

An open letter from the United Methodist Rural Advocates (UMRA) to the delegates of GC 2019:

To All General Conference Delegates,

At the 1940 General Conference of the Methodist Church, a group of rural leaders, concerned that the issues and voices of smaller membership Town & Country churches and people were not being heard by the Conference, formed the Methodist Rural Fellowship. For the past 78 years, MRF and its successors United Methodist Rural Fellowship and now, United Methodist Rural Advocates, has existed to advocate for the needs of the two thirds of the United Methodist Congregations which are in Rural, Town and Country settings. In the United Methodist Church the median attendance is less than 100, and so while these churches are small in number, collectively they are making an outsized impact for Christ on their communities.

UMRA does not write to endorse any of the three plans submitted by the Commission on A Way Forward. We do ask that all those involved in the Special Session of General Conference remember John Wesley's admonition to "Do No Harm" as they determine what will be the best way for our church to move into the future.

For example, we see the following potential harms in the proposed plans:

- Outcomes in which rural congregations have to vote to leave or stay within the denomination may significantly diminish average attendance in those churches.
- Results which diminishes the connectional support of rural congregations will threaten the health of rural churches.
- Significant disruption in the life of the local church distracts from our mission of Making Disciples of Jesus Christ, for the Transformation of the World.

In light of these, and other, potential harms, we request that all involved in the Special Session be as aware as possible of the impact of what is chosen on the Rural, Town and Country churches. If you are not sure what the impact will be, please talk to someone you know living or serving in a rural setting.

And as always, you can contact United Methodist Rural Advocates, as we will continue to speak for the needs of the rural church. You can learn more about us on our website at <http://www.umruraladvocates.org/> or on our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/UMRuralAdvocates/>

We will see you in St Louis.

Peace,

Laura Byrch, Elder, Western NC [lbeach@wnccumc.net](mailto:lbeach@wnccumc.net)

Alan Bolte, Elder, Minnesota- serving in West Ohio

[revahb53@gmail.com](mailto:revahb53@gmail.com)

Jodi Cataldo, Laity, Dakotas Jodicataldo@yahoo.com  
Andrew Coon, Elder, Missouri revcoon@live.com  
Carl Ellis, Elder, Great Plains cellis@larcm.org  
John Gilmore, Elder, Louisiana budddg@gmail.com  
Roger Grace, Elder, West Ohio rogergrace@yahoo.com  
Sue Grace, Laity, West Ohio smgrlg51@yahoo.com  
Judy Hill, Laity, Mountain Sky judyh@plainstel.com  
Michele Holloway, FTLP, OR-IA michele.holloway@yahoo.com  
Peggy Jeffries, Elder, Missouri peggyx15@yahoo.com  
Deb Ketcham, Elder, West Ohio revdsk@frontier.com  
Alan Rice, Elder, Western NC ARice@wnccumc.net  
David Ruesink, Laity, Presbyterian druesink@gmail.com  
Mollie Stewart, Laity, N. AL mollicestewart0128@gmail.com  
Orrinda Stockton, Laity, CA-NV orrinda.stockton@gmail.com  
Erie Stuckett, Laity, MS ebsmill@bellsouth.net  
Randy Wall, Elder, Western NC RandyLWall@aol.com  
Sara Wrona, FTLP, Western PA pastorsarajw@gmail.com