

## **Decision of the Liberia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church on Five Proposed Constitutional Amendments from 2016 GENERAL CONFERENCE**

### **Introduction**

By decision of 2016 General Conference of the United Methodist Church that each of the 56 annual conferences of the global UMC must make a decision on the following five proposed Constitutional Amendments; the Liberia Area of the UMC is pleased to submit its report. At the seat of its recent annual conference held in Ganta, Nimba County, Liberia, from 13-19 February, 2017, the Liberia Annual Conference took a decision on each of the five proposed Constitutional Amendment by simple majority vote. The vote cast by a delegation of 956 comprising of laity and clergy made the following decisions:

Proposed Amendments number one and two were given a “**no**” vote by the Liberia Annual Conference, while Amendments number three, four and five were given a “**yes**” vote. The analysis and position of the Liberia Area of the UMC regarding each vote is stated after each proposed amendment below.

### **Proposed Constitutional Amendment #1:**

In the 2012 Book of Discipline, Division One, add a new paragraph between current ¶¶ 5 and 6: As the Holy Scripture reveals, both men and women are made in the image of God and, therefore, men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God. **The United Methodist Church recognizes it is contrary to Scripture and to logic to say that God is male or female, as maleness and femaleness are characteristics of human bodies and cultures, not characteristics of the divine.** The United Methodist Church acknowledges the long history of discrimination against women and girls. The United Methodist Church shall confront and seek to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large. The United Methodist Church shall work collaboratively with others to address concerns that threaten the cause of women’s and girl's equality and well-being. If voted and so declared by the Council of Bishops, this would become the new ¶6, and the current ¶¶ 6-61 would be renumbered as ¶¶ 7-62.

**Our Analysis & Position:** We are in total agreement, and consistent with Scripture (Genesis. 1:26-27; 9:6; I Corinthians 11:7), that humanity is made in the image of God. Therefore both male and female are of equal value before God. We also stand strongly opposed to discrimination against women and girls, for we are all God’s children. However, we strongly opposed the reference that “it is contrary to Scripture and to logic” to acknowledge or claim the maleness or fatherhood of God. The Scripture is replete with references to God as Father. When Jesus taught his disciples, (and, by implication, us) how to pray, he taught them to call God “Our Father” (Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2); throughout his teaching and preaching ministry, Jesus often referred to God as “Father” (Matt. 5:16; 6:9,26; 11:27; Luke 2:9; John 2:16; 4:21; 10:17,30; 14:6-11; 15:9). When he prayed, while carrying the sin of the entire world on the cross, he addressed God as his Father (Luke 23:34). After Jesus’ resurrection, he informed his disciples that he was returning to his Father and their Father (John 20:17). In addition, the Apostles referred to God as “our Heavenly Father” (Romans 8:15; Phil. 2:11; 1 John 1:3; 2:15, 22-23). Furthermore, to accept this inclusion, “*The United Methodist Church recognizes it is contrary to Scripture and to logic to say that God is male or female, as maleness and femaleness are characteristics of human bodies and cultures, not characteristics of the divine*” would undermine the doctrine of the Trinity, nullify our affirmation of faith (Apostle Creed), and portions of the Bible as non-scripture. Therefore, we voted “NO” to this proposed amendment with a “no” vote of 956; a “yes” vote of 0; and abstention vote of 0.

## **Proposed Constitutional Amendment #2:**

**In the 2012 Book of Discipline, Division One, ¶4, Article IV, amend by deletion and addition as follows**

After “all persons” delete “without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition”. After “because of race, color, national origin,” delete “status,” and “ability”. At the end of the paragraph, add “nor shall any member be denied access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status, or economic condition.”

¶ 4 would read: The United Methodist Church is part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of

sacred worth. All persons shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In the United Methodist church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, ability, or economic condition, nor shall any member be denied access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status, or economic condition.

**Our Analysis & Position:** We acknowledge that this proposed amendment seeks to make changes to Paragraph 4 on inclusiveness. We support inclusiveness, because all of humanity is of sacred worth. However, as the proposed new paragraph stands, it asserts that “*all persons shall be eligible... to receive the sacraments*”. We disagree because only baptized persons are eligible to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. Second, it asserts that “*In the United Methodist church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member... nor shall any member be denied access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status, or economic condition*”. We disagree because we believe membership into the local church should not be based on baptism and making a vow only. The pastor (s) must continue to have a shepherding role (counseling, training, church discipline, etc.) in determining when a person is ready for full membership. Also, we believe that a member may be denied “*an equal place in the life, worship and governance of the church*” based on a person’s spiritual gifting or maturity; or, if a person’s doctrinal beliefs or choice of lifestyle contradicts the teaching of Scripture (eg.: a practicing polygamist; sorcerer; self-avowed homosexual, unrepentant criminal, etc.). Therefore, we voted “NO” to the proposed amendment with a “no” vote of 955; “yes” vote of 1; and abstention vote of 0.

