

**A STATEMENT FROM THE MICHIGAN DELEGATION**  
**March 16, 2021**

The Michigan Delegation met on March 13, 2021, in the midst of uncertainty surrounding the further postponement of the general and jurisdictional conferences. The delegates considered the May 8, 2021 called *Special Session of the General Conference*, issues related to the scheduling and format for jurisdictional conferences, questions about the election of bishops and other matters of importance to the life of The United Methodist Church.

After robust discussion of these issues and more, the delegation makes the following statement to the Michigan Annual Conference, the North Central Jurisdiction (NCJ) College of Bishops, the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy, the NCJ Mission Council, and NCJ delegates.

*Dear Friends in Mission and Ministry,*

*Our vision as a delegation is to listen; to lead the Michigan Conference into a more just and inclusive church; to continue the reconciling work of Jesus Christ in whatever new things emerge; to challenge ourselves to follow in the way of Christ; and to live into the catholic spirit of John Wesley. We value: a strong foundation; holding all in sacred worth; compassion, honesty & realism; servant leadership; the journey.*

In line with this vision, we make the following commitments about issues related to General Conference, the May 8, 2021 called *Special Session of the General Conference*, and the North Central Jurisdictional Conference:

**THE MAY 8, 2021 CALLED SPECIAL SESSION**

- Whereas the virtual format for the May 8, 2021 called *Special Session of the General Conference* will likely impede equal participation around the globe, and whereas this format and the limited time allowed for the conference, as well as the limited ways of deliberating<sup>1</sup> cannot allow for fair consideration of complex legislation, the Michigan Delegation does not support any effort to add to the called *Special Session* agenda any substantive or complicated legislation about the future structure of our church. Such pieces of legislation, such as The Protocol and others, should be dealt with in the legislative process at an in-person General Conference.

**THE CHRISTMAS COVENANT AND THE PROTOCOL**

- Recognizing the need for contextual ministry and connectedness in mission, the Michigan Delegation supports regionalization, especially as it is imagined in the Christmas Covenant legislation. The delegation affirms the Christmas Covenant because of the broad central conference participation in crafting it and because we believe that the regionalization it envisions will move us away from U.S.-centrism and allow for contextualization in mission and ministry throughout our global church.

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the specified up-or-down votes only and votes taken by paper ballot for the called session and the reality that this is a one-day conference.

- In line with the decision of the March 2020 called *Special Session of the Michigan Annual Conference*, at which the Michigan Annual Conference voted to send The Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation legislation to the General Conference under the 45-day rule, the Michigan Delegation affirms its original support for The Protocol and stresses that this complex piece of legislation should be dealt with at an in-person session of the General Conference.
- And, whereas the Michigan Delegation is committed to a more just and inclusive church and to continuing the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, we call our bishops, colleges of bishops, and the Council of Bishops to continue to hold in abeyance any charges related to sexual orientation or gender identity, to the provision of same-sex marriage or holy union, to the ordination, commissioning or consecration of LGBTQIA+ persons or to other matters related to our impasse over sexual orientation in line with the dictates of *The Protocol* (which we anticipate will be addressed at the next in-person General Conference).

#### **THE ELECTION OF BISHOPS IN THE NORTH CENTRAL JURISDICTION**

- Whereas U.S. delegates have been asked to consider pausing the election of bishops or electing fewer bishops, the Michigan Delegation supports elections for the North Central Jurisdiction (NCJ) for missional purposes. Specifically, the delegation supports the recommendation that the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy had already made to elect one bishop. This is a reduction of one episcopal leader for our jurisdiction, given that we have recently had two bishops retire. The delegation recognizes that other jurisdictions may make different decisions based on their local contexts.

#### **THE NORTH CENTRAL JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCE**

- Whereas considerations of equity and mission demand the seating of elected delegates and the selection of future leadership for the church, the Michigan Delegation supports the convening of a regular session of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference (in-person or virtually) in 2021 for the purpose of electing and consecrating one bishop and for the purpose of electing representatives for the general boards and agencies.
- The Michigan Delegation supports efforts by the NCJ College of Bishops, the NCJ Mission Council and the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy to meet with delegates in the jurisdiction to improve communications and the sharing of information as we seek to deal with complex issues in these uncertain times.

This statement is made prayerfully as an effort to move our church forward by clearly communicating what we believe will bring us into a healthier future centered in the mission and ministry to which God has called us. We offer it humbly to our annual conference, our jurisdiction and our church.

In Christ,

The Michigan Delegation  
 Cochairs: Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai and Laura Witkowski