

**Africa College of Bishops' Meeting, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, Southern Africa 7-11 September, 2015**

**A Statement on the state of global UMC and our common world**

From the 7-11 September, 2015, we the Bishops of the Central Conferences of Africa gathered at the Elephant Hills Resort, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe as part of our Annual business meeting. Highlights of the meeting included worship, fellowship, and evaluation of ministries and responsibilities God has entrusted to our care as Shepherds of His flock.

Our meeting was immensely blessed by the presence of some of our spouses as we celebrated some of the tremendous success stories in all Episcopal Areas on the continent.

We celebrate with gratitude the recent training and commissioning of thirty-nine Global Missionaries on the continent of Africa (Zimbabwe) by the General Board of Global Ministries

We note with deep gratitude the kind hospitality of the Zimbabwean people and their rich cultures. As part of our activities, we received ministry updates from some of our institutional leaders, as well as lectures and presentations on leadership, economic empowerment and sustainability. In addition, we discussed relevant issues confronting the Church and the global community.

We took time off to pray and intercede for Africa, the world and the global Church, especially the persecuted Church, and the growing global refugee community as a result of ongoing political instabilities we are experiencing in parts of our world.

**Global Terrorism**

In recent months, the world has watched with shock and dismay the massive human rights abuses against innocent, helpless and defenseless families, especially women and children, and the horrible refugee crisis that has engulfed and overwhelmed parts of Europe and Africa, with no permanent solution in sight. This crisis, is no doubt the result of the ongoing bloody and brutal civil war in Syria, the ISIS insurgency across parts of Europe, as well as the Boko Haram and Al-Shabab insurgencies in parts of Africa.

In Africa, the Boko Haram insurgents continue to carry out atrocities and mayhem against innocent citizens in towns, villages, cities, and religious facilities (mosques and churches) in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, etc. Young men and women are being manipulated to carry out suicide bombings to destroy innocent lives and property. The Al-Shabab also continues to unleash untold havoc against innocent civilians in Somalia, Kenya, and other parts of Africa.

As a consequence of these crises, thousands of families have been ripped away from their homes and made homeless. Thousands of others have died from starvation, disease, lack of shelter, and crossfire bombing and shooting between warring factions. Women and girls have suffered enslavement and rape, while thousands of children are denied their rights to education and safety as the crisis rages on.

We whole-heartedly condemn these atrocities and call upon the United Nations and our political leaders in Africa including the African Union to do all that lies within their power to restore peace and tranquility. We will continue to pray to Almighty God for his divine intervention while we pursue some practical ways to pursue the path of peace and unity, including dialogue with our young people, grassroots, women's movements, and community and political leaders.

In recognition of our role as God's messengers of peace and reconciliation, we present this press release in the hope that we will draw the attention of our denomination to the stark realities of needless suffering and pain in our world as a result of current Global terrorism, unjust political systems and the manipulation of weaker nations by world powers; and to work together as a church to usher in God's reign of peace, justice and freedom to all.

### **Marriage and Sexuality**

Over the past four decades, from 1972 until the present, we have watched with shock and dismay the rapid drift of our denomination from this Holy call to a warm embrace of practices that have become sources of conflict that now threatens to rip the Church apart and distract her from the mission of leading persons to faith and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. One of such practices is the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender).

We are deeply saddened that the Holy Bible, our primary authority for faith and the practice of Christian living, and our *Book of Discipline* are being grossly ignored by some members and leaders of our Church in favor of social and cultural practices that have no scriptural basis for acceptance in Christian worship and conduct. Yet they continue to attempt to persuade members of the Church to incorporate these practices as an accepted code of conduct within global United Methodism.

As leaders of the church in Africa, we call upon all United Methodists, Bishops, clergy and Laity to an unreserved commitment to the Holy Bible as the primary authority for faith and practice in the church. We call upon all members throughout the connection to adopt practices consistent with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. We submit to the teachings of Scripture that God designed marriage to be between man and woman, and the procreation of children is a blessing from God (Gen. 2:24-25; Psalm 127:3-5). Scripture also teaches that all persons are sexual beings, whether or not they are married. However, sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant bond of a faithful monogamous, heterosexual marriage, and not within same-sex unions or polygamy. The Christian marriage covenant is holy, sacred, and consecrated by God and is expressed in shared fidelity between one man and one woman for life. In this vein, we denounce all forms of sexual exploitation, including fornication, adultery, sexual commercialization, slavery, abuse, polygamy, etc.

As shepherds of God's flock, we covenant to be in ministry with those of our members who adopt practices that are inconsistent with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures

## **MAINTAINING THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH**

One of the functions of the Bishops of the church is to “maintain the unity of the church”. As leaders of the church, we believe that there are far more important issues that unite us than issues of sexual orientation. As a church, we are called to be in solidarity with people who suffer as a result of unjust political systems, wars, famine, poverty, natural disasters, diseases, illiteracy etc. etc. We believe that we can be united around these issues rather than allow ourselves to be ripped apart by issues of sexual orientation.

Therefore, we the College of African Bishops of the United Methodist Church, meeting at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and convening with 11 of our 12 active member Bishops and one retired Bishop present, do hereby unanimously adopt this Statement on global terrorism, Christian sexuality and marriage and the need for unity in the United Methodist Church and commend it to the whole Church for circulation, reading and study.

### **Recommendation to General Conference**

1. That during the entire period of the 2016 General Conference, there should be daily prayer sessions for the return of our denomination to Biblical teachings, the unity of the church, global terrorism (remembering the millions of refugees) and the cessation of wars around the globe.
2. That the Council of Bishops commit to demonstrating their shepherding responsibility (1 Peter 5:2-4) by acting consistently with the Holy Bible for to do otherwise would require that one must recuse himself or herself from the divine call to be Shepherd of all of God’s people.

Signed on this 11th day of September in the Conference Room of the Elephant Hills Resort, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, to the glory of God:

1. Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa, Zimbabwe Episcopal Area
2. Bishop John G. Innis, Liberia Episcopal Area
3. Ntambo, Nkulu Ntanda, North Kantaga Episcopal Area
4. Bishop John Wesley Yohannah, Nigeria Episcopal Area
5. Bishop Gabriel Unda, East Congo Episcopal Area
6. Bishop Domingos, Gaspar Joao, W. Angola Episcopal Area
7. Katembo, Kainda, Southern Congo Episcopal Area
8. Nhanala, Joaquina F., Mozambique Episcopal Area
9. Bishop Jose Quipungo, East Angola Episcopal Area
10. Bishop Daniel Wandabula, East Africa Episcopal Area
11. Bishop John K. Yambasu, Sierra Leone Episcopal Area
12. Bishop David K. Yemba, Central Congo Episcopal Area
13. Bishop Benjamin Boni, Cote D’Ivoire Episcopal Area
14. Bishop Arthur F. Kulah, (R)