



3rd June, 2022

Press Release

Envisioning the Next Methodism in Africa

A fortnight ago, May 13–18, 2022, some ninety-two (92) United Methodists who, among others, were delegates to General Conference and some key leaders (clergy and lay), including some Central Conference Bishops, gathered at the Desmond Tutu Conference Center in Nairobi, Kenya as part of the Africa Initiative’ regular bi-quadrennial Prayer and Leadership Summit. Reflecting on the texts Habakkuk 2:2-3, and Philippians 3:12–14, United Methodist members from Africa's three Central Conferences prayed, studied the Scripture, and deliberated on pressing issues facing the global United Methodist Church.

This summit was notable in that its purpose was to envision the future of the United Methodist Church in Africa. In light of recent developments within the global UMC, the great uncertainty that now hovers over its continued existence as a global church, and its implications for the church in Africa, this meeting, organized by the UMC Africa Initiative, was critical to the life and ministries of the UMC in Africa now and in the future.

Some of these recent changes are deeply concerning to leaders and members of the UMC Africa Initiative. They include the following:

The “Big Tent” Agenda that now governs the operations of the Council of Bishops. We remain deeply concerned over the insistence of the Council of Bishops to run the affairs of global UMC according to its “Big Tent” agenda which is similar to the “*One Church Plan*”, to the gross neglect of the Traditional Plan that was voted for by a majority of delegates at the recent Special Session of General Conference, held in St. Louis, Missouri, from 23rd-26th February, 2019. The “Big Tent” agenda, like the “One Church Plan”, promotes the unconditional inclusivity of any one, with any kind of beliefs and practices into the life and ministries of the church, including becoming pastor and leader within the UMC. It sets no boundaries or preconditions; for example, of one coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ, no commitment to becoming

an obedient disciple of Jesus Christ, or one's belief in the Holy Scripture as primary authority for faith and Christian living.

Further, it promotes the legalization of homosexuality, the practice of same-sex marriage, and the ordination of LGBTQIA+ persons within the UMC. The UMC in Africa insisted then, and continues to contend now, that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian living, in consonance with the teachings of the Holy Bible (Genesis 2:18-25; Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1: 24-32), and as enshrined in the 2016 Book of Discipline of the UMC.

As a manifestation of the Council of Bishops' continued operations of its "Big Tent" philosophy to run the affairs of the global UMC, it has failed to address the case of one of their own that is a practicing lesbian and lawfully married to a same-sex spouse, despite the Judicial Council's landmark ruling invalidating her election and consecration as a UMC bishop (Decision 1341, April, 2017). As a result, some bishops within the Council of Bishops have persistently endorsed these sinful practices with impunity.

The UMC in Africa considers such actions on the part of our spiritual leaders, who ought to be "Shepherds of God's flock" entrusted to their care (1 Peter 5:2-3), as apostasy. We consider their actions diametrically opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6-9), which has the potential to lead people astray from the truth (Matthew 18:6). As a result, given the acts of some of our "spiritual leaders" and the rapid drift of the UMC's from biblical Christianity, we find it difficult to continue to follow its example as a legitimate Christian organization capable of providing spiritual leadership and direction to Africa's growing church. Therefore, the African gathering evaluated the past, comprehended the present, and looked into the future with hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we contend for the faith once for all entrusted to the Saints (Jude 3), and committed to sustaining a Christ-centered, scripturally-driven, evangelistically-functional, and mission-minded church in Africa.

Postponement of 2020 General Conference to 2024. Another recent development that was high on the agenda of the Initiative's Prayer and Leadership Summit was the decision of the Commission on General Conference to postpone 2020 General Conference to 2024. The decision was made as though predestined in February, despite the fact that we still had more than five months until the planned General Conference in the final week of August of this year. We still advocate for an early holding of General Conference.

We strongly feel that the postponement was highly unwarranted, given the significant improvement in the cessation of the COVID19 disease globally and the start of mass gatherings in the United States and other parts of the world. Prior to the decision to postpone the General Conference, we urged with the Council the Bishops and the Commission on General Conference to proceed with the General Conference and not cite the problem of COVID-19 and the difficulties in obtaining visitors' visas to the United States as justifications for postponement. We advocated that, if hosting the General Conference in the United States proves challenging, the global Church should explore a location outside of the United States. We also proposed having the event in Africa (Johannesburg, Nairobi, Abidjan, Harare, and so on).

