

THE MEMPHIS DECLARATION

January 25, 1992

Adopted by 117 concerned United Methodists

Written in a meeting at Memphis, Tennessee

In his preface to the Standard Sermons, John Wesley wrote, “I design plain truth for plain people.” Those of us gathered here today in Memphis, lay and clergy alike, seek to emulate Wesley and speak “plain words of truth” to the people called United Methodists. We call our Church to affirm and live out the mandate of Jesus Christ to be His disciples and to call all persons of every race and nation to name and follow Him as Savior and Lord.

In the tradition of The Houston Declaration, we come together to challenge United Methodists to live more faithfully as the Body of Jesus Christ, under His Lordship. This involves confessing, proclaiming, and living the Apostolic faith.

In light of the authority of Scripture, we affirm that:

1. God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the only way of divine salvation.
2. Holy Living is the way for Christians to live out the mandate of discipleship given by Jesus Christ.
3. The local congregatin is the center for mission and ministry to the world.

GOD’S REVELATION IN JESUS CHRIST

Among the people called Christian, in many nations and among many peoples, including United Methodist, there has been a falling away from commitment to the basic truths and doctrines of the Christian faith.

If we are to be obedient to the teaching of Scripture, and to our Wesleyan heritage, we must lift up Jesus Christ as God’s gift of salvation offered to all humanity. There are doctrinal issues on which Christians may disagree. We dare not, however, deny our Lord in the name of a shallow pluralism or in a vain attempt to elevate tolerance above primary faith commitment to Jesus Christ. We must not surrender the uniqueness and centrality of Jesus Christ and our Christian heritage for the sake of an easy dialogue with those who are not yet Christian, or a false ecumenism with those who do not profess the fullness of the Christian faith.

Jesus of Nazareth was God in human flesh who lived on earth, suffered and died on the Cross, was raised from the dead, lives as eternal Savior and Redeemer, present with us in the Person of the Holy Spirit, and he will return again. He is God’s only way of salvation. We are called to live out and share this faith personally and collectively as our primary purpose and commitment.

THE CALL TO HOLY LIVING

We affirm the call of Jesus Christ, the teaching of Holy Scripture, and the faithful witness of John Wesley, that as Christians we are called to holy living. We cannot be self-righteous, because our own personal lives fall far short of His standard of holy living, but the standard must be upheld.

The power of Jesus Christ is at work in the Person of the Holy Spirit and can transform every life and overcome every sin. He calls His Church to transform the current culture, not conform to it.

We urge all United Methodists, including ourselves, to turn away from a consumer mentality, greed, and moral disintegration. We are called to be servants and witnesses to our neighbors in word and deed, leading the world to repent and accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Church must reach out in a ministry of love, compassion, and healing to all persons – married, single, children, one-parent homes, and broken families. We affirm marriage as the God-ordained pattern of relationship between men and women. God created us male and female, and the natural order of creation and procreation is the union of male and female, as husband and wife. The Christian Church has always held this to be in accordance with God's will. We challenge the Church to be unequivocal in support of the Christian family, the sanctity of human life, and Christian sexual morality: fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness.

Scripture plainly identifies adultery, fornication, and homosexual practice as sins of the flesh, signs and consequences of the fallen condition of humankind that needs redemption. Let us cease to debate homosexual practice as if the witness of the Scripture and the tradition of the Church were not clear from the beginning. A militant minority must not be allowed to control the direction of the Church of Jesus Christ.

It is time for us to move on to the central purpose of the Church: to serve the world in Jesus Christ's name and win the world for Him.

LOCAL CONGREGATION

The local church is the primary place where we encounter the Risen Lord. It must again become, in doctrine and practice, the center of the mission and ministry of the Church. The purpose of the boards, agencies, and seminaries must be focused on the equipping of the people of God to be in ministry where they worship and work.

Fiscal responsibility calls for the curtailment, reordering, and reduction of the bureaucracy of the Church so that more of our tithes and offerings will go directly into mission and ministry and not increasingly into general church staff and support for boards, agencies and study commissions.

We are concerned about ministerial leadership. We must be especially careful that a seminary education be consistent with our Wesleyan heritage and not dominated by

a secular mindset. Some of our seminaries are committed to both the teaching and modeling of our Wesleyan heritage, recognizing that seminaries are places where men and women are trained for Christian ministry. We celebrate their faithfulness to the Church and we pledge our loyalty and support to them.

CALL TO ACTION

We urge the 1992 General Conference to take these actions and pass necessary legislation to:

Reaffirm the use of Biblical language and images in our common life together; mandate the use of the name Father, Son, and Holy Spirit whenever we speak of the Trinity; and reject the replacement of Biblical language and images in the proposed Book of Worship and in other church materials with alternative language and images which alter the Apostolic Faith.

Abolish the General Council on Ministries as an unnecessary and costly layer of bureaucracy. It is in direct conflict with the Constitution of the Church which assigns to the Council of Bishops “the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interest of the entire Church and for carrying into effect the rules, regulations, and responsibilities prescribed and enjoined by the General Conference.” (Par. 50, Art. III, The Constitution).

Reduce the number, size, staff, and costs of General Church boards and agencies.

Restore the Church’s mission and evangelistic thrust. Establish a General Board of Evangelism, including the transfer of the section on church extension from the national division of the Board of Global Ministries, so that reaching the world for Christ will again be central to the purpose and mission of the Church.

Approve the recommendation of the Study Commission and mandate the move of the General Board of Global Ministries out of New York, to enhance the mission and ministry of the Church.

Reaffirm Christian sexual morality and the current provisions of the United Methodist Discipline (Par. 71f, 402.2, 906.12). Homosexual persons are people of sacred worth to whom we are called to minister. Since the practice of homosexuality is, however, incompatible with Christian teaching, we call for the rejection of the report and recommendations of the Committee to Study Homosexuality and oppose further official study. The Biblical witness and the unbroken tradition of the Church provide the foundation of our understanding.

Affirm that baptism is a means of God’s grace, but that a personal decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is essential for salvation and for full membership in the Church.

Out of love and concern for the United Methodist Church, we 117 United Methodists have adopted the MEMPHIS DECLARATION. We invite all United Methodists to join with us in endorsing the Memphis Declaration and its Call to Action.

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