

Dear Methodists in the Nordic & Baltic Episcopal Area

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

With these words, I wish all of you a blessed New Year!

At the beginning of the new year, I am writing to share a few words regarding the agreement between different factions in the denomination entitled "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation", which has just been made public by a mediation group. A separation is expected to take place, as traditional conservative groups in the church plan to form a new Methodist Church, while the United Methodist Church will continue.

The mediation group was successful in reaching a broad based agreement between the main streams of the church. The agreement empowers annual conferences and local churches to shape a future, where they are able to develop their ministry in their own context and culture with integrity and faithfulness as they follow God's call.

I entered this process in the summer of 2019 on the invitation of Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone. I desired to offer a central conference and a European perspective in a predominantly US conversation, and to urge the diverse groupings to talk to each other and begin to search for joint solutions to the benefit of the entire church. Participation in the mediation group has been extensive and demanding work with much prayer – there were times when the tension level was so high that I doubted we would be able to agree on anything, but in the end, all were willing to bend towards each other.

To many a separation of the church will be painful and filled with grief – this how I experience it as well. At the same time, the gaps between the different theological and ethical positions in the church are too wide to be bridged. The purpose of a strong, broad based and respectful agreement prior to General Conference in May in Minneapolis is to ensure a peaceful and dignified process leading to a decision, that can help the church to move on in God's mission, rather than a conflict-ridden confrontational process with incalculable impact on our witness and ministry.

The mediation group could not have done its work without the outstanding guidance of Mr. Kenneth Feinberg, noted mediator known for his work with the September 11 Victim's Compensation Fund, the Boston Marathon victims, and the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster. Mr. Feinberg, who is a Jewish gentleman, offered his professional guidance to us *pro bono*.

The following are some of the main points in the agreement. I strongly encourage you to read the entire agreement.

- Central Conferences may vote to leave the post separation UMC to join another new expression of Methodism from the UMC, this will require a 2/3 majority. Deadline 31. Dec. 2021.
- An annual conference may decide, if supported by 20% of its voting delegates, to vote on their affiliation. To affiliate with other than the post-separation UMC will require the support of 57% of the delegates (this is a compromise between 2/3 and simple majority). Deadline July 1, 2021.
- If a local church does not vote, it remains part of the denomination decided by the annual conference. If the local church desires to have a vote on affiliation, the church council will decide whether this will be with a 2/3 or a simple majority vote. Deadline 31. December 2024.
- If churches decide to disaffiliate from the UMC and not become part of a Methodist Denomination pursuant to the protocol, it must comply with BoD paragraph 2553.

- There will be a compensation of 25 Mio USD paid to the conservative group leaving the UMC to form a new denomination. An additional two Mio USD will be laid aside for other groups deciding to separate from the UMC.
- To support communities historically marginalized by racism, GCFA would allocate \$39 million over eight years to strengthen Asian, Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander ministries, as well as Africa University. Of that total, \$13 million would come from funds the separating traditionalist denomination chose to forgo.
- All administrative and judicial processes addressing restrictions relating to self-avowed practicing homosexuals or same-sex weddings shall be held in abeyance beginning January 1, 2020 through the adjournment of the first conference of the post-separation United Methodist Church. Clergy shall continue to remain in good standing while such complaints are held in abeyance.

The necessary legislation is being written and will be brought as petitions to general conference through one or several annual conferences. With this, the mediation group put their work in the hands of the delegates for their discernment and decision. The General Conference is the top lawmaking body in the church, and its delegates make decisions for the entire denomination. The delegates carry a large and important responsibility, and we need to surround them with prayer in the weeks towards and during the conference.

I hope and pray, the proposal from the mediation group by the grace of good may contribute to the healing of the pain we have inflicted on each other and strengthen the church to engage wholeheartedly in its mission, even if it may be under different circumstances.

In the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference as well as in the Nordic & Baltic episcopal area we hold divergent theological and ethical positions, not least regarding how to be in ministry with all people, including those who identify as LGBTQ. The decisions of General Conference will affect the central conference and the Nordic and Baltic annual conferences in significant ways, and we will make important decisions. I intent to do my utmost to help the conferences in their context to shape their future and to develop their ministry, faithful to God's calling to all of us, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I invite you together with me to pray and to strive to be a vital church that generously and joyfully shares Jesus' love and salvation with the people around us. God is still calling us...

Christian Alsted  
bishop

A document with answers to possible supplementary questions will offer additional background information.  
FAQ