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Central Conference Delegates release Christmas Covenant and Proposal for Unity in 2020

Delegates to the 2020 General Conference from three central conferences propose a covenant to seek a new unity for The United Methodist Church and invite other delegations to endorse the covenant.

The central conference delegates' release "A Christmas Covenant: Our Gift of Hope" includes a preamble, values statement, and outline to their petitions, which will be offered for passage by an annual conference session in the coming months.

The Christmas Covenant, created in collaboration with United Methodists holding membership in central conferences around the world, reminds United Methodists that we are united in mission and do not need to divide in this season of the church.

"It is noteworthy that this effort comes from leaders in our central conferences," states the Rev. Jonathan Ulanday, General Conference clergy delegate from the East Mindanao Philippines Annual Conference. "This changes the narrative that central conferences, especially in Africa and the Philippines, would just agree with what the American church decides to do. This covenant is our humble gift of hope to our church as we seek to find a way to faithfully engage in mission together."

The Christmas Covenant seeks to turn back the tide of division and dissolution. From the Covenant:

Distracting from and detrimental 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.

Drawing inspiration from African and Filipino values and concepts, the Christmas Covenant includes a series of proposals to reshape United Methodism to be in gracious relationships with one another to better fulfill the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, including:

- 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.

The Rev. Hilde Marie Movafagh of the Norway Annual Conference reflects that “I have not given up on the United Methodist Church. Splitting up will hurt our church for a long time and will set back our global mission. We cannot afford that. We are stronger together in the midst of diversity. In the current conflict, I think it is better to stay together, but decentralize authority to embrace our diversity and do mission differently in different contexts.”

The delegates are currently seeking feedback from other delegations and will make the petitions publicly available after they are passed by an annual conference session that has done the necessary discernment. While the petitions deadline has passed for individuals to submit legislation to General Conference, Annual Conference sessions have a later date by which they can submit legislation.

Those who wish to support the Christmas Covenant may sign using this link:
<https://tinyurl.com/ChristmasCovenant>

Further Quotes:

- “I don't support the dissolution of the UMC by any group of United Methodists and resolution or petition emanating from anywhere to do so will be resisted by my vote. The UMC is our heritage that I can't afford to lose. I am standing up for the UMC.” Jefferson Boye Knight (GC lay delegate), Director, Human Rights Monitor, Peace With Justice Program, Liberia Annual Conference
- “The Christmas Conference of 1784 gave birth to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. Our prayer is that this Christmas Covenant could be a rallying point for a renewed and revived United Methodist Church around the world.” Rev. Jonathan Ulanday (GC clergy delegate) Pastor, Polomolok UMC, South Cotabato, Philippines, East Mindanao Philippines Annual Conference
- “We are one body in Jesus Christ and created in the image of God, as UMC members we have the freedom to serve God in our own excellent ways regardless of differences in missional context.” Olive Beltran (GC lay delegate), Vice-President, Philippines National UMW Society for Christian Service, North Central Philippines Annual Conference
- “We people from central conferences are focused on the mission of the church and we will not have time to talk about dissolution and extinguishing the flame of Methodist and dismembering the cross of Christ as these are represented on our logo. We stand on the unity of the church and this proposal is calling the whole church to stay together as Jesus asked his father in his prayer for the disciples ‘that they be one.’ We are one in Christ and as we celebrate Christmas let us be in covenant to be one.” Rev. Lloyd Nyarota, Ecumenical appointment, United Church of Canada, Zimbabwe East Annual Conference

- “Considering that the Christmas Covenant comes in the Christmas eve, it is important because of the following aspects: It teaches Christians to love one another as Jesus Himself loved the world. It teaches us to live together as one people. It challenges Christians to be engaged in the mission. It challenges Christians to live together in their difference.” Rev. Julio Andre Vilanculos, Vice-Chancellor, United Methodist University of Mozambique, South Mozambique Annual Conference

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