



**IOWA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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December 7, 2021

Dear Leaders of the Iowa Wesley Covenant Association,

We have received and acknowledge your letter requesting that the Bishop and Cabinet rescind our recent leadership statement, *Leading Now*. We understand there are those like you who are brokenhearted. We, too, are brokenhearted by the status of our church and will encourage support for the Protocol, *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring*, when General Conference is finally able to meet. Like you, we feel called to articulate a vision at this time to lead our Conference forward. We recognize that a portion of the vision we articulate is outside the current *Book of Discipline* of our church and that we confidently look forward to the passing of the Protocol.

We have heard from you and others: “Why now? Why not wait for General Conference?” First, we, like many Iowa United Methodists, desire a church that is fully inclusive and believe that in our denomination there is room for centrists, conservatives, and progressives. Secondly, the urgency of our response is directly related to organized groups that have made the decision to leave The United Methodist Church and have sought to define the post-separation United Methodist Church. Furthermore, some groups are actively recruiting congregations and pastors to join these new denominations based on assumptions of The United Methodist Church that we believe to be false. We have no objection to groups defending and defining themselves.

We strongly object to organizations that are both determined to leave The United Methodist Church and are telling others how we will behave post-separation. We have chosen to articulate a vision of The United Methodist Church that we believe we can live into in Iowa now.

We understand that this statement has come as a shock to you, and you request a withdrawal. This statement is a matter of conscience for each of us, akin to non-violent resistance to unfair civil laws. We realize that taking this stand may have consequences and we accept those consequences, whatever they may be, openly and freely. We cannot, however, honor your request to rescind our statement.

You indicate in your response that many faithful congregations will decide they can no longer submit to the authority of leaders who legitimize acts of defiance contrary to our church’s polity. We understand this may be the case, and we regret that any church may feel the need to leave The United Methodist Church. Still, we are committed to helping any congregation do just that if they feel God is leading. We are not interested in holding any congregation hostage or trying to place an undue burden upon those congregations.

You also point out that our statement holds to the disaffiliation language of the *Book of Discipline 2016*. It does indeed. While it was, and continues to be, our desire to facilitate the grace-filled exit of any congregation that is uncomfortable

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with this vision, matters of property move into the sphere of state laws. While we remain willing to violate this single matter in the *Book of Discipline* to lead our church, violation of state law regarding property would jeopardize the local congregation and the Iowa Annual Conference. Finally, should we hold General Conference and the Protocol passes, we are more than willing to shift to that process for exiting.

The Bishop and the Cabinet are committed to church choice and pastor choice regarding same gender weddings. We are committed to our vision of a fully inclusive United Methodist Church in Iowa and believe that all people who want a home in the Iowa Annual Conference will have a home here. We will not force anyone to act against their conscience, convictions, and integrity. We remain committed to marriage between two people and to fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness. Most of all, we are committed to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission and equipping local congregations to do the ministry God is calling them to do.

May God's grace lead all of us into a future with hope.

In Christ,

Bishop Laurie Haller

Rev. Ron Carlson, Dean

Rev. Melissa Drake

Rev. Dr. Heecheon Jeon

Rev. Dr. Jaye Johnson

Rev. Dr. Moody Colorado

Rev. Doug Cue

Rev. Bill Poland

Rev. Dr. Lanette Plambeck