

Global UM Leaders Reimagine a New Methodist Movement

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Traditionalist United Methodist leaders from around the world have agreed on an expansive vision for a new, global Methodist church.

Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, March 2 – 4, episcopal leaders from Africa, Eurasia, the Philippines, and the United States, were joined by traditionalist clergy, and renewal and reform group leaders from the Confessing Movement, Good News, UMAction, and the Wesleyan Covenant Association to explore a unified way forward for traditionalists should The United Methodist Church’s 2020 General Conference adopt the “[Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace for Separation](#)” at its May 5 – 15 gathering in Minneapolis, MN.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, President of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, Bishop Scott Jones, who presides over the Texas Annual Conference, and Mrs. Pat Miller, Executive Director of the Confessing Movement, jointly convened the meeting of over two dozen clergy and laity. They explained the purpose of the meeting was to draw together traditionalists with diverse perspectives to find unity moving forward and prepare for a transitional period before a convening conference to launch a new Methodist church.

In a document entitled “[Reimagining the Passion of a Global Wesleyan Movement](#),” the more than two-dozen leaders said, “If the 2020 General Conference adopts the Protocol legislation, with one voice and a spirit of humility we intend to form a global Wesleyan movement committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and the work of the Holy Spirit in conveying God’s truth, grace, renewal, and sanctification to all people who repent and believe.”

The two page document details the broad agreement the leaders reached regarding their vision for a new church’s “culture and mission,” its “essential doctrinal beliefs,” and its “organizational” structure. “What a beautiful thing,” said the Rev. Dr. Jan Davis, Senior Pastor at Central UM Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, “to be in a room with broad diversity, people from all over the world, from many different perspectives, yet we were solidly of one mind in our mission for a new denomination – proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord! It brought me to tears.”

Davis, who leads one of the fastest growing local UM churches in the U.S., and was one of the participants who has never aligned with any of the reform and renewal groups, added, “I want to be part of a clergy covenant that shares my core beliefs – a high Christology, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the authority of Scripture. I want to be in a system that holds one another accountable for preaching and teaching basic Christian doctrine and beliefs.”

While United Methodist traditionalists have wide agreement around the core doctrinal and ethical teachings of the Christian faith, the potential division of the UM Church has challenged them to consider how to organize and structure a new traditionalist denomination.

“As we draw closer to General Conference, and the real possibility that delegates from around the world will vote to separate the UM Church, many traditionalists are taking this opportunity to rethink how we do church,” said Boyette. “While they’re solidly committed to Methodism’s core confessions of the Christian faith, they’re also very open to remodeling an institutional structure that many think is overly bureaucratic and too costly. So as challenging as separation is, it does give us a chance to pray and discern new ways to fulfill the Great Commission.”

Last November the WCA released a substantial portion of what it called a draft “[Book of Doctrines and Discipline](#),” and invited comment on the document. It continues to work on the remaining sections of the book and to release them for comment as well.

“From the beginning, we conceived of the draft ‘Book of Doctrines and Discipline’ as a robust conversation starter for a likely convening conference of traditionalists,” said the Rev. Dr. Jeff Greenway, Senior Pastor at Reynoldsburg UM Church in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and the Chairman of the WCA Council. “However, the WCA Council has never been under the illusion that what it produces will wind up as *the* final product for a new traditionalist church – it won’t. The council knows many people will have voice in what is next, and it is eager to partner with them. We’re greatly encouraged by the meeting in Atlanta and how much agreement and progress was made there, but we know there’s much more work to do and many others who will give shape to what comes next.”

The group of leaders who met in Atlanta anticipates releasing further details as they continue to work together to develop transitional plans and most importantly a convening conference where traditionalists from around the world will seek God’s will for a new Methodist church.

“We started working through some difficult and challenging issues that we all must address together,” said the Rev. Dr. Carolyn Moore, Lead Pastor at Mosaic Church in Evans, Georgia, and Vice-Chairwoman of the WCA Council. “And what encouraged me the most was our willingness to be open to the Holy Spirit. At one point, we just stopped, set the agenda aside, and prayed because someone shared the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our midst. That prompting, and the time of prayer that followed, propelled us forward.”

The document, “[Reimagining the Passion of a Global Wesleyan Movement](#),” includes the names of the individuals who endorsed it. The endorsers plan to remain in conversation and work together as further developments warrant.