolution is called “infamous” and the author states, “The duped delegates regurgitated on cue the abolitionist (i.e. liberal) propaganda about the institution of African servitude and life in the Old South.” I enclose documentation.  This book has been offered for sale in the SCV catalog, SCV’s online store, and in their official publication *Confederate Veteran*. I enclose documentation.  The Southern Baptists may have apologized over slavery in 1995 but in 2014 it aided and abetted an organization that is promoting pro-slavery theology and a neo-Confederate ideology that condemns the Southern Baptist Convention.  One concern I have developed in investigating neo-Confederate groups is how they are enabled by mainstream organizations such as corporations, churches, government bodies and others. So I have decided to ask these groups to reconsider their relations with specific neo-Confederate groups. It is all well and good that I have written on extremist Confederate Christian nationalists for the *Canadian Review of American Studies* (<http://www.templeofdemocracy.com/ConfederateChristianNationalism.pdf>), but I have realized that the enabling of a racist historical consciousness in the general public and racist neo-Confederate groups by mainstream churches is as detrimental to America as these fringe churches referred to in my paper. The Christianity advocated by the SCV is largely similar. You can review their Chaplain’s Chronicle online at <http://www.scv.org/about/chaplainsChronicle.php> and <http://chaplain-in-chief.com/>.  In the summer of 2013 I had a successful campaign getting corporations to stop supporting the SCV as reported in a Black Commentator article which is available online at a free guest link at <http://www.blackcommentator2.com/527_cover_scv_donation_loss_sebesta_guest.html>. (Link is also in my online curriculum vitae.) It took eight days for this campaign to succeed. I regret to say that so far the temples of Mammon were much more willing to give up neo-Confederacy than the churches of Christ.  I ask that the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention not host the events of neo-Confederate organizations.  Finally as other denominations inevitably move away from hosting neo-Confederate groups the neo-Confederate groups will seek alternatives and the Southern Baptist Convention risks being the leading church hosting neo-Confederate organizations. This transition seems to have already started.  Sincerely Yours,  Edward H. Sebesta |

The Richmond Episcopal bishops written in 2014 did not reply. This was a follow up letter sent to all three of them by certified mail. Rt. Rev. Shannon Sherwood Johnson Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Edwin F. Gulick Jr., Assistant Bishop, and Rt. Rev. Susan Ellyn Goff, Bishop Suffragen. (2/27/15) Hopefully this year I will get a reply.

|  |
| --- |
| February 18, 2015  Edward H. Sebesta    [edwardsebesta@gmail.com](mailto:edwardsebesta@gmail.com)  Ret. Rev. Shannon Sherwood Johnson  Diocesan Bishop – Diocese of Richmond  Mayo Memorial Church House  110 West Franklin St.  Richmond, VA 23226  Dear Rt. Rev. Johnson:  I enclose a copy of an article from the *Richmond Free Press*. In it you can read how St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, despite their long history of lending their church to neo-Confederate groups, decided to stop lending their church to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This article is available online at <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2014/nov/07/confederates-hold-service-downtown-church/>. I think it shows what can be done when people decided to engage an issue and live up to their principles.  On the other hand I regret that I have not received a reply to my letter of February 18, 2014 to yourself regarding the Episcopal Church being one of the leading denominations in hosting neo-Confederate groups and requesting that the Episcopal churches in Richmond not host neo-Confederate groups.  I ask you again to not lend the use of the facilities of the Episcopal Church to neo-Confederate churches.  Sincerely Yours,  Edward H. Sebesta |

This is a certified letter sent to United Methodist Bishop Rev. Young Jin Cho’s letter which attempted to side step the issue. The United Methodist Church has a variety of pronouncements related to race, but it remains to be seen if they really mean anything.

