



Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Florida Conference,

Grace and Peace to you, in the name and spirit of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, in these first days of a new year.

I write to commend to you the fruit of a mediation process undertaken by sixteen United Methodists, entitled "**A Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.**" The eight-page document, linked [here](#), represents work done by a group of United Methodists from across the world who represent many (not all) of the important streams of our church. This work was done in collaboration with Mr. Kenneth Feinberg, noted mediator known for his work with the September 11 Victim's Compensation Fund, the Virginia Tech and Boston Marathon victims, and the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster. Mr. Feinberg, who is not a United Methodist, offered his professional guidance to us *pro bono*.

The Protocol is offered in service to the delegates who will gather four short months from now in Minneapolis for the 2020 General Conference. It is not perfect—no mediation is—but it gives a great deal to each of these different streams, more than I could have imagined at the beginning. All of this has been done—and the word I hear from many is that it is something of a miracle—without harming these persons. I attribute this to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The protocol was unanimously affirmed and signed by the sixteen participants.

Key features of the mediation protocol and proposed legislation that will follow are:

- The ongoing existence of The United Methodist Church
- A gracious way of departure for a traditionalist conservative Methodist Church, with a financial settlement.
- The creation of four regional conferences—Africa, U.S., Europe, Philippines—each with its own ability to adapt the Book of Discipline.
- The removal of restrictive language related to LGBTQ identity and practice in the U.S. post-separation United Methodist Church immediately following the May General Conference.
- Holding in abeyance any administrative or judicial processes regarding restrictions in the Book of Discipline related to LGBTQ persons, as of January 1, 2020.
- Creation of a fund to strengthen the Black Church and ministries with and among marginalized persons.
- No annual conference or local church is required to vote on departure from the United Methodist Church.
- No one is asked to leave or separate from the church.
- Annual Conferences and local churches may vote to depart from The United Methodist Church with their property in order to participate in another Methodist expression.
- Wespath will offer a continuity of service across the various Methodist expressions.

Note: *This brief summary is not intended to be a substitute for the actual reading of the protocol. It is simply to encourage United Methodists to develop an understanding of the contents of the protocol.* I encourage you to view the following documents:

- [A Press Release](#)
- [The Signed Protocol](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)

Much of the effect of this protocol will be how we receive it and how we turn toward each other. It is not about winners or losers, but about how God's promise of grace and reconciliation relates to our structures, convictions, and hopes. It is significant, and at the same time, it is one step in a journey.

For me, this mediation work is in the fulfillment of my consecration vows as a bishop, to seek the unity of the church. And for me, it is in continuity with the work of the Commission on a Way Forward.

- No one has to vote to leave the church.
- No one is being asked to leave the church.
- And The United Methodist Church, under the cross and flame, will continue to be in ministry across the world.

We were told in the mediation process that if we did not write the narrative, it would be written for us. A culture of trials related to LGBTQ persons in the church becomes the dominant narrative. By holding these administrative and judicial processes in abeyance until the resolution of these matters, we are able to devote our energies to working and walking together to finding reconciliation and grace through structural separation.

I give thanks for those who participated in the mediation and particularly to Mr. Kenneth Feinberg, who led us in this process. I give thanks for all of the people of the Florida Conference, and believe this mediation does no harm to anyone of them. I also place great trust in our delegation to the 2020 General Conference. They are authorized to help our church to move forward into a new season of mission and flourishing.

In the interim, we have much work to do in service to our Lord, in the strengthening of our local churches and ministries. We have an important question to answer: "What kind of annual conference will we be?" And we are in connection with each other, for a larger purpose: "*to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*"

This will continue to be my focus, and I ask you to join me.

The Peace of the Lord,

+Ken Carter

Bishop, Florida Conference, The United Methodist Church