



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



A Common Word from the Council of Bishops

Thursday, May 9, 2019

The Council of Bishops offers a pastoral and prophetic word in response to the decisions of the Special Session and the codification of some of these decisions in our *Book of Discipline*.

Bishops are not judges or legislators. Bishops are preachers, teachers, shepherds, mediators, and missional strategists who appoint clergy and lead annual conferences to make disciples for the transformation of the world. We offer this reflection as an expression of our pastoral and prophetic witness. The prophetic gift to our church calls for a confession of the harm that has been done, an acknowledgement of grief and support of a vision of God's promise to do a new thing (Isaiah 43). The pastoral gift is to accompany conversations across the church about our denomination's future.

We affirm the fruitful and creative ministries in our annual conferences. Recognizing that "*the Annual Conference is the basic body of the church*" (BOD, 33), there is an emerging discernment that the power and hope in our connection resides in the annual conference, which is closer to local churches and better honors our different contexts. And there is a strong conviction that we cannot arrive at solutions that enhance our unity in our legislative processes.

There is also a renewed commitment to seek new ways of being in relationship. In the words of the Mission, Vision Scope of the Way Forward, "*We should be open to **new ways of embodying unity** that move us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality. Therefore, we should consider **new ways of being in relationship** across cultures and jurisdictions, in understandings of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences, and in the design and purpose of the apportionment.*"

There is a sense among the Council that we are in untenable times. To this end the Council is exploring models and plans of new forms of unity, including work being done in Africa, Europe, the Western Jurisdiction, a new Methodism, the gifts of the black church, among creative experiments in annual conferences and a connection of new expressions of United Methodism.

The Council has nominated a Servant Listening Team to accompany these conversations across the church. At the same time, the whole Council is called to a season of deep listening.

We grieve the brokenness in our relationships, and confess that we are complicit in this. Amidst pervasive dynamics of "*evil, injustice and oppression*" in the church and the world, we pledge to work for reconciliation in order to demonstrate the way of Christ, which is to love and serve one another. As we approach Pentecost, we call upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit to "*make us one with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to all the world.*"

Sources: Services of Baptism and Holy Communion. The Mission, Vision and Scope of the Commission on a Way Forward. The Book of Discipline.