

## The Case for Considering Alignment with the Global Methodist Church

*Set forth your case, says the LORD;  
bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.  
(Isaiah 41:21)*

Three Assumptions in the discernment process:

1. “Stay or go” is the wrong first question. “What is Christ calling this church, this Christian, to be and to do?” is the first question. What are the core convictions and spiritual DNA of the congregation? Until we know who we are in Christ, questions of ‘go or stay’ are irrelevant.
2. God will call some to stay with the continuing UMC and some to move toward other expressions such as the GMC. Yes, really! Where Christ is leading *you* is what matters and arises from answers to question (1).
3. A church version of cell division (mitosis) is a constructive, win-win movement toward a vigorous future for all expressions, with ample historical precedents. An (un)civil war schism will diminish all parties. Fallen human nature relishes schism, even as it blames “others” for the carnage. The Holy Spirit continues to birth light, life and order out of chaos, reflected in a mitosis moment.

Examples of the “Wicked Problem” afflicting the UMC:

1. Trust deficits. A denomination-wide 2010 study confirmed this as a major issue for laity and clergy. Trust issues include confidence in competence, leadership, motives, integrity, truth-telling, appointment-making, use of finances, and reliable communication (without spin). Laity, clergy, bishops and paid staff all named this as a huge shadow and pain at all levels of church life.
2. Demographics. Over 80% of UM churches now are located where 20% of the population lives. Over 2/3 of UM churches have worship attendance of 2-60. The modal age of mainline Protestants is 67; Statistically, in 25 years the average UM member of today will be...dead. The UMC has endured 54 sustained years of US decline, losing nearly half its membership/attendance while the national population has increased by 32%. Over 90% of US congregations have declined significantly. Currently Methodism in Great Britain is on course for numerical extinction around 2050; the US church is a decade behind them for functional extinction as a relevant presence. The demographics of age and church locations is overwhelming us.
3. Dysfunctional institution and organization. Apportionments are meant to empower ministry in the local church but nearly all laity and clergy cannot see any major difference that the combined 10 prior years of apportionments has made in the life of the local church. Clergy shortages were envisioned over a decade ago but no effective steps were taken to address the need. No consistent metrics exist to measure the effectiveness of clergy or local congregations.

Retired clergy (in Ill Great Rivers Conference, as an example) comprise 400 of 600 total clergy) and all can vote for General Conference clergy delegates. The .5% of conference membership who are clergy get 50% of the delegates, giving clergy an unfair say in general church life.

4. Theology. Under the blanket of “interpretation” the church affirms wildly inconsistent definitions of God, Christ, scripture, salvation or marriage, with all using the same technical words but “interpreting” each term in ways reflecting biblical schizophrenia or theological dysphoria, i.e., the stuff doesn’t add up in simple language. For example, to those who say the nature of Christian marriage is not a big deal doctrine and can be defined to mean different things provided it includes the number “2” ... convince your spouse marriage is not that big a deal!
5. Denial. We are becoming a religious version of Sears, the once-dominant retailer where denial of problems by leadership led to its slow collapse. Consider Council of Bishops’ statements for blissful statements that downplay, ignore or deny the profound level of our challenge while circling the institutional wagons to protect the *status quo* with “Better together” words.

How the Global Methodist Church can make a difference:

1. The creation of the GMC will force the UMC into profound and necessary changes consistently resisted for the previous 50 years, giving the world a better, more diverse and clearer Wesleyan Christian witness.
2. The GMC will push the re-set button on clergy preparation and appointment, significantly reduced infrastructure/bureaucracy, refined focus on a few major emphases (such as evangelism), trusting local churches in using their resources for missions local and overseas that connect, actively partnering with local churches in appointments in ways impossible under the existing system.
3. The GMC will embody the spirit of vigorous early Methodism in the loving support and accountability of class meeting/small groups required of all members. Lived in grace, it will empower true discipleship to replace the numbers of membership often entirely disconnected from discipleship.
4. The GMC will encourage local church support for institutions, whether in missions or education. The days of sending money to schools that are essentially secular and devoid of any clear identity as a Christian or Methodist college/university beyond ancient history, will end. Support for actively Christian students in a variety of school settings would increase.
5. The GMC will not stack up millions of unused dollars intended for church starts and renewal but will actively seek to plant new faith communities in settings where the 80% of the US population lives, a priority shared with every growing Christian faith group in the US.

Challenges and temptations in moving toward the GMC

1. Negativity. If the motive to align mostly is a desire to not have gay weddings or clergy, recall that no Christian church can or should long survive based on a negative. Anyone who desires to get closer to Jesus will be welcomed in a GMC congregation. If any have problems with that vision, it is better to align elsewhere. This also includes rejection of seeing everything in negative terms. There are good things about the UMC and about the forming GMC. Affirm where the Holy Spirit is moving, both within one's own camp and in the camp of the other. Let Philippians 4:8 be part of the vision and discernment process.
2. Selfishness. If a main attraction of the GMC is a reduction in apportionments, that reason will not and should not last. The reduction is intended also to enable local churches to channel more support for local and world ministries and spiritual witness, not to hoard.
3. Fantasy. The GMC is a real-world church and will have real birth pains, growing pains and need for patience and grace. Those who think to align with the GMC because their church will start attracting younger worshippers and will start to grow are leaving out the real requirements of local church revival, reformation and discipleship that are the 'stuff of salvation' for real world Christians.
4. Confirmation bias. If left unchecked it can lure a church into a misinformed and disappointing decision, one way or the other. After a church/Christian has identified core beliefs, spiritual DNA (see #1 above), a sign of a healthy discernment process is the ability to hear and process more than one point of view. If one is leaning toward the GMC, it is the ability to express reasons to remain with the legacy church that those who will remain would agree are their reasons, fairly stated. Some conferences are insisting that churches in discernment be sure to include a "Reasons to Stay" section in that process, and that is fine. Now, will there be a similar requirement to include a "Reasons to shift" section for those congregations where the pastor is not permitting discussion of the subject? Not our problem...it is for us to use integrity in what we do and leave others to their conscience and God in dealing with a Methodist ship of Zion clearly on its way to capsiz.

Last thoughts: Consider these words from the UM News Service article, *Church Disaffiliations, Court Cases Mount,* by Heather Hahn, February 8, 2022: "Most of the time, down the road, whatever it was that caused the divide goes away, and often we get back together," said the Rev. Kevin Newburg, a professor of Methodist history at United Methodist Drew Theological School and a United Methodist elder. "But the other thing, the divided groups do much better apart. They thrive." It's time to see that word reclaimed as an honest description of the church of the Wesleyan way, in all its expressions. Not for all, but for many, the Global Methodist Church will be the way to thrive as a witness of love and service for Jesus Christ.