

A Christmas Covenant: Our Gift of Hope

Preamble: A Church for All in Mission Together

I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God...of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

By God's grace we are all part of the Body of Christ, admonished to love one another as God has loved us. Even in the midst of the brokenness in our church and world, we are entrusted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ that offers healing, love, and reconciliation to all. We are invited to celebrate the abundance of God's grace, affirm our common baptism, recognize the diversity of our spiritual gifts and ministries, and faithfully engage in God's mission together. As John Wesley exclaimed before joining a great cloud of witnesses, "The best of all is, God is with us!" Indeed, nothing can separate us from the love of God and from one another.

Our Guiding Principles and Values

As United Methodists from central conferences, we envision a Church that connects globally, engages in mission together, respects contextual ministry settings, celebrates the diversity of God's creation in its many beautiful expressions, and values mutually empowering relationships in order to strengthen our core mission of evangelism, discipleship, and social witness for the transformation of the world. This is our covenant.

We draw from the following principles held dear by our global community and United Methodists in central conferences. These principles inspire us to reimagine being the Body of Christ in today's world:

- **We are all children of God.** Our United Methodist Social Principles state, “We believe that our primary identity is as children of God. ... The Church seeks to fully embrace and nurture cultural formation and competency as a means to be fully one body, expressed in multiple ways” (2016, ¶161.A) To consider one another siblings of equal stature and rights is a key human value upheld by our Christian faith. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). In appreciation of our differences as equals, it is our sacred covenant—anchored in grace—to share with one another the freedom to live out the Gospel in accordance with our various missional contexts.
- **Ubuntu.** Ubuntu is an African concept that embodies a way of life where humanity is based on the understanding of interdependence and community life. It is lived recognizing that we are all created in the image of God and should do unto others as we wish it be done unto us. Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa declares, “The profound truth is, you cannot be human on your own. ... You are human because you participate in relationship. It says a person is a person through other persons. This is what we say. This is what the Bible says. This is what our human experience teaches us.”
- **Bayanihan.** Bayanihan is a cherished ancient Filipino concept of community spirit and cooperation to achieve communal goals. Rooted in the word *bayan*, which means *nation* or *community*, bayanihan has been traditionally expressed through concrete community support for families that need to relocate. The able-bodied persons of the barrio carry the entire wood and bamboo house and transfers it to a new location, especially in anticipation of typhoons, floods, and landslides. This might be rare in these modern times, but the spirit of bayanihan is alive in the hearts of Filipinos when they act as one community in support of one another in times of need, even when it is deemed impossible to do so.

We celebrate these principles as we commit to build and prosper a church rooted in community, one that welcomes and affirms the sacred worth of all God’s children and extends extravagant hospitality in caring for their welfare, working faithfully to keep them from any harm.

Distracting from and detrimental to these values and to our common mission are calls to dissolve or dismember The United Methodist Church, to liquidate its assets and distribute them to the highest bidder. Such plans are harmful to the Body of Christ through whom people of faith seek to connect and live in gracious relationships. Pitting one part of Christ’s Body against another also harms our witness to a world awash in violence and injustice. Our constitution’s preamble states clearly that the church’s “very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission.” Therefore, we are in firm agreement with the

bishops of both Africa and the Philippines, who in separate resolutions, have declared their strong opposition to dissolution.

Holding in gracious tension the differences between us and bearing with one another in love, let us envision new ways of being in relationship together in The United Methodist Church. We lift up these values that undergird our proposal:

- **Connectional relationships rooted in mission.** Our unity is not for unity's sake but for the effective proclamation of the Gospel—to invite all into a loving relationship with God and with one's neighbor. We welcome and affirm the sacred worth of all God's children and embrace everyone's participation in building God's beloved community.
- **Respect for contextual ministry settings.** This is a missional, structural, and connectional endeavor that is an expression of faithful stewardship of God's mission in a diverse and changing world. Such respect implies understanding that our church needs to find appropriate ministry expressions in different mission contexts. **Doing otherwise fosters relationships that are essentially colonial.**
- **Legislative equality for regional bodies of the church.** The diversity of our ministry settings is real. Fulfilling the mission of the church together can be strengthened by identifying our contextual differences and allowing for authority to be exercised equitably by both central and jurisdictional conferences, annual conferences, or any regional structure formed by General Conference to address our respective mission contexts.

Our Proposal

Guided by the aforementioned principles and values, and recognizing that we need a new way to be in gracious relationships with one another to better fulfill the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, we propose the following actions and legislative changes to our *Book of Discipline*:

- Suspension of all actions furthering any dissolution or separation plans and liquidation and distribution of the assets of The United Methodist Church.
- Formation of a U.S. Regional Conference.
- Establishing legislative equality for central and jurisdictional conferences.

Petitions supporting these proposals will be passed by annual conference session at least 45 days prior to the 2020 General Conference.

Our Call

We are stronger together. Being in mission together as a global church celebrates our unity in diversity and positively impacts the different contexts we represent. While diversity is a challenge, we do not believe dissolution is the right way to heal the wounds that cause us pain as Christ's Body. A truly global church committed to be in mission together embraces its differences and allows for self-determination. It is able to find common ground in affirming how we do effective ministry in places we serve. Acknowledging that our different contexts need different solutions is a better way forward and fosters mutuality. This path affirms a stronger common witness to the global community. God's grace is present everywhere and in everyone. We are called to humbly respond to this grace in recognizing its many expressions around the world. This call we do best together.

Signed on 18 December 2019 by these elected delegates to the 2020 General Conference and leaders from the central conferences:

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GC Delegate, North Katanga Annual Conference
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Jeffrey Boye Knight
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