



UNITED METHODIST CHURCH AFRICA INITIATIVE

UMC CENTRAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA

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AFRICA INITIATIVE

5th August 2016

A MESSAGE TO GLOBAL UMC FROM UMC AFRICA INITIATIVE

Over the past weeks we have been following the events and activities of the five jurisdictions of The United Methodist Church with mixed emotions and serious concerns about the future of our beloved church. We have read of actions taken by some in gross disobedience to the Bible and our *Book of Discipline*, and of others who have written to express their disagreements. We are deeply concerned. However, we are praying for God's intervention as we discern God's plans for the future of our church.

It is shockingly amazing that in the communication of "**Love Prevails**" to the Council of Bishops there was no mention of a specific reference to any passage of the Holy Scripture, our primary authority for doctrine, faith, and Christian living as the Church of Jesus Christ, to support any of its claims, arguments, and demands and justifications for the actions it has taken in recent times. This attitude and behavior has the propensity to embarrass, ridicule, and blur the message of the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone has the power to save and transform society.

In light of the commitment we (African delegates to the 2016 General Conference) made to the request of the Council of Bishops by our support to have them set up a special Commission to inquire into all human sexuality issues contained in our *Book of Discipline*, many of us are deeply saddened by the actions of some of our brothers and sisters to attempt to derail the unity of global Methodism. Their actions to grossly disrespect our Bishops and disobey our global decision at the recent 2016 General Conference are incompatible with fostering unity within global Methodism.

Furthermore, their actions seem to confirm the fears of our founding father, John Wesley. About five years before his demise, John Wesley had expressed his fears about the future of our church in regards to its continued commitment and submission to the Scripture and discipline that govern us. He said, "*I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America [in Africa and the rest of the world]. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both to the doctrine, spirit and discipline with which they first set out*". When we abandon the clear teaching of Scripture in favor of some philosophies and ideologies of contemporary society, we cease to exist within God's parameter of grace.

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We are left to wonder, why are we not identified as Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus, etc., but Christians? It is because every religious faith has a doctrine and a religious code of conduct that distinguishes it from all other religion. In the case of Christianity, it is the Bible, the Holy Word of God, as the Quran is for the Muslims. One's religious identity is not found in the most appealing cultural or political system of the day, for that is fleeting. Loyalty, obedience, and submission to the teachings of these "divine writings" of the faith to which one belongs defines, distinguishes, and truly identifies adherents. One cannot claim to truly be a member of any of the world's religions and live in gross disobedience to its teachings. (John 14:15; Psalm 119:9-11, 105; 19:7-11). Let the church be the church; and let not the culture of the day define the global Christian community called United Methodist, but the Bible (Joshua 1:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Christian Church, bought and birthed with the blood of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:1-13; Matthew 27: 32-61; John 10:10-11; Hebrews 10:1-39) is not and cannot be a social club; it cannot be directed by any form of political activism that contradicts the teachings of Scripture. And it is not a social or political system based on humanism or secular ideologies and philosophies (2 John 2; 15-16; Colossians 2: 8-15; 1 Samuel 8) that seeks endorsement for a kind of "human rights" to the detriment of human existence as God our Creator has designed it. Instead, the Church of Jesus Christ is a global community redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who lives in loving relationship with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. They are a people called out from the world and yet sent into the world (John 16:7-11; Acts 1:8; Genesis 6:5-9; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 28; Judges 2:10-13; 17:6) to share the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit in order that persons might come to faith in Christ and become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We cannot in any way be "bad news" by our decisions, actions, and attitudes, and yet attempt to proclaim the good news.

It is time to return to the faith of our fathers and mothers (the Holy Scriptures) and be the church. In spite all that is going on, there is hope for the continued growth and development of the Church of Jesus Christ because Jesus is still the LORD of His Church. We will remain committed and determined to live in loyalty and obedience to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, and to our *Book of Discipline*. We will also remain supportive of the unity of the global United Methodist Community as long as the Bible remains our primary authority for faith and Christian living. We shall remain loving of members of the UM Church who have chosen to tread the cultural path of contemporary society that is inimical to the teaching of Scripture, in the hope that we will reconcile our differences and submit to the Lordship of Christ. They are our brothers and sisters for whom Christ also gave his life. However, we shall not compromise our Christian faith on the altar of what seems to the minds of some to be "socially acceptable and politically correct" cultures and practices of contemporary society.

We are confident that God is in sovereign control of His Church. He promises to continually build it until He returns to receive us unto Himself, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18b). We need to only be still, yet vigorously prayerful and discerning in such a time as this, and we will see the deliverance of the Lord.

We must admit that global United Methodist Church is at the crossroads (Jeremiah 6:16). We have choices to make. On one hand, we can choose to obey God and His word, and thereby repent of the sin of gross disobedience and abandon the quest to be like the rest of the world. On the other hand, we can choose to continue in pursuit of what the cultural

practices of the day dictate that denies God's sovereignty over God's creation and accepts what feels good, what seems politically acceptable to society, etc. The choice is ours.

But as Joshua, at the close of his ministry in Shechem, said to all of the Israelites, and by implication to all United Methodist at the crossroads today, we wish to challenge all born-again believers in Jesus Christ (John 3:3-5), in the words of this great general of God's people, "*Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness...But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household (the UM Community in Africa, in particular, and all faithful Christians everywhere who are committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the undiluted Word of God for belief and practice), we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:14-15). Together, we shall make it for God's glory (Joshua 2:17-18; 2 Samuel 10:9-12). God has wonderful plans for the prosperity of His Church on earth (Jeremiah 29:11). Let us be firm and very courageous in prayer and in discerning God's will for the future of our church, always abounding in the Word of the Lord; for we know our labor in the Lord is not in vain (Joshua 1:4-6; 1 Corinthians 15:58). May God bless the people called United Methodist.

For His Glory,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerry P. Kulah', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Dr. Jerry P. Kulah, Central Conference Coordinator, UMC Africa Initiative
On behalf of the UMC Africa Initiative