



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



Tuesday, February 12, 2019

To my fellow United Methodists:

Greetings in the blessed name of our savior and Lord Jesus Christ.

In less than two weeks, 864 fellow Methodists will gather in St. Louis, Missouri, in the United States to attend the Special Session of the General Conference. This Special Session has been called by the Council of Bishops following the mandate given to the bishops at the 2016 General Conference.

As bishops, we were asked by the delegates of the General Conference to lead in finding a way forward beyond the impasse around LGBTQ identity, interpretation of scripture and the unity of the church.

In response to this mandate, the bishops appointed a Commission on a Way Forward; 32 persons from all parts of the world where we are present to propose possible solutions. After more than 18 months of meetings and deliberations, the Commission offered three possible ways forward. These have come to be known as the One Church Plan, Traditional Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan.

These plans, together with other petitions, are now before the delegations to the General Conference, who will discern the best way forward for The United Methodist Church. The General Conference is the highest legislative body in the church and the only group that can decide church law and speak officially for our global denomination.

As we approach St. Louis, we offer the following clarifications about the role of the bishops regarding this Special Session. As noted above, bishops did not propose legislation for this General Conference. Consistent with the Judicial Council's action in [Decision 1360](#), the legislation was proposed by the Commission on a Way Forward, and found to be in order.

Bishops do engage in the teaching office (Book of Discipline, Paragraph 403) during this season. In matters of church unity, doctrine and mission, bishops have a teaching role (BOD, 403.e). This clear understanding led the 2016 General Conference to ask the bishops to lead in finding a way forward beyond our divisions (BOD, 414.1). Many

bishops have led dialogues and Bible studies in their residential areas, and have welcomed conversations from differing perspectives.

As bishops, we remain in an extended season of prayer. We are always aware that the office of bishop, entrusted by you to us, is a gift and a sacred privilege. We seek to fulfill this role with humility and faithfulness, and in a spirit of intercession and gratitude. The role of prayer has been the focus of [Praying our Way Forward](#), and has been at the heart of our spiritual leadership.

When the church is in conference, bishops preside (BOD, 403.f); they order the deliberation, in accordance with the rules of the General Conference but do not vote on the composition of delegations or the substance of the petitions. The Council of Bishops will be bound by a covenant of presiding, which was written in collaboration with the Commission on the General Conference. [A copy of the covenant is attached to this letter.](#)

Lastly, the bishops honor the delegations who will gather in St. Louis, and will continue to see our appropriate calling as helping them to do their best work in these three important days. We continue to give thanks for the mission of The United Methodist Church, for the power of the Cross and the Flame, and for the hope that God will guide us in a way forward.

The peace of the Lord,



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