



12 September 2022

PRESS RELEASE

AFRICA INITIATIVE'S RESPONSE TO AFRICAN BISHOPS' ACCUSATION

On 8 September 2022, the global space went viral with a press release emanating from the annual gathering of the Central Conferences of Africa College of Bishops, held on the main campus of the Africa University, Mutare Zimbabwe. In that press release, the seven (7) out of thirteen (13) active Bishops and one Retired Bishop from the three Central Conferences of Africa accused the Africa Initiative of the following counts:

1. That the Africa Initiative has lost its original goal of advocating for African causes, issues and representation in the United Methodist agencies and gatherings such as the General Conference
2. That Africa Initiative is now working with the Wesleyan Covenant Association to destroy our United Methodist Church
3. That the Africa Initiative is working with and supporting the Global Methodist Church, a denomination that has not been recognized by the General Conference.

Based upon these allegations, the Africa College of Bishops has resolved to disassociate from any activities of the Africa Initiative, and not allow its activities in their areas of services.

In response to these allegations, we firstly want to make it unequivocally clear that we love and respect our episcopal leaders and esteem them as the shepherds of God's flock (the Central Conferences of Africa) entrusted to their care.

However, we are shocked, surprised, and ashamed that some of our episcopal leaders (some have written to disassociate themselves from the allegations) would devote their valued annual gathering, not to address vital issues confronting the church in Africa, but on allegations against the Africa Initiative without making any inquiries of its leaders of their concerns. Contrary to the so said call for unity, they released a declaration of war. During the tenure of the late Bishop John K. Yambasu of the Sierra Leone Area, he always extended invitation to the leadership of the Initiative to the annual gatherings of the Africa College of Bishops to offer briefings. At such forums, episcopal leaders made inquiries of the Initiative's activities, and provided guidance. Contrary to that approach, the current leadership of the College of Bishops selected to discredit the Initiative and levy allegations without any due process, consistent with our Book of Discipline (BOD, 2016, Para. 2701-2719). This is unfortunate. Whatever the misunderstandings, we could have settled them around the "fire hart or under the palaver hut" where African elders and their subjects meet to settle their disputes. Instead, some of our leaders decided to go public with unauthenticated allegations.

However, because this accusation is within the public space, it is important that the Africa Initiative make the following clarifications for the common good of our clergy and laity of the 13 episcopal areas of the three Central Conferences of Africa whose confidence and support the Initiative enjoys, and for the global community.

The Africa Initiative is an empowering Movement within the three Central Conferences of Africa for the evangelization of the nations, revitalization of the church, and transformation of the African society. We are an advocacy group with elected delegates to General and Central Conferences who have the rights and responsibility to engage other delegates and the people called United Methodist from around the world on issues that are trending or expecting to come before the General and Central Conferences.

While episcopal leaders are not members of our annual conferences, we are. We are the voting members of the General Conference, and it is unthinkable that anyone would think and believe that it is possible to stop us from standing up for Jesus Christ or from debating all the issues of the United Methodist Church. Our ultimate goal is to work toward the sustainable growth and development of the UMC in Africa. Hence, the Africa Initiative remains undauntedly committed to its vision, to see Biblical Christianity taught, lived, and sustained within the three Central Conferences of Africa in the Wesleyan spirit.

To achieve this vision, the mission to which the Initiative remains unwaveringly devoted is as follows:

- To facilitate bi-quadrennial prayer and leadership summits for members of the Central conferences of Africa
- To foster partnership, network and fellowship among leaders of the Annual and Provisional Conferences of Africa
- To facilitate training in cross-cultural evangelization and missions, discipleship, leadership development, prayer revivals and resource mobilization for annual and provisional conferences of Africa
- To raise the voice of the African Church within global Methodism, by supporting the practice of biblical orthodoxy, training delegates to General Conference, and speaking out against unbiblical theological persuasions, teachings, and practices that have the propensity to misrepresent and undermine Wesleyan doctrines.

