

Conference Lay Leaders Statement – New Unity and Peace

As leaders of laity in our annual conferences, we affirm the vital role of active lay persons and the focus upon local congregations as the “most significant arena” for accomplishing the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We celebrate the connectionality of our global denomination and our common ministry as United Methodists.

Being united with clergy leaders in that mission and ministry, we recognize that there are many differences among faithful leaders, both lay and clergy. Sometimes this shows our strength in diversity; but sometimes it results in pain and conflict when those differences seem to be irreconcilable.

Unfortunately, the 2019 General Conference and subsequent reactions have illuminated and exacerbated some of these long-standing differences – particularly deep divisions over how we are to be in ministry with LGBTQIA persons and varying interpretations of Scripture.

We lament the resulting pain for all and the apparent brokenness of our connectional church. We mourn the reality that we may not be able to reconcile our differences with integrity, and that conflict and division are likely to continue if we go on with business as usual. It appears that we cannot ignore the debilitating impact of our conflict on the mission and ministry of the church, as well as the strain upon our essential connectional relationships.

In light of the above, we seek a new form of unity based upon our common Wesleyan tradition and our common commitment to the mission field, and not defined organizationally or structurally. We seek a sustainable peace that gives our church the freedom to move into the future with integrity and wholeness in a new relationship with each other, connecting our past with a hope-filled future.

We, therefore, encourage development of legislation for the 2020 General Conference that provides a resolution to our denominational conflict, allowing different parts of our church to walk forward on separate paths, blessing each others’ ministry. We call for a non-punitive, gracious avenue to multiply the Methodist witness in ways that are true to the conscientious, sincere convictions of our members, and respectful of our church’s global reach. We recognize that this may involve structural separations and difficult changes in church connections that require time and grace.

We pray that God will lead us through this difficult journey toward a new Methodism that can share the love of God with a hurting world.

Finally, we pledge to continue serving faithfully in lay leadership, encouraging all laity to focus upon keeping the fire of our mission as “the main thing” in the months ahead.