

To the people of The United Methodist Church:

The Council of Bishops brings you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has called us to be servant leaders of the church. In 1812, Bishop Francis Asbury, Bishop William McKendree and General Conference Secretary Daniel Hitt sent the first letter to churches following General Conference. This letter seeks to revive that tradition. Many bishops will also be communicating individually with their own areas.

Hundreds of lay and clergy delegates from around the world gathered in Portland, Oregon, along with bishops and pastors, church members and staff, volunteers and visitors, to engage in Christian conferencing, to make decisions for our church's future, to affirm our global connection, to worship and to celebrate God's faithfulness.

We celebrated the success of our Imagine No Malaria initiative, which seeks to raise \$75 million in the fight against malaria, a disease that takes the life of a child in Africa every two minutes. We celebrated our ecumenical partnerships as we move into full Communion with the Uniting Church in Sweden and toward full Communion with the Moravian church. We celebrated our heritage: the 250th anniversary of our oldest church, John Street United Methodist Church, the 200th anniversary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the 150th anniversary of United Methodist women, the 25th anniversary of Africa University and others.

We continued in our acts of repentance with a presentation from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes about the Methodist involvement in the 1864 Sand Creek massacre. We shared in the consecration of deaconesses and home missionaries and the commissioning of missionaries. We moved toward a global Book of Discipline and global Social Principles. We voted to add five new bishops in Africa after 2020, and approved a churchwide study on our ecclesiology.

The Episcopal address set the tone for the event, focusing on humility and lifting up our accomplishments. We heard from our laity an invitation to members to be more involved in making disciples and getting involved in ministries to bring the love of Christ to others. We heard our young people say they "are engaged in Christ's journey with energy and love." We also heard them say clearly that they do not want a divided church and urged us to "be in unity even if we do not have unanimity." They give us hope for our future.

The body had difficult and challenging work before it as we acknowledged our differences over human sexuality. Amidst those differences, the delegates affirmed they want their bishops to lead and we found ourselves with an opportunity for a holy moment. We spoke candidly about what divides us and what our church might look like in the future if we dared to consider new possibilities. We offered a way forward, postponing decisions about sexuality matters and committing to having a different kind of global conversation that allows all voices to be heard.

Our differences do not keep us from being the body of Christ. They do not keep us from doing good in the world. They do not keep us from making a difference – and so we set forth bold new goals: to make a million new disciples of Jesus Christ; to engage 3 million new people to make a difference in the world;

to transform 400 communities for vital abundant living; to reach a million children with lifesaving health interventions; and to double the number of vital congregations.

Most importantly, we affirmed our commitment to stay united. We proved that we are more than debates and divisions, more than rules and resolutions. We stood together as the body of Christ. As we reflect on our time in Portland, our prayer is for unity in the church for the advancement of our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

As John Wesley reminded us, “Best of all, God is with us.”

Signed on behalf of the Council of Bishops,
Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the Council