

## **THE WAY FORWARD FOR UMC: A LOOK AT THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS PROPOSAL.**

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church has come up with a proposal to have a Special limited agenda Session of The General Conference in May 2021. This follows the decision of The Commission on General Conference to postpone The Regular General Conference for yet another year due to the Covid 19 Pandemic.

Preliminary reactions this Call by the Bishops are mixed. This is so understandably given the high levels of mistrust in the Denomination.

This essay critically looks at this Proposal from Council of Bishops. We are going to look at the Wisdom from The Council as well as the concerns from those skeptical of the Call and the way The Council handled the recently called Special General Conference of 2019.

For starters, it is true that the Pandemic has caused unprecedented Challenges to everyone and every Institution under the Sun. Life has been rendered more unpredictable than ever before. It's hard to Plan. There is always a new threat of a variant form of the virus of The Covid 19 Pandemic as each day approaches. There is no guarantee that even when we have the VACCINES for everyone those VACCINES will be able to deal with all variant strains of the Pandemic. There is no conclusive agreement that the VACCINES will also prevent the spreading of the virus. Both the Commission on General Conference and The Council of Bishops could be right that by August 2021 the roll out of the VACCINES may not have covered all Regions of the world, especially Africa where a significant number of Delegates reside now.

We therefore, submit that the decision of the Commission on General Conference and the subsequent proposal from The Council of Bishops must be understood in this context. We see Wisdom in it.

We can put the Bishops Proposals into three broad categories as we do not have time and space to itemize all twelve here. Key for us are these ones:

First, they propose legislation to deal with retiring Bishops and their replacement or non replacement. That Section highlight the dire financial predicament our beloved Denomination finds itself in. The financial dashboard of The UMC is flicking red. The Episcopal Fund is just a tip of the iceberg I. We may be descending into deeper financial trouble as a Denomination. This , of course, is understandable. If there is growing uncertainty about the future of the Church givers get reactant to give until there is clarity. The talk of the possibility of the Split of The UMC is not helping the situation.

The Second deals with the issue to do with Denominational Budget that must be approved by The General Conference urgently as the Church is now operating outside of an approved Budget. At the Budget gets presented, the wider Church will have an appreciation of financial dynamics in the CHURCH as seen by our financial Agency, GCFA and The Connectinal Table.

Third, there Proposal deals with the election of Critical Boards and Officers of The Annual Conference that makes the Annual Conference function. The Annual Conference is the backbone of The United Methodist Connectinal System. It has to be functional.

Just looking at these Proposals in this context, we believe that is the best way to go. Bishops are seeking for a pragmatic way forward. To that end, we believe The Council needs the Support of everyone. As a Delegate I would Support this proposal as the best way forward in the short term.

In the long term we pray that the Commission on General Conference work out a robust strategy for the holding of the Regular General Conference now rescheduled to August 2022 that no matter what the status of The Global Pandemic will be at that time. The General Conference take place and decisively deal with the energy draining issue of Human Sexuality in Church. We call upon both the Commission and The Council of Bishops to realize that this issue can no longer continue dragging while the Church is literally dying from a problem everybody knows. We did waste a lot of money and time on the now better forgotten 2019 Special General Conference. This turned out to be the worst gathering of United Methodists at General Conference level when we had promised The Church and the World that we were gathering to close the chapter of fighting amongst ourselves over Human Sexuality and focus on The Mission of The UMC, only to do the very opposite. This must not be repeated neither is procrastinating our option.

It is our considered opinion that the United Methodist Church has the capacity to hold the General Conference even in the midst of The Covid 19 Pandemic with legitimate outcomes achieved. We do have the Capacity. With all our agencies, and specifically United Methodist Communications we must be able to come up with a viable option achieve this. We must challenge ourselves that of Continental Bodies like The African Union could hold their summits, surely The UMC can. Technology is now very advanced to fail us to achieve this. What we may lack is the political will not lack of options.

We do know that there are some afraid of facing the hard reality facing The Denomination that we have irreconcilable Theological and ethical differences that can be just be wished away. There are those of course, benefitting from the paralysis bedeviling the Church and wish it continue no matter what the consequences may be to the Church. As Methodists and Responsible Christians we must not allow this any longer. We must face the elephant in room.

Those not keen to Support the Bishops on this Initiative are doing so mainly from two perspective: First is a governance point of view. They raise the cardinal questions of Separation of powers between the Legislature and the Executive. The multi million dollar question is: who crafted the legislation being presented by the Bishops? Can the Executive craft the law of the Church and then Preside over it's passage and again collate the votes and make the announcement of the results????

These questions are critical for some as they bring into question our Governance structure as a Denomination. They bring to the fore the whole question of accountability of the Executive to The Legislature.

The second is the Memory of the 2019 Special General Conference. Many believe it did not give us Confidence that Special General Conferences help solve anything. What if Delegates choose to differ with the Bishops? How will the executive and those who may be Supporting them react given the precedent set by the aftermath of 2019? These are legitimate questions that need to be taken seriously.

Overall, we do Support the proposal by the Bishops on the short term. We are however, very concerned about what happens after the Special General Conference.

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March 2021.