

# THE CHRISTMAS COVENANT: OUR GIFT OF HOPE

## *An equitable structure of global regionalism*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contacts:** Priscilla Muzerengwa  
[pmuzerengwa@gmail.com](mailto:pmuzerengwa@gmail.com)

Rev. Betty Kazadi  
[Bkazadi2001@yahoo.com](mailto:Bkazadi2001@yahoo.com)

Rev. Cristine Carnate-Atrero  
[ptr\\_cristineatrero@yahoo.com](mailto:ptr_cristineatrero@yahoo.com)

Rev. Hilde Marie Mavafagh  
[hilde.m.movafagh@mf.no](mailto:hilde.m.movafagh@mf.no)

### **Christmas Covenant Website and Videos Launched**

*Proponents mark first anniversary of submission to GC by Philippines conference*

HARARE, ZIMBABWE (February 15, 2021) – On February 13, 2020, The Philippines Annual Conference – Cavite (PACC) of The United Methodist Church approved the [Christmas Covenant legislation](#) for submission to the next General Conference. This is the first time a major re-structure proposal has emanated from the denomination’s central conferences (regions outside the United States). It transforms central conferences into regional conferences and creates a regional conference for the United States. This legislation has been [affirmed](#) by the UMC Connectional Table. Marking its first anniversary, proponents of this legislation – [signed by leaders](#) from across the central conferences – launched a [website](#) which includes [video testimonials](#) from its supporters and an [FAQ page](#). Some parts of the website can be viewed in various languages spoken in central conferences. This is part of a major effort to reach out to every conference and seek endorsements from General Conference delegations. Supporters are encouraged to [sign up](#). GC delegations are invited to host conversations with Christmas Covenant proponents.

Bishop Ciriaco Francisco of the Manila Episcopal Area presided over the conference that endorsed the Christmas Covenant to General Conference. In a [video](#) he says, “I am proud that the Christmas Covenant legislation was conceived, produced, and promoted by people from our central conferences.... It is our gift to our denomination at a time of uncertainty for the future of the United Methodist Church.” Highlighting legislative equity and respect for contextual ministry settings that are hallmarks of the Christmas Covenant, Bishop Francisco emphasized that “No region can be forced to do anything it does not want to do.”

Rev. Hilde Marie Mavafagh, director of the United Methodist seminary in Norway, said in a [video](#) that it is “really strange” that delegates from central conferences get to decide how mission and ministry is done in the unique context of the United States. “Regional equality would also give the United States freedom to make decisions fit for its region. We want to be the church in the best way possible in the context where we belong,” says Rev. Mavafagh.

Rev. Ande Emmanuel, a General Conference delegate from the Southern Nigeria Annual Conference supporting this legislation, lifts up the great justice and compassion ministries of the denomination in Africa. In another [video](#) on the website he says, “I want to see the work of The United Methodist Church to continue even beyond the next General Conference.... The Christmas Covenant is legislation that gives every geographic area of The United Methodist Church an equal opportunity to do mission within its own context while maintaining our global connection.”

**Decolonizing the current structure the denomination is at the heart of the Christmas Covenant.** “Working with women and youth in many countries in southeast Asia, I understand the entrenched effects of colonialism in the social, cultural, and economic life of these developing nations - all of them former colonized peoples,” says Deaconess Emma Cantor, UMW missionary in Asia, in another [video](#). “Our church is no different. When there is no equity and mutuality in how various parts of the church relate with each other, we create second class church members. Systemic colonialism should be eradicated from within our denomination,” she emphasized.

Two questions usually asked about the Christmas Covenant are addressed in the [FAQ page](#) of the website:

### **What is the Christmas Covenant Stance on the Inclusion of LGBTQI persons?**

“The Christmas Covenant legislation ensures that no regional conference can be forced to do anything against its will. No regional conference can impose on any other regional conference. Recognizing the sacred value of all persons as created in the image of God, the Christmas Covenant encourages regional conferences to consider ministry approaches that reflect the theological convictions of the missional contexts they serve.”

### **Is the Christmas Covenant in conflict with the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation?**

“No. These are two separate pieces of legislation focused on two different things. While the Protocol has ‘regionalization’ as one of its pillars, it does not have proposed legislation to make that happen. The Protocol is an amicable separation proposal. The Christmas Covenant is about the future of a vital UMC engaged in effective mission work rooted in mutuality, interdependence, and respect for the missional contexts of each regional conference it seeks to establish. The Christmas Covenant does not prevent any part of the UMC from leaving the denomination. There are already existing remedies in the Book of Discipline passed in 2019 that are available for churches that want to depart from the UMC.”

A downloadable folder of resources in English can be accessed by AC leaders and GC delegations: <https://tinyurl.com/christmascovenantresources>

###

### ***The Christmas Covenant***

*Website:* [www.christmascovenant.com](http://www.christmascovenant.com)

*Email:* [christmascovenant@gmail.com](mailto:christmascovenant@gmail.com)