

Coalition of Traditional Leaders Continues to Support the Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation

Over a year ago, a diverse group of United Methodist Church leaders released the [Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation](#). Never before had leading bishops, general church officials, and leaders of advocacy groups representing centrists, progressives, and traditionalists agreed on a plan for resolving the church's long dispute over its sexual ethics, teachings on marriage, and ordination standards. Among the members who negotiated the agreement were United Methodists from Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the United States. Additionally, they had the services of Mr. Kenneth Feinberg as their mediator, a world-class attorney with a distinguished record of mediating conflicts and managing high profile settlements.

In response to the Protocol, we, the undersigned, met in Atlanta, Georgia, in early March of 2020 to cast [a vision for a new traditional expression of Methodism](#). We are a group of bishops, clergy, and laity, men and women, African-American, Asian, Caribbean, Caucasian, and Hispanic persons from every U.S. jurisdiction, and three central conferences who seek a faithful future for United Methodists. Over the past year, and in light of the anticipated passage of the Protocol, we have focused on preparing for a new, traditionalist, and global Methodist church that is committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly. Like the mediation team that produced the Protocol, we have gone about our work in a spirit of grace and peace, looking forward to the future God has for us.

Our preparation for this hopeful future has been interrupted by the global Coronavirus pandemic. We grieve the loss of over two million people worldwide, the severe economic hardship caused by measures to combat the virus, and the geographic, racial, and economic inequities highlighted by the pandemic. The Christian Church, including The United Methodist Church, has been severely challenged to find new ways of ministering to the heightened needs of a broken world. Financial shortfalls are affecting all aspects of the UM Church, threatening the survival of some congregations and drastically changing the work of general church agencies and bishops.

In this critical time, it is all the more important for the UM Church to make crucial decisions about our future. Structural changes precipitated by this crisis must involve those who envision a long-term future together, while giving those who are called to different directions the opportunity to craft those directions unhindered by ongoing conflict. The absence of a decision on the way forward only exacerbates institutional inertia and loss of momentum for ministry.

We therefore urge the Commission on the General Conference, working with the Council of Bishops, to find a way in the spirit of the Protocol for the General Conference delegates to debate, deliberate upon, and ultimately pass the Protocol's implementing legislation at the earliest possible time. Our local churches, annual conferences, and the church's general boards and agencies can no longer remain in a state of uncertainty and unrest where there is no clear guidance or official direction for the future. For the sake of the greater mission of the church catholic, we must bless one another and then be about God's mission as each new church discerns it.

We affirm and support the Commission on the General Conference in their significant responsibility to provide for a General Conference experience that can accomplish what needs to be accomplished for the present and future of the church within the limitations imposed by current circumstances. We uphold the non-negotiable principles of ensuring the greatest safety practical for delegates and participants, as well as the equal voice of all delegates, regardless of geographic location or access to digital technology. We urge the church to continue in fervent prayer for the Commission and all charged with planning and administering the General Conference.

We continue our wholehearted support for the Protocol as the best mechanism to free our church from its debilitating conflict and position the church to move forward in ministry. We support the passage of the Protocol's implementing legislation that would allow for an amicable separation of the UM Church into two or more new churches. It is our prayer that the people drawn to them will be given the freedom and space to discern God's will for their missions as they seek God's guidance. We call on all bishops and clergy to allow local churches, annual conferences, and central conferences to determine freely with which new church they wish to align, once the Protocol's implementing legislation is adopted.

We reiterate our intention, after the Protocol is passed, to form a global Wesleyan movement committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and the work of the Holy Spirit in conveying God's truth, grace, renewal, and sanctification to all people who repent and believe. The pandemic-occasioned crisis in our church only increases our urgency to bring to fruition the vision articulated in our statement of last year. We remain committed to a global church that ministers to all and is mutually accountable throughout our connection to the high calling of our identity in Jesus Christ.

We urge conferences, districts, clergy, and congregations to prepare now for the changed reality of a post-pandemic church, including a post-separation church. Knowing the identity of our churches coming out of the pandemic will facilitate reengaging members who have fallen away in the interim and will form the basis for new outreach in mission to the world. As we long to move forward into a new reality, we embrace by God's grace the current reality of expectant waiting, trusting God to provide the wisdom and strength needed for this liminal time.

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