

## **The Christmas Covenant: Our Gift of Hope**

### **An Equitable Structure of Global Regionalism**

#### **Frequently Asked Questions**

##### ***What is the Christmas Covenant?***

The Christmas Covenant is a set of legislation and constitutional amendments submitted to the United Methodist Church's (UMC) General Conference with the goal of establishing regional equity in the structures of the church for missional effectiveness while sustaining connectional unity. It is rooted in the following values:

- Connectional relationships rooted in mission
- Respect for contextual ministry settings
- Legislative equality for regional bodies of the church

##### ***Why is it called the Christmas Covenant?***

The legislation was conceived during the Christmas season of 2019. Christmas is an auspicious time for Methodists as it reminds us of the Christmas Conference of 1784 that gave birth to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, one of the original predecessor bodies of the UMC. Proponents pray that the Christmas Covenant would be a rallying point for a renewed and revived UMC around the world.

##### ***What is the context that gave birth to the Christmas Covenant?***

Soon after the special General Conference of 2019, proposals to dissolve or dismember the UMC proliferated. All these major legislative proposals emanated from the United States. The African College of Bishops issued a statement on maintaining the unity and integrity of the UMC. The Philippines' College of Bishops also released a pastoral letter that spoke against the dissolution of the UMC. Proponents of the Christmas Covenant who are from Central Conferences saw this as the "kairos" moment – an opportune time for voices from Central Conferences to be heard. Rooted in a lamentation of how colonialism has shown itself in efforts to divide the church without hearing from the silenced margins of Central Conferences, and harming its mission work, the Christmas Covenant was born – a gift of hope from those in the grassroots for the future of our global connection.

##### ***What is the vision that inspired the Christmas Covenant?***

In its preamble, proponents declare: "We envision a Church that connects globally, engages in mission together, respects contextual ministry settings, celebrates the diversity of God's creation in its many beautiful expressions, and values mutually empowering relationships in

order to strengthen our core mission of evangelism, discipleship, and social witness for the transformation of the world.”

### ***How does the Christmas Covenant achieve this?***

The Christmas Covenant achieves regional equity by transforming Central Conferences to Regional Conferences. The change in name will undo the negative connotation associated with the term “Central” (i.e. the Central Jurisdiction segregated Black churches and clergy in the United States). The proposed constitutional amendments will strengthen the ability of Regional Conferences to adapt the Book of Discipline to meet the unique missional needs of each region. The Christmas Covenant also creates the United States Regional Conference with regional equity and structure (as proposed by The Connectional Table) and authorizes contextual adaptations of the Book of Discipline for missional effectiveness.

### ***Why the Christmas Covenant?***

We are stronger together. Being in mission together as a global church celebrates our unity in diversity and positively impacts the different contexts we represent. While diversity is a challenge, we do not believe dissolution is the right way to heal the wounds that cause us pain as Christ’s Body. A truly global church committed to be in mission together embraces its differences and allows for self-determination. It is able to find common ground in affirming how we do effective ministry in places we serve. Acknowledging that our different contexts need different solutions is a better way forward and fosters mutuality. This path affirms a stronger common witness to the global community. God’s grace is present everywhere and in everyone. We are called to humbly respond to this grace in recognizing its many expressions around the world. This call we do best together.

### ***Who wrote the Christmas Covenant?***

The Christmas Covenant legislation was written primarily by United Methodists from Africa, Europe and the Philippines. In February, 2020 it was passed by the Philippines Annual Conference - Cavite and submitted to the next General Conference. The Connectional Table (CT) affirms the Christmas Covenant as an “expression of the CT’s commitment to institutional equity and to dismantling historic, systemic colonialism.” (CT press release, Nov. 3, 2020)

### ***Why the Regional Conferences?***

The various geographical regions of the UMC, sharing closely related ministry context, will benefit from an opportunity to engage in conversations related to the life and ministry of the church within their respective regions, while maintaining missional and connectional relationships with other regions. The Christmas Covenant celebrates the Connectional Table’s U.S. Regional Conference legislation (which Central Conference bishops have affirmed), making it an integral part of the Christmas Covenant legislation, and takes this regionalization effort to the level of the entire UMC Connection. This offers United Methodists in all regions of the UMC,

the space to engage in context-specific conversations for each region that otherwise would have been brought to the General Conference. United Methodists at General Conference can then focus their time to meaningfully consider matters related to global Christian witness.

***What happens if the Christmas Covenant is approved?***

The Christmas Covenant is a set of legislation that includes petitions which take immediate effect upon General Conference adjournment and upon approval and constitutional amendments that requires 2/3 approval at annual conferences.

The Christmas Covenant endorses the creation of 5 episcopal areas in Africa, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, to strengthen the ministry of the church.

Upon adjournment of the General Conference, the US Regional Committee with legislative powers can convene. This will include all delegates to the General Conference from the United States of America and two representatives from each regional conference outside the US.

***What is the future of the United Methodist Church if the Christmas Covenant is approved?***

The Christmas Covenant sustains the unity of the church and allows the church to continue with existing ministries. The Christmas Covenant authorizes a study to strengthen the work of regional conferences facilitated by the Connectional Table, Standing Committee on Central Conferences Matters (to be renamed Standing Committee on Regional Conference Matters Outside the US), and the new Standing Committee on US Matters.

***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.