That request was made five months in advance of the General Conference schedule to ensure that the leadership of the Commission and the Council of Bishops would work to put into place modalities, and work with relevant agencies to ensure that delegates could sit interviews for their visitors' visas, just as other entities were doing to facilitate the processing of visas for their guests to the USA. Our request was completely ignored. Instead, as early as February, they postponed General Conference to 2024. One then wonders whether this was a designed strategy to postpone the passing of the Protocol that all sides (Progressives, Centrists, and Traditionalists) had joyfully agreed upon as the best possible solution to ensuring that both Traditionalists and Progressives within the UMC amicably separate to do effective ministry as they see appropriate. Hence, the gathering evaluated the decision of the Commission to determine a way forward for the UMC in Africa.

Birth of the Global Methodist Church. Another agenda item of the summit was the birth of the Global Methodist Church (GMC) and its implications for the UMC in Africa. Prior to the birth of the GMC, the Africa Initiative has had very close ties with some of its key leaders who, formally, were members of the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA). We therefore invited some leaders of the GMC to unfold the package of the GMC to African leaders, as by doing so, it would afford us the opportunity to ask all the questions about what we wanted to know about the GMC, and to know the options available to the UMC in Africa when amicable separation takes place.

Contrary to the opinions of some detractors, Africa Initiative did not invite leaders of the GMC to launch the GMC or to persuade annual conferences in Africa to join the GMC. While we are in partnership with the WCA and other renewal groups within the UMC, Africa Initiative is a movement within the three Central Conferences of Africa committed to missions and leadership development of African leaders and delegates to General Conference. We are not a member of the GMC. The Initiative, as a “brain child” of

the three Central Conferences of Africa, endorsed by every episcopal area, with assigned representative to the Initiative (an action taken by Central Conference Episcopal leaders in Accra, Ghana, in 2017), it cannot have membership in two denominations simultaneously.

Our decision to ask the GMC leadership to speak at the summit was predicated upon our conviction that access to knowledge is emancipation, and that people of the UMC in Africa have a right to know what is going on in the global UMC. And we encourage all of our Episcopal leaders to support information dissemination to their local churches, districts, and annual conferences so that the church in Africa does not stay "in the dark" on global church concerns.

Our experience with information dissemination across Africa's Central Conferences over the last four quadrennial (2008-present), is a manifestation of the massive transformation taking place within the African church in terms of numerical growth and spiritual depth, coupled with delegates' meaningful contributions to General Conference recently and their participation in the life and ministry of the global church.

It saddens our hearts, therefore, that some African Episcopal leaders refuse to discuss within their annual conferences the issue of human sexuality, that has unfortunately taken center stage within global United Methodism; the Protocol that might lead to amicable separation, etc.; and would dare to persecute some of their General Conference delegates and leaders who attempt to do so. We respectfully request the Council of Bishops to investigate allegations of imprisonment, suspension and expulsion of some clergy and laity from ministry and from the United Methodist Church without following the processes in the Discipline by some of our episcopal leaders in the Episcopal Areas of North Katanga, Angola East, Central Congo, East Congo, and Zimbabwe. We have received numerous reports of such allegations. Their primary offense is allegedly their commitment to preach and teach the Traditional position on Human Sexuality, and inform people about the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.

These Bishops who represent predominantly traditional annual conferences and episcopal areas, and who once stood for the traditional position of the African church have apparently changed their traditionalist stance in favor of a progressive alliance. While they have their rights to do, they do not have the right to persecute and expel from the church prominent leaders or member of our denomination in Africa for disagreeing with their episcopal leaders in these debates. We therefore beg the Council of Bishops to kindly intervene as soon as possible.

Key Consensus. The Africa Initiative's Prayer and Leadership Summit culminated with a powerful session of praise and prayer in thanksgiving to God for His plans and intentions for the future life and ministry of the church in Africa. At the conclusion of the Prayer and Leadership Summit, the following consensus was reached, in accordance with our present episcopal leaders who were present:

- ❖ That the Africa Initiative remains committed to its vision of a biblically committed, Christ-centered, evangelistically functional, mission-minded, self-sustaining, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-theologizing church in Africa.
- ❖ That the Africa Initiative remains committed to its mission of training, equipping, and empowering pastors and church leaders to foster discipleship, leadership, and raising the voice of the Central Conferences in Africa within global United Methodism.
- ❖ That the United Methodist Church in Africa shall not be a part of a denomination that changes the current language of the Book of Discipline on human sexuality in order to legalize homosexuality, same-sex marriage, or the ordination of practicing LGBTQIA+ people as pastors.
- ❖ That the Africa Initiative shall continue to encourage African churches and conferences to patiently await the 2024 General Conference while advocating for the adoption of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, and while acknowledging unique circumstances in some areas of the Continent that may cause members to act before then.
- ❖ That Bishops who have reached mandatory retirement by 2020 across the Central Conferences of Africa, but could not officially retire due to the postponement of the General Conference, be graciously retired, and that new episcopal elections take place this year.
- ❖ Now that the Judicial Council has ruled that the Council of Bishops can facilitate episcopal elections in Jurisdictional Conferences, it is our ardent hope that the respective Colleges of Bishops will equally facilitate episcopal elections in the Central Conferences in Africa, as the Philippines has fixed the dates. For to fail to do so would be considered by us as marginalization; and a gross denial of the rights of the UMC in Africa to exercise its spiritual democracy by electing its new episcopal leaders as will the jurisdictions in the United States.

