



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



Five Shared Callings for Bishops in The United Methodist Church

July 17, 2019

Statement from Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., president, Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church

As a denomination, we are living in the tension between the actions of the Special Session in St. Louis in the winter, the decisions of Annual Conferences in the summer and the prospect of another General Conference in ten months. In the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops this week, we acknowledged the great differences across our many annual conferences, and yet have *five shared callings* as leaders in this season.

1. Sending

Sending is related to itineracy and open Itineracy, and this is how churches most directly experience our leadership as bishops. This is the practice of missional appointment-making and the call to spread scriptural holiness. Our discernment in sending clergy to ministries is related to the question many United Methodists are most concerned about, “Who is my pastor?” or “Who will be my next pastor?”

2. Missional Strategy

Missional Strategy is our work with cabinets, primarily district superintendents, and this work is first done in annual conferences and residential areas. This is our calling to lead people in the mission of witness and service, and this is the work of increasing the influence of Wesleyan Christianity in a region.

3. “New Ways of Embodying Unity” (Mission, Vision and Scope of the Way Forward)

Our consecration vow is to seek the unity of the church. As an active pursuit, it is to accompany conversations across our church. We serve as bishops at a time when the connection is “strained” ([Mission, Vision and Scope](#)). We sense the strength of unity and mission at the level of the annual conference, which is the “basic body of the church” (*Book of Discipline*, 33), and we see great promise for our future in the annual conferences.

4. A Global Church

We sense a maturing in a global church, and a movement from global governance to global relationships as we consider “new ways of being in relationship across cultures and jurisdictions” ([Mission, Vision, Scope](#)). Our missional partnerships are critical responses to human need, the great commission and the great commandment. At the same time, our present way of being a global church is unsustainable from the perspective of polity and financial stewardship.

5. Spiritual Leadership

We will seek to strengthen our annual conferences in 2019 through the ministries of sending and missional strategy. Our primary work is not legislative or legalistic. In this season, our primary calling is to discover new ways of embodying unity through structure, mission and relationships (John 17). As we noted in December 2018 and May 2019, this leadership is prophetic—we confess the harm done to the LGBTQIA community across our world by our church—and pastoral—we will continue in a ministry of deep listening to all of the people of our church, and we will exercise the teaching office as bishops called and consecrated to serve in this season.



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