

# General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns (GCCUIC) Petitions to the 2012 General Conference

***“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” John 17:20-23, NRSV***

Jesus’ priestly prayer in John 17 provides clear directions to The United Methodist Church regarding its ecumenical work:

- In this prayer, Jesus passionately reveals his desire that the body of believers be one. Since the unity of believers is one of Jesus’ desires, then the pursuit of ecumenical relationships with other Christian communions certainly has to be a primary focus across The United Methodist Church.
- In this prayer, Jesus also links the unity of the body of believers to a specific result – so that the world may believe that God sent him. Since the manifestation of unity can lead those outside the church to believe, and since belief is a basic element of the mission of The United Methodist Church (“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”), then the pursuit of unity needs to be one of the strategies the denomination employs to fulfill its mission.

In response to Jesus’ call for unity among Christians around the globe and in support of the emergence of a new and inspiring ecumenical movement, GCCUIC envisions a revitalized ecumenical focus across The United Methodist Church which is characterized by:

- Effective leaders who understand and pro-actively fulfill their ecumenical and interreligious responsibilities
- Vital congregations which are actively engaged in ecumenical and interreligious relationships, and
- Proactive training to equip leaders and congregations so that they are prepared and motivated to become involved in dynamic ecumenical and interreligious activities.

The Constitution of The United Methodist Church and The Book of Discipline clearly articulate the United Methodist commitment to ecumenism and the role of bishops in ecumenical relationships:

- ¶ 6: Article VI: “Ecumenical Relations – As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity; and therefore it will seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life: through world relationships with other Methodist churches and united churches related to the Methodist Church or The Evangelical United Brethren Church, through councils of churches, and through plans of union and covenantal relationships with churches of Methodist or other denominational traditions.” (The Constitution of The United Methodist Church)
- ¶ 403.1e: “The bishop leads therefore through the following disciplines: ... e) A passion for the unity of the church. The role of the bishop is to be the shepherd of the whole flock and thereby provide leadership toward the goal of understanding, reconciliation and unity within the Church – The United Methodist Church and the church universal.” (The Book of Discipline)
- ¶ 427.2: “The Council of Bishops is thus the collegial expression of episcopal leadership in the Church and through the Church into the world. The Church expects the Council of Bishops to speak to the Church and from the Church to the world and to give leadership in the quest for Christian unity and interreligious relationships.” (The Book of Discipline)

With these key scriptural, constitutional, and disciplinary provisions in mind, this proposal has been developed to strengthen and enhance ecumenical and interreligious relationships within and beyond The United Methodist Church.

This approach focuses on the bishop as a sign and symbol of the unity of Christ’s church with the intention of supporting all bishops in their role as the ecumenical / interreligious officer within an episcopal area.

**Recommendation: Incorporate GCCUIC into the Council of Bishops**

GCCUIC and the Council of Bishops have submitted legislation to create an Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships within the Council of Bishops to deepen and expand the ecumenical and interreligious commitments of The United Methodist Church.

The Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships (OCUIR) will:

- be guided by an oversight group of eleven members, including laity, chaired by the Ecumenical Officer, and
- include staff, managed by the Ecumenical Staff Officer of The United Methodist Church who will report to the Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops.

The eleven members of the OCUIR:

- two Episcopal leaders: the Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops and one from a central conference

- one member from each jurisdiction
- one member from the central conferences in Africa, one member from the central conferences in Europe, one member from the central conference in The Philippines (the bishop from a central conference shall be one of these three)
- two members from our Full Communion Ecumenical Partners
- each jurisdiction and central conference to nominate two individuals to a pool from which the Council of Bishops will elect the members of OCUIR
- attention given to inclusion of racial /ethnic representation, youth, young adults, and women with a goal of 50% laity

Rationale for incorporating GCCUIC into the Council of Bishops:

- Assigning oversight responsibility for ecumenical and interreligious relationships to one body, specifically the Council of Bishops will result in:
  - greater attention by the Council of Bishops to things ecumenical and interreligious and to the ecumenical issues and interreligious concerns of this time,
  - a more complete understanding of current and potential ecumenical and interreligious partnerships around the world,
  - stronger relationships with existing partners, such as: Pan Methodists, World Methodist Council, World Council of Churches, national councils of churches, regional and state councils of churches, Christian Churches Together, churches in full communion with The United Methodist Church, and churches engaged in bilateral dialogues with The United Methodist Church
  - enhanced equipping and formation of bishops, district superintendents, and directors of connectional ministries, pastors, and laity in their ecumenical and interreligious roles
  - stronger connections to the annual conferences and to central conference bishops,
  - deepened relationships between the Council of Bishops and the ecumenical and interreligious staff, and
  - improved stewardship by refocusing the attention of staff to the ecumenical and interreligious vision and mission and replacing the GCCUIC Board of Directors with a smaller oversight group.
- This structural model is similar to those used by many of our ecumenical partners.