|  |
| --- |
| February 20, 2015  Edward H. Sebesta    [edwardsebesta@gmail.com](mailto:edwardsebesta@gmail.com)  Rev. Young Jin Cho  Presiding Bishop  The United Methodist Church Virginia Conference  P.O. Box 5606  10330 Staples Mill Road  Glen Allen, VA 23058-5606  Dear Rev. Cho:  I am responding to your letter of March 19, 2014 to myself concerning the hosting of neo-Confederate groups by the United Methodist Church (UMC).  I enclose a copy of an article from the *Richmond Free Press*. In it you can read how St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, despite their long history of lending their church to neo-Confederate groups, decided to stop lending their church to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This article is available online at <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2014/nov/07/confederates-hold-service-downtown-church/>. I think it shows what can be done when people decided to engage an issue and live up to their principles.  In your letter you state:  “According to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, our current *Discipline*, the authority for making decisions regarding the meeting of outside groups in our church resides with the pastor and board of trustees of each local congregation. While our *Discipline* does state ‘permission can be granted only when such use is consistent with the Social Principles … and ecumenical objectives,’ it is left up to the discretion of the pastor and board of trustees of each church to make that determination.”  I have heard in the press reports covering the UMC that ministers performing same-sex marriage are being put on trial, and I read UMC websites talking about “connectivity” as a reason that members should oppose same-sex marriage. It seems that there is connectivity for homophobia and dis-connectivity regarding racism. The expression that comes to mind is the cliché “Where there is a will there is a way.” However, I think it would be a fool’s errand on my part to argue UMC ecclesiastical law with a bishop of the UMC.  However, I think the real problem is that you have unnecessarily narrowed the question as to whether you can compel a church to not host the Sons of Confederate Veterans. There are other possible actions that can be taken.  You yourself could express an opinion or at least raise the question, there could be a group set up to discuss the question, there could be a forum on the topic, there could be an article in a newsletter, and there are possibly other avenues that could be taken. Again where there is a will there is a way.  Your response is the response of a lawyer trying to neatly dispose of the issue. I don’t see in your response the spirit of the abolitionist John Wesley.  On pages 24 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, ¶ 5, Article V it states:  Racial Justice – The United Methodist Church proclaims the value of each person as a unique child of God and commits itself to the healing and wholeness of all persons. The United Methodist Church recognizes that the sin of racism has been destructive to its unity throughout its history. Racism continues to cause painful division and marginalization. The United Methodist Church shall confront and seek to eliminate racism, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large. The United Methodist Church shall work collaboratively with others to address concerns that threaten the cause of racial justice at all times and in all places.  There is an expression popular now days, “Walk the Talk.” I would like to see the UMC actually walk this talk and not host neo-Confederate groups.  On pages 345-46 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, ¶ 433, No. 2 it discusses a Pan-Methodist Commission where the African American Methodist denominations, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the African Union Methodist Protestant Church, the Christian Methodist Church, and the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church are to participate discussion a possible union with the United Methodist Church. Will the UMC delegates explain to this Commission the UMC’s accommodation and enabling of neo-Confederate groups? Will they know that union to the UMC is connectivity to the Confederacy and neo-Confederates?  I again ask you to not have a United Methodist Church congregation host the national reunion of the Sons of Confederate Veterans in Richmond, Virginia in 2015.  Sincerely Yours,  Edward H. Sebesta |

I also got an evasive letter from the Most. Rev. Francis X. DiLorenzo, Roman Catholic Bishop of Richmond. The website of the Roman Catholic Diocese is outspoken about a great many issues, but there seems to be a difficulty in speaking about the issue of enabling neo-Confederates. The following is the text of the follow up letter sent by certified mail.

|  |
| --- |
| February 18, 2015  Edward H. Sebesta    [edwardsebesta@gmail.com](mailto:edwardsebesta@gmail.com)  Most. Rev. Francis X. DiLorenzo  Bishop of Richmond  Pastoral Center  7800 Carousel Lane  Richmond, VA 23294-4201  Dear Most Rev. DiLorenzo:  I enclose a copy of an article from the *Richmond Free Press*. In it you can read how St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, despite their long history of lending their church to neo-Confederate groups, decided to stop lending their church to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This article is available online at <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2014/nov/07/confederates-hold-service-downtown-church/>.  I think this shows what can be done when the people of a church decides to live by their professions of not being racist.  Your letter of March 11, 2014 in which you said, “We are not aware of any such events in this area,” doesn’t actually answer my request that you not host neo-Confederate groups.  I would also like to forestall two other possible responses. One is where some position against racism is stated without actually stating that you wouldn’t host a neo-Confederate group. Another is where you unnecessarily very narrowly constrain the question of whether you can compel churches not to host neo-Confederate groups. You could take a position yourself, you could call together a group to discuss the question, and I am sure there are other ways of addressing the issue.  Finally, I enclose some photos of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) having a ceremony with Confederate flags at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Mobile, Alabama in 2008. Though how immaculate a cathedral is when it hosts a group like the SCV is I think open to question. Hosting the SCV also raises questions about the credibility of *Gaudium et Spes* in its pronouncements against discrimination.  I ask you to, as is said nowadays, “Walk the Talk,” and not have the churches of the Diocese of Richmond host the SCV.  Sincerely Yours,  Edward H. Sebesta |

Finally there was a certified letter sent to Presbyterian USA Moderator Jack Corley since the term of office of the prior Moderator had expired. The reply sent by Archibald Wallace III was from him in a personal capacity since it turns out my letter was just sent after his term was expiring. The letter after addressing the evasion of the issue by Wallace asks if the Presbyterian USA church’s statements regarding race really have any real application or effect.