The Africa Initiative continues to advocate for African causes, issues and make representations in United Methodist agencies, movements and coalitions, and gatherings such as the General Conference, contrary to the allegation that the Initiative has lost its goal. Consistent with our vision to see the teaching and practice of biblical Christianity thrives on the Continent of Africa, we affiliate with the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) and other members of the Reform and Renewal Coalition. Also, consistent with the connectional nature of the UMC (para. 125). “We desire to affirm and celebrate our relationships, covenants, and partnership with autonomous, affiliated autonomous, affiliated united covenanting and concordat churches) as well as other partners in the Wesleyan and ecumenical Christian families” (para. 570-574). It will be unfortunate

for any episcopal leader to attempt to take these rights from another United Methodist or a group of United Methodists because of disagreements” (BOD, para. 125, p. 95).

At its recent gathering in May 2022, at the Desmond Tutu Retreat Center in Nairobi, Kenya, the Africa Initiative unequivocally resolved that:

1. The United Methodist Church in Africa shall not be a part of a denomination that changes the current language of the Book of Discipline on human sexuality in order to legalize homosexuality, same-sex marriage, or the ordination of practicing LGBTQIA+ people as pastors. This is the ultimate, decisive, and undisputed position of the UMC in Africa.
2. The Africa Initiative shall continue to encourage African churches and conferences to patiently await the 2024 General Conference while advocating for the adoption of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, and while acknowledging unique circumstances in some areas of the Continent that may cause members to act before then.
3. That Bishops who have reached mandatory retirement by 2020 across the Central Conferences of Africa but could not officially retire due to the postponement of the General Conference, be graciously retired, and that new episcopal elections take place this year, as the case is for jurisdictional conferences. Failure on the part of any College of Bishops or constitutionally retired Bishop to abide by the Book of Discipline in this regard is to lack the legitimacy to lead any annual conference in Africa (BOD, 2016, para. 408.1a, b). Further, it would be a demonstration of injustice to members of the central conference over whom he or she presides.

If this resolution and celebrated action by clergy and laity within the Central Conferences of Africa is a basis for some African Bishops’ claim that the Africa Initiative has lost its goal of serving in the interest of the Central Conferences, then, God is our Judge and the thriving congregations of the UMC across Africa are our witnesses.

Conclusion

While we hold our Bishops in high esteem and are willing to continue to collaborate with them for the common good of the UMC in Africa, the leadership of the Initiative is available for dialogue on any matter of concerns. Africa Initiative serves in the supreme interest of the UMC in Africa in particular, and the global UMC in general; and will continue to do so.

The Africa Initiative remains that singular force for uniting African delegates to General Conference toward the common vision of sustaining biblical orthodoxy on the Continent. We will not compromise this vision for anything. We therefore want to assure members of the clergy and laity of the UMC in Africa that the Initiative will continue to work for the growth and expansion of the church in Africa, and not to undermine or destroy it, as alleged.

As we conclude this response to the Africa College of Bishops’ accusation against the Initiative, we remain committed to praying for our episcopal leaders to strive toward leaving behind a

positive legacy for which posterity would celebrate them. We also pray that, void of liberal and progressive persuasions against 2000 years of biblical orthodoxy that is rapidly plummeting the UMC in the USA; our Bishops would see the Africa Initiative as a reliable and trustworthy partner in the holistic growth and development of the UMC in Africa.

Furthermore, we pray for our Bishops that they would “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away”. (1 Peter 5:2-4). May God bless the Central Conferences of Africa, and enable us to live, teach and preserve biblical orthodoxy in Africa. Amen.

Signed:

Rev. Dr. Jerry P. Kulah, West Africa Central Conference, General Coordinator, Africa Initiative

Rev. Dr. John Pena Auta, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Mr. Simon Mafunda, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Rev Sinzohagera Emmanuel, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Rev. Wilton T.A. Odongo, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Rev Dr Julius S. Nelson, Jr, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Mr. Nicolas Munongo, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Rev Ben Illunga Banza, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Dr Antoine Umba, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Mr. Tunda Kasongo Lukali Prosper, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Rev. Bartolomeu Dias Sapalo, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Dr. Muriel V. Nelson, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

Rev. Yayuba Bazel Yoila, Executive Committee Member, Africa Initiative

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