### **Proposed Constitutional Amendment #3**

**In the 2012 Book of Discipline, Division Two, Section VI, ¶ 34, Article III) amend by addition as follows:**

After the first sentence, add, “Such elections shall include open nominations from the floor by the annual conference, and delegates shall be elected by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast.”

¶ 34 would read: The annual conference shall elect clergy and lay delegates to the General Conference and to its jurisdictional or central conference in the manner provided in this section, Articles IV and V. Such elections shall include open nominations from the floor by the annual conference, and delegates shall be elected by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast. The persons first elected up to the number determined by the ratio for representation in the General Conference shall be representatives in that body. Additional delegates shall be elected to complete the number determined by the ratio for representation in the jurisdictional or central conference, who, together with those first elected as above, shall be delegates in the jurisdictional or central conference. The additional delegates to the jurisdictional or central conference shall in the order of their election be the reserve delegates to the General Conference. The annual conference shall also elect reserve clergy and lay delegates to the jurisdictional or central conference as it may deem desirable. These reserve clergy and lay delegates to the jurisdictional or central conferences may act as reserve delegates to the General Conference when it is evident that not enough reserve delegates are in attendance at the General Conference.

**Our Analysis & Position:** This proposed amendment requires nominations from the floor and election of delegates by simple majority vote. It will standardize the process of election, so all annual conferences elect their delegates to General and Central or Jurisdictional conferences in the same form and manner. We therefore voted “yes” to this proposed amendment with a “yes” vote of 956; no vote of 0; and abstention; 0.

#### **Proposed Constitutional Amendment #4 : General Conference timing**

In the 2012 Book of Discipline, Division Three, ¶ 46, Article I, amend by addition, as follows: To the end of the paragraph, add “provided that Episcopal elections in central conferences shall be held at a regular, not an extra, session of the central conference, except in the case where an unexpected vacancy must be filled.”

**¶ 46 would read:** The bishops shall be elected by the respective jurisdictional and central conferences and consecrated in the historic manner at such time and place as may be

fixed by the General Conference for those elected by the jurisdictions and by each central conference for those elected by such central conference, provided that Episcopal elections in central conferences shall be held at a regular, not an extra, session of the central conference, except in the case where an unexpected vacancy must be filled.

**Our Analysis & Position:** This proposed amendment requires that Episcopal elections in the central and jurisdictional conferences be held at a regularly scheduled conference, for effective coordination and effectiveness in the elections of persons as bishops without fear of foul play. We voted “yes” with a vote of 956; “no” vote of 0; and abstention vote of 0.

**Proposed Constitutional Amendment#5: Accountability**

In the 2012 Book of Discipline, Division Three, ¶ 50, Article VI, amend by addition, as follows:

After the last paragraph, add “These provisions shall not preclude that adoption by the General Conference of provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold its individual members accountable for their work, both as general superintendents and as presidents and residents in Episcopal areas.”

The bishops, both active and retired, of The Evangelical United Brethren Church and of The Methodist Church at the time union is consummated shall be bishops of The United Methodist Church. The bishops of The Methodist Church elected by the jurisdictions, the active bishops of The Evangelical United Brethren Church at the time of union, and bishops elected by the jurisdictions of The United Methodist Church shall have life tenure. Each bishop elected by a central conference of The Methodist Church shall have such tenure as the central conference electing him shall have determined.

The jurisdictional conference shall elect a standing committee on episcopacy to consist of one clergy and one lay delegate from each annual conference, on nomination of the annual conference delegation. The committee shall review the work of the bishops, pass on their character and official administration, and report to the jurisdictional conference its findings for such action as the conference may deem appropriate within its constitutional warrant of power. The committee shall recommend the assignments of the bishops to their respective residences for final action by the jurisdictional conference.

These provisions shall not preclude that adoption by the General Conference of provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold its individual members accountable for their work, both as general superintendents and as presidents and residents in Episcopal areas.

**Our Analysis & Position:** This proposed amendment enhances accountability for bishops by allowing the Council of Bishops (COB) to hold its members accountable. This would allow the COB to step in any case or problem that has to do with any of their colleagues when the complaint process against a bishop fails. We voted “yes” to this proposed amendment with a vote of 956; a “no” vote of 0; and abstention vote of ‘0”