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A Faithful Response to “Leading Now and Into the Future – Our Vision”

The leadership of the Iowa Wesleyan Covenant Association Regional Chapter has received and reviewed the Iowa Annual Conference Appointive Cabinet’s and Bishop Laurie Haller’s “Leading Now and Into the Future – Our Vision” (hereafter “Leading Now”). We are shocked and brokenhearted that Bishop Haller and the Cabinet believe their insights are superior to the discernments of The United Methodist Church’s General Conference and its *Book of Discipline*. This attempt to circumvent the Discipline and enact new policy and procedures is an egregious abuse of power and privilege by the Bishop and the Cabinet.

As we all know, our church’s teaching is that a Christian marriage is between one man and one woman. At numerous General Conferences the UM Church, through the work of its global delegates, has prayerfully, faithfully, and repeatedly reaffirmed this understanding of marriage, and most recently did so at the special 2019 General Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. Bishop Haller and the Cabinet do not have the authority to supersede the UM Church’s teachings with their own opinions. Such an approach is an invitation to confusion, chaos, and anarchy. According to “Leading Now,” as of January 1, 2022, the Bishop and the Cabinet will permit Iowa Annual Conference clergy and local churches to preside at, and host, same-sex weddings, contrary to the *explicit provisions of the Discipline*.

Therefore, we respectfully call on Bishop Haller and the Cabinet to rescind “Leading Now.” We also urge episcopal colleagues in the North Central Jurisdiction and among the Council of Bishops to strongly encourage Bishop Haller and the Cabinet to withdraw “Leading Now.”

If the document is not rescinded, we are confident faithful local UM churches (traditionalist, centrist, and progressive) in the Iowa Annual Conference will decide they can no longer submit to the authority of leaders who legitimize acts in defiance of our church’s teachings and its time-honored way of discerning God’s will for the whole.

Ironically, Bishop Haller and the Cabinet demand that congregations who can no longer be part of a Conference that disregards the Discipline follow the terms* of the Discipline in exiting. “Leading Now” claims the terms constitute a “gracious exit,” but they are neither gracious nor sincere given the context. They are not the terms proposed in the *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation*. Essentially, the Bishop and the Cabinet lean into the legislation proposed in the Protocol to justify their defiance of the Discipline regarding Human Sexuality. They then ignore the Protocol and return to the Discipline to hold churches accountable who feel they can no longer be a part of a Conference where the Bishop and the Cabinet have chosen to disregard and defy the Discipline.

We are all disappointed the UM Church has not been able to convene a General Conference and so adopt the *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation*, an amicable and orderly plan of separation widely endorsed by leading Bishops, theologically diverse advocacy groups, and annual conferences. However, disappointment does not entitle Bishop Haller and the Cabinet to make-up their own rules in the interim. Again, we call on the Bishop and the Cabinet to rescind “Leading Now.”

Blessings,

The Iowa Wesleyan Covenant Association Regional Chapter

* “Local congregations who desire to leave the Iowa Annual Conference, will need to 1) present a written statement outlining their desire to leave as their faithful response to this vision of ministry and human sexuality to the Bishop and the Appointive Cabinet, 2) schedule a charge conference with their local District Superintendent, with a two-thirds majority vote in favor of disaffiliation, and 3) must satisfy any remaining apportionment payments and pension liability calculations.”