Other considerations:

- A critical first step will be to organize a discernment / transition group to develop a new, vibrant perspective regarding the ecumenical and interreligious work of The United Methodist Church, including:
  - theological grounding
  - vision for ecumenical /interreligious work
  - study of current and envisioned ecumenical / interreligious work
  - value of ecumenical / interreligious efforts
  - measurements of effectiveness
  - financial ramifications
  - staffing configurations, and
  - training of bishops, district superintendents, and directors of connectional ministries in their ecumenical / interreligious responsibilities.

- Although GCCUIC supports the constitutional amendment which has been submitted by the Council of Bishops, the proposed incorporation of GCCUIC into the Council of Bishops is not dependent on the adoption of the constitutional amendment.
  - The amendment will permit the Council of Bishops to designate one bishop without residential responsibilities to serve as the full-time President of the Council.
  - GCCUIC and the Council of Bishops envision that one of the roles of the President will be to serve as the Chief Ecumenical Officer who will:
    - Meet with other denominational leaders to provide a unified spirit and voice for the spiritual and temporal issues facing our world
    - Represent the UMC at world-wide ecumenical tables
    - Lead the bishops in their ecumenical and interreligious roles
    - Oversee the incorporation of GCCUIC into the life of the Council
    - Ensure that The UMC is a faithful partner in its ecumenical and interreligious relationships
    - Lead and participate in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in order to strengthen our commitment to justice and reconciliation within the Church and the world community
  
- Funding:
  - 2013 – 2016 quadrennium - included in the World Service Fund budget
  - 2017 – 2020 quadrennium and beyond – to be included in the Episcopal Fund budget
  
- GCCUIC has submitted three categories of legislation:
  - The preferred legislation which will result in GCCUIC and its responsibilities being incorporated into the Council of Bishops and the deletion of all references to GCCUIC in the Book of Discipline. This legislation intentionally provides only the purpose and basic structure of the OCUIR, thus giving the new organization an opportunity to re-vision the nature of ecumenical and interreligious work across the church.
  - The backup legislation needs to be approved if the preferred legislation is not adopted. These petitions down-size the GCCUIC board to eleven members and make other logistical changes.
  - Other legislation related to ecumenical and interreligious relations is described later in this report.

### **Some other GCCUIC Recommendations:**

#### **Adoption of full communion relationships with Pan Methodist churches:**

- The African Methodist Episcopal Church
- The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- The African Union Methodist Protestant Church
- The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and
- The Union American Methodist Episcopal Church

#### **Option for agencies to elect board members from churches of the Pan Methodist Commission or from our Full Communion Ecumenical Partner churches**

## Renewal of Resolution 6061, “Our Muslim Neighbors”

### Trail of Repentance and Healing with indigenous people:

- Act of Repentance (AOR) at General Conference
- The UMC will begin a process of healing relationships with indigenous persons which will continue beyond the quadrennium and which will include activities such as:
  - training using study guides prepared for the church’s use
  - discovering the on-going impact of historic traumas
  - confessing our own participation in the continuing effects of that trauma
  - building relationships with indigenous persons wherever the church happens to be by listening and being present with them
  - working beside indigenous persons to seek solutions to current problems
  - advocating and resourcing programs which are determined by native and indigenous persons to be part of the healing process
  - holding an Act of Repentance Service for the Healing of Relationships with Indigenous Persons in each conference
- Every conference and every local congregation of The United Methodist Church will develop and nurture relationships with indigenous persons through a process of deep listening and learning
- Every conference and every local congregation of The United Methodist Church will implement specific actions to demonstrate a genuine attitude of repentance, such as:
  - providing culturally sensitive learning environments to encourage and resource the education and training of indigenous leadership, including laity and pastors
  - consider transferring a portion of land, property or its income to indigenous persons’ projects wherever the church is holding land or property in trust
  - consider transferring land or property to an indigenous community, in conjunction with ¶2547.2, whenever a conference entity is closing a charge or holds excess land

### The Charter for Compassion:

- Provisions of the Resolution:
  - Endorsement of the Charter for Compassion and including it in the Book of Resolutions
  - The United Methodist Church will work toward the fulfillment of the Charter’s provisions
  - Annual Conferences and local churches will study the Charter and participate in its calls to action
- The Charter for Compassion has been adopted by faith groups and communities across the globe, including the Presbyterian Church USA in 2010..
- Text of the Charter:

**The principle of compassion** lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

**It is also necessary** in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

**We therefore call upon all men and women** ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

**We urgently need** to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

**Please direct questions and feedback to:**

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