

A Provisional Emergency American Central Conference (PEACC)

John Wesley called the Methodist Movement "irregular" and "extraordinary" in terms of polity and organization. Theologically, however, Methodism proclaimed none other than the classic faith handed down by the apostles. Wesley believed God raised up Methodism to provoke the established church of his day to reform. Our founder never left the Anglican Church, but neither did he allow his ministry to be constrained by the structural norms of his Church.

Wesley demonstrated willingness to circumvent the established lines of episcopal authority in times of extreme necessity. His ordination of Thomas Coke was such an emergency measure that allowed the Methodist Church in America to organize at a time of "stuck-ness."

Methodism now finds itself in a moment of crisis. Bishops who reject the discernment of General Conference nonetheless use the authority granted to them by the same to negatively impact the clergy and congregations entrusted to their care. General Conference, the only group empowered to speak for United Methodism, is unable to meet due to a global pandemic. The existing structural polity of the UMC is inadequate for the moment in which we find ourselves.

The formation of a Provisional Emergency American Central Conference (PEACC) for traditionalists could provide relief for those UM congregations and conferences who are locked in structures not conformed to UM theological and ethical teachings. Central Conferences are explicitly intended for regions outside the U.S. Such a structure would be thoroughly "irregular," extra-disciplinary, and intended to address this unprecedented, extended time between General Conferences.

Provisional central conferences (Par. 560-567) do everything a central conference does (except elect bishops) and are organized between GC's. The bishop overseeing the PCC determines which of the rules governing a central conference apply to the provisional CC (Par. 561). The boundaries and organization of a provisional central conference formed between General Conferences expires at the close of General Conference unless renewed or affirmed. A Central Conference Discipline could be quickly assembled from the work done by the Transitional Leadership Council on the Transitional Book of Discipline for the Global Methodist Church.

Keeping things under the general rubrics of UM polity might help us keep our current divisions outside the secular courts. Any sorting done now will ease the pain of sorting needed later.

If our choices are an ethical/theological crisis, a legal crisis, or a polity crisis, I believe a crisis of polity is to be preferred. Unlike the Christmas Covenant plan, the PEACC would conform to the ethical and ministry standards established by the general church.