Signed:

Rev. Dr. Jerry P. Kulah, West Africa Central Conference, General Coordinator, Africa Initiative

Rev. Wilton T.A. Odongo, Africa Central Conference

Rev Dr John Pena Auta, West Africa Central Conference

Rev Dr Julius S. Nelson, Jr, West Africa Central Conference

Rev Mujinga Mwamba Kora, Congo Central Conference

Madame Ruth C. Kulah, West Africa Central Conference

Rev Izwela S. Olivier, Congo Central Conference

Rev Tshibang Mutond Jacques, Congo Central Conference

Rev Monga Kamuyombo Richard, Congo Central Conference

Karumb Mansang Justine, Congo Central Conference

Mbayo Ngoy Nhoris, Congo Central Conference

Dorothee Abedi Tulia, Congo Central Conference

Kibawa Mukonde Sebwila, Congo Central Conference

Jean Jacques Mbuyu, Congo Central Conference

Rev Martin Kasongo Wakubatwa, Congo Central Conference

Dr Antoine Umba, Congo Central Conference

Betuely Shariel Nikodem, Congo Central Conference

Rev Upendo Malaki Likondi, Congo Central Conference

Tumba Lokwa Djedje, Congo Central Conference

Tunda Kasongo Lukali Prosper, Congo Central Conference

Rev Omba Djamba Dissashi, Congo Central Conference

Sukisa Munomgo Nicolas, Congo Central Conference

Lokoto Lowa Armand Pierre, Congo Central Conference

Rev Stanley Mwiti Ringeera, Africa Central Conference

Nellie Gatune Ruuri, Africa Central Conference

Jaka Joile, Africa Central Conference

Bartolomeli Dias Sapalo, Africa Central Conference

Joao Kahilo Isaac, Africa Central Conference
Me Lupaka Tshita Fils, Congo Central Conference
Manirakiza Godelieve Eaac, Congo Central Conference
Marcel Kakudji Faliata, Congo Central Conference
James Kawadza, Africa Central Conference
Rev Kenneth Kalichi, Africa Central Conference
Juliel Kapula Kalitonga, Africa Central Conference
Laaanton Chibuwe, Africa Central Conference
Simon Mafunda, Africa Central Conference
Muriel V. Nelson, West Africa Central Conference
Cletus A. Sieh, West Africa Central Conference
Richlain K. Quire, West Africa Central Conference
Rev K. Richard Tonnonlah, West Africa Central Conference
John Chikuta, Africa Central Conference
Kasongo M. Mirielle, Congo Central Conference
Yayuba Bazel Yoila, West Africa Central Conference
Yuwsa Zabairu Elsmar, West Africa Central Conference
Botoe Korto Kennedy, West Africa Central Conference
Jacob Apari Lawan, West Africa Central Conference
Rev Alexander Atiku Sabo, West Africa Central Conference
Loma Otshudi Louis, Congo Central Conference
Kasongo Longanga Martin, Congo Central Conference
Omba Wamu Adeline, Congo Central Conference
Upite Mbaza Jacques, Congo Central Conference
Aboua Louis Roi Nondenot, West Africa Central Conference
Adjobi Ameya Philippe, West Africa Central Conference

Kephas Otieno Otoo, Africa Central Conference
Rev James Boye Caulker, West Africa Central Conference
Rev Francis B Charley, West Africa Central Conference
Madame Yeabu M. D Kamara, West Africa Central Conference
Theresa M. Dougba, West Africa Central Conference
Sule Mataple Abasu, West Africa Central Conference
Rev Prof Edwin Momoh, West Africa Central Conference
Kubam Kwanshi, West Africa Central Conference
Rev Edna M. Bomei, West Africa Central Conference
Rev Salama Hassan, West Africa Central Conference
Diacre Uwimana Delphine, Africa Central Conference
Rev Sinzohagera Emmanuel, Africa Central Conference
Rev David Muwaya, Africa Central Conference
Rev Paul Matheri, Africa Central Conference
Rev Moses Maina Karuiki Africa Central Conference
Madame Evelyn Ann Akumu, Africa Central Conference
Rev Marc Baliyanga, Africa Central Conference
Richard Olang, Africa Central Conference
Carol Alois Ososo, Africa Central Conference
Kabah Kasongo Mwenze, Congo Central Conference