|  |
| --- |
| February 21, 2015  Edward H. Sebesta    [edwardsebesta@tx.rr.com](mailto:edwardsebesta@tx.rr.com)  Jack Corley  Moderator – Presbytery of the James  3218 Chamberlayne Ave.,  Richmond, VA 23227  Dear Mr. Corley:  I enclose a copy of an article from the *Richmond Free Press*. In it you can read how St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, despite their long history of lending their church to neo-Confederate groups, decided to stop lending their church to the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This article is available online at <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2014/nov/07/confederates-hold-service-downtown-church/>. I think it shows what can be done when people decided to engage an issue and live up to their principles.  The Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) is scheduled to have a national reunion in Richmond, Virginia in 2015. I ask that Presbyterian Churches USA not lend their facilities to the SCV. The SCV web page on this is: <http://www.jebstuartcamp.org/jebstuartcamp.org/2015reunion/>.  I am writing a follow up to a letter I sent last year in March 2014. I had written a letter addressed to Archibald Wallace III former moderator of the Presbytery of the James asking that the Presbyterian churches not host neo-Confederate groups. I got a reply dated March 20, 2014 in which he informed me that he had received my letter dated March 10, 2014 on March 19, 2014 but his term ended March 1, 2014 and that he had forwarded my letter to the Stated Clerk.  I am enclosing a printout of the letter I had sent to Mr. Wallace, but not all the supporting documentation. According to Mr. Wallace the original mailing is with the Stated Clerk and in the interest in conserving paper I am not going to provide a second set unless it is shown to be necessary. I am enclosing this printout because forwarding my March 10, 2014 to the Stated Clerk doesn’t mean that the Moderator in 2014 read it or anyone else and it seems to have become a dead letter. I would have preferred to have had the letter forwarded to the current Moderator in 2014. If this letter comes after the expiration of your term please forward it to the current Moderator.  Mr. Wallace after explaining the disposition of my letter ends his letter with the following:  “Had I been Moderator at the time I received it, I would have responded that the Moderator has no power to do the things that you ask, but I will leave that decision to others who now serve as Moderator and Stated Clerk. “  However, I did not receive a reply from anyone other than Mr. Wallace from the Presbytery of the James.  In Mr. Wallace reference to “power” I am presuming that he is implying that I requested that he personally compel churches not to host neo-Confederate groups.  My request in the letter was twice and I quote both instances as follows:  “I ask that the Presbyterian USA churches in the Presbytery of the James not make available any of their churches to the UDC or SCV.”  And:  “Again, I ask you not to hose either the SCV or UDC in any Presbyterian churches. Additionally, I am asking for your help in my campaign against mainstream enabling of neo-Confederate groups by setting an example by not hosting either the SCV or UDC in any Presbyterian.”  I didn’t specify compulsion or any specific means by which this might be done. Mr. Wallace could have forwarded my letter to individual churches, he could have expressed an opinion on the matter, and he could have put the issue up for discussion in the Presbytery of the James. I am sure there are other means where this issue might be addressed.  Mr. Wallace unnecessarily and very narrowly focuses the question on whether he has the power to compel churches to not host neo-Confederate groups and evades the issue. The whole reply of Mr. Wallace does show that the law firm WallacePledger, PLLC has an able lawyer.  I don’t propose to get entangled in a discussion of ecclesiastical law of the Presbyterian Church USA with officers of said church. At the end of the day for whatever reason you are either hosting neo-Confederate groups or not.  In writing my letters to churches and denominations in asking them to not host neo-Confederate groups I have to rely that their statements about race and policies regarding race in their governing documents, such as your Book of Order 2013-2015, are in good faith, that they really mean something. However, it is a free country and you are fully entitled to not care at all about hosting neo-Confederate groups. At the end of the day you are fully in your rights to be the Presbyterian Church CSA as well as USA. It would not be desirable, but it is in your rights.  However, after fully informing you of the issues, making sure that there is no basis of plausible deniability, (you weren’t informed, you thought I was asking for compulsion, etc.) and you continue to be indifferent I can say the Presbyterians don’t care at all, that they are the Presbyterian Church CSA as well as USA.  I regret to see that a Presbyterian Church USA lent their church to the Children of the Confederacy national convention. This is an organization run by the United Daughters of the Confederacy to teach children that the Confederacy and its leaders are glorious. I enclose documentation.  I hope to hear from you on this issue, I hope not to read later this year that a Presbyterian USA church lent their facility to the SCV. I hope to get a reply not written by a person writing as a lawyer.  Regards,  Edward H. Sebesta |