



For Immediate Release
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UMC Bishops end 5-day meeting; clarify key decisions

WASHINGTON, D. C.—: The bishops of The United Methodist Church gathered online for five days to worship, to discern ways to best offer leadership to the church in this liminal time and to hear about the exciting mission and ministry occurring across the global connection.

During the meeting which was attended by more than 100 active and retired bishops from Africa, Asia, Europe and North America, the Council of Bishops celebrated the lives of their colleagues and spouses. The bishops began each day in a time of devotion as they grounded their work. The bishops also spent time in Covenant Groups each day where they shared their heart and life and work.

The meeting opened on Monday, April 26 with the presidential address in which Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, the president of the Council, challenged the clergy, laity, delegates and bishops to use the time well and continue to shape a narrative of mission and ministry for The United Methodist Church.

The bishops heard and were inspired by the Antiracism work that is occurring throughout the global church as they recommitted themselves to continue to address the systemic racism facing our communities around the world. Bishops from every corner of the church shared their work and shared inspiring stories of love in action.

The General Secretaries offered their report and provided clarity around their work and their commitment to lead the church in this time. Chair of the General Secretaries Table Dawn Wiggins Hare told the bishops that the General Secretaries are committed to continuing working with their current boards as they lead the church in this liminal time.

A portion of the meeting focused on the role of the episcopacy in an ever-changing environment. The group tasked with this work shared their work to date and invited bishops into small groups to provide feedback. A final report is anticipated at the November 2021 COB meeting.

The bishops spent a significant portion of their meeting each day listening and learning from one another as they described their current realities and how they might respond in ways that would be faithful to their baptismal, ordination and consecration vows.

“The bishops were engaged, listened intently, honored one another’s voices and supported one another throughout the meeting,” Bishop Fierro Harvey said. “These are challenging times for the church, yet the strong, steady and non-anxious leadership of the bishops is greatly needed at this time,” she added.

They reviewed the recent decisions of the Judicial Council and the implications on their work.

The Council received the work of a writing team, initiated by Central Conference and Jurisdictional Conference Bishops and at the direction of the Executive Committee. The document, a “Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church”, is not an official statement of the Council, but rather a resource that can be adapted and shared by bishops, active and retired, who find it helpful as they exercise the teaching office.

The leaders of the UMC also heard encouraging reports from the COB leadership teams working on Justice and Reconciliation, Missional Engagement, Congregational Vitality and Leadership Development as well as UMCOR's response to the COVID crisis in India and the rest of the world. The bishops also heard a report and watched a video from the Connectional Table's work on the State of the Church.

COB Ecumenical Officer Bishop Sally Dyck presented the Ecumenical Report, which highlighted the UMC work with other churches and denominations throughout the world.

The bishops had previously chosen Bishop Hope Morgan Ward to deliver the episcopal address at the May 2020 General Conference. Bishop Ward requested that she be relieved of the responsibility given that the landscape had changed dramatically and the fact that she had elected to take vocational retirement at the end of 2021. She believes strongly that the address ought to be given by an active bishop.

After a period of discernment, the bishops voted Bishop Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Annual Conference as the one to deliver the episcopal address at the postponed 2020 General Conference scheduled for the Fall of 2022.

The bishops also acted on the following:

- The Council of Bishops affirmed their interpretation of the *Book of Discipline* that the delegates elected for the 2020 General Conference that was scheduled for May 2020 are the duly elected delegates to the postponed General Conference scheduled for Fall of 2022.
- The bishops affirmed the dates of November 2-4, 2022 for the regular sessions of the Jurisdictional Conferences for the purpose of electing bishops and general agency members.
- The Council of Bishops reaffirmed their interpretation of the *Book of Discipline* that special sessions of the Jurisdictional Conference may be called at any time by the College of Bishops based on provisions of Paragraph 521 but not for the purposes of electing members to boards and agencies or to elect bishops.
- The bishops rescinded their November 2020 recommendation for no election of bishops at regular sessions of the Jurisdictional Conferences and that the COB strongly encourage consideration of mission, context, resources and future impact of the COVID pandemic and potential changes in the UMC in making decisions about the number of bishops to be elected, within the disciplinary parameters of paragraphs 404.2 and 512.1.

The bishops believe the determination of the number of bishops to be elected at regular sessions of the Jurisdictional Conferences is a matter to be determined by jurisdictions at either a special or regular session.

Bishop Harvey noted: "We have done our best to provide clarity where clarity is needed as we set our heart and mind to using our time well in the in between time leading to the postponed 2020GC scheduled for the fall of 2022."

"We continue to listen to each other to find ways to support one another and to lead the church together. We don't always agree but I believe we operate out of a sense of love and respect for one another and deep commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ," Bishop Harvey said.

Videos of the some of the sessions of the COB meeting at available online at:

www.facebook.com/umcbishops

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