

*January 3, 2020*

Following the 2019 special session of General Conference, conversations with various factions have continued within The United Methodist Church, all who agree that the current level of tension cannot and should not be sustained over an extended period of time.

This morning, January 3, 2020, a [statement](#) was shared with the denomination reflecting a [Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation](#) which outlines a proposal representing these various perspectives and a negotiated means of moving forward. One aspect of this negotiated agreement is that the diverse petitions proposed to the 2020 General Conference would be withdrawn and request that this proposed Protocol be considered in their place.

As with all proposed legislation, we do not know how General Conference will receive, modify, or amend it. The Council of Bishops will request the Judicial Council to offer a Declaratory Decision regarding this proposal.

In light of the release of this agreement, I would offer the following recommendations:

- Reflect rather than react. Be prayerful for the church. Remain objective. Since this is a negotiated proposal everyone is not entirely satisfied with the outcome, yet the denomination needs to look for the best solution to address its current impasse.
- Read the full agreement and pay attention to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), which will answer many questions raised by the proposal.
- The agreement allows a means for those who wish to separate from The United Methodist Church to do so, providing a timeline for separation, and assuring our clergy and congregations that our Pension Plan will continue to serve our churches and clergy.
- There is an emphasis on “separation” which communicates mutual agreement, rather than “leaving.”
- The United Methodist Church remains The United Methodist Church, although there were some who were calling for the full dissolution of the denomination.
- There is an acknowledgement of financial support in the separation, which includes funds set aside for racial violence and discrimination to address the issue of racism within the church.
- Provisions would be made to allow congregations to separate and even consider whether an annual conference might separate from The United Methodist Church.
- All churches desiring to remain United Methodists will not need to do anything different or to make any further decisions.

This Protocol tries to offer a respectable path forward that treats others with grace and respect. The primary question for me is how do we Glorify God and love others in our

decisions? How can we be open to those who interpret and understand scripture differently as we worship God and serve neighbors while traveling along different paths of faithfulness?

While I have not addressed each of the details proposed in the agreement, I have refrained from doing so knowing that this will be the work of our General Conference. While our Western North Carolina delegation to the General Conference has asked that all opinions and reactions be addressed to the delegation here [delegation@wnccumc.org](mailto:delegation@wnccumc.org), many of you have personal friendships with those who have been elected. I encourage you to be in conversation with them as they prepare to consider these issues within the next few months.

There will be some who welcome this proposal. There will be others who are resistant to the proposal. It is always hurtful to me to separate in order to be The United Methodist Church. Let's be in prayer, slow down, and give space for the Holy Spirit to guide the church. Again, this is a proposal. Now we trust the General Conference to do its work. I refuse to give up on the One who is reconciling all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20).

Bishop Paul L. Leeland  
Western North Carolina Conference  
United Methodist Church