

## **A STATEMENT ABOUT THE PROTOCOL OF RECONCILIATION & GRACE THROUGH SEPARATION**

In the aftermath of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference and the subsequent crises it caused within the United Methodist Church, Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone (now deceased) experienced a deep calling to bring healing to the denomination. Drawing on the relationships built over many years of leadership and ministry, Bishop Yambasu and other Central Conference Bishops convened a diverse group of church leaders representing centrist, progressive, and conservative constituencies within the Church.

Over time, this initial group solidified and became the unofficial mediation group that produced the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace through Separation. Facilitated by world-renowned mediator Kenneth Feinberg, Esq., the mediation team acknowledged the reality of irreconcilable differences in theology, biblical interpretation, and disciplinary practices within the UMC. Then, guided by a commitment to principles of amicable separation, the mediation group met over a period of six months and developed a mutually agreed-upon framework that proposed a special, time-limited pathway for churches wishing to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

The Protocol Agreement was publicly unveiled in January 2020 and, shortly thereafter, its enabling legislation was submitted for consideration at the 2020 General Conference. What no one could have foreseen, however, was the sudden onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which locked down whole communities, disrupted domestic and international travel, and caused multiple postponements of the General Conference. One of the chief impacts of the pandemic for the United Methodist church will be that the Protocol Agreement first released in early 2020 will not be legislation considered until the postponed General Conference meets in 2024. By this time, four years will have gone by since it was originally proposed.

Out of a spirit of transparency, trust, and accountability, members of the mediation team have reached out to the organizations that initially supported the Protocol Agreement, General Conference delegates, and others within our broad constituencies. The overwhelming consensus among those with whom we spoke is that the once-promising Protocol Agreement no longer offers a viable path forward, particularly given the long delays, the changing circumstances within the United Methodist Church, and the formal launch of the

Global Methodist Church in May of this year.

Moreover, bishops and church leaders in the Central Conferences, especially in Africa and the Philippines, have consistently voiced serious misgivings about the Protocol and its potentially disruptive impacts in their geographical regions. Since the Protocol was first released, these initial misgivings have crystallized into firm opposition in annual conferences worldwide.

Given the growing opposition to the Protocol within the constituencies we represent, the dwindling support among General Conference delegates, and the serious reservations of Central Conference leaders, we can no longer in good faith support the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace through Separation or work towards its adoption at the next General Conference.

We are profoundly grateful for the prayers, time, and sacrifices made by all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the development of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation. That effort represented an extraordinary convening process that engaged people of diverse geographies, backgrounds, and theological perspectives to think through the possibility of achieving amicable separation. While we can no longer endorse the Protocol Agreement and its enabling legislation as a whole, our organizations and constituencies continue their strong support for some of its most essential provisions, including:

- A continued commitment to finding constructive paths for individual congregations to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church using BOD ¶ 2553. We, therefore, implore bishops, district superintendents, and conference trustees to facilitate amicable departures after congregations pay their required pension liabilities.
- A renewed dedication to acknowledging the historical role of the Methodist movement in systems of systematic racial violence, exploitation, and discrimination. We, therefore, urge the General Conference to allocate \$39M over the next two quadrennia to strengthen ministries by and for Asian, Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander Communities and ensure that Africa University can continue its vital work of training the next generation of leaders.
- Continued abeyance on all administrative or judicial processes addressing restrictions in the Book of Discipline related to self-avowed practicing homosexuals or same-sex weddings through the adjournment of the first conference of the post-separation United Methodist Church.

As we move through this season of Pentecost, we continue to pray for the Holy Spirit to fall afresh on God's Church and lead us even deeper in the way of Christ,

Respectfully submitted,

### **Mediation Team Members**

Rev. Thomas Berlin, representing UMCNext, Mainstream UMC, Uniting Methodists

Rev. Egmedio "Jun" Equila, Jr., Philippines Central Conference

Janet Lawrence, representing Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Reconciling Ministries Network

Rev. David Meredith, representing Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Reconciling Ministries Network, member of UM Queer Clergy Caucus

Dr. Randall Miller, representing Affirmation, Methodist Federation for Social Action, and Reconciling Ministries Network

### **Endorsing Organizations**

Neil Alexander on behalf of Uniting Methodists

Deborah E. Bass on behalf of BMCR, Inc

Bridget Cabrera on behalf of Methodist Federation for Social Action

Ann Craig on behalf of Affirmation

Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli on behalf of UMC Next

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Rev. David Livingston on behalf of Mainstream UMC

Rev. Antoine Love on behalf of BMCR, Inc

Rev. Jasmine Smothers on behalf of UMC Next

**Add Your Signature**

