



District Dialogs
Musings of A United
Methodist District
Superintendent about
GC2019

By Rev. Dr. Charles S. G. Boayue, Jr.

In this district dialog, please let me share some musings as a clergy delegate to the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference. I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts.

My heart breaks. When I see what is going on today in The United Methodist Church, my heart breaks. I see progressives, many friends of mine for many years, ratchetting up *their* colleagues to defy and oppose the decision of the 2019 General Conference. Already, several boards of ordained ministry have taken their stand, announcing that they would no longer honor the book of discipline when it comes to issues of human sexuality. My heart breaks when I see some conservatives and traditionalists prepare to break up the United Methodist Church to ensure that there is no ordination and marriage of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals allowed in the Church. Many of these, who are friends of mine are ratchetting *their* colleagues for a long fight. It seems that the 2020 General Conference will be a side show to an all-out fight over doctrinal orthodoxy and ecclesiastical control. My heart breaks, not because of the fight, but because of how it is being waged. The way we fight should be a witness to who and whose we are, not primarily a revelation of what we think.

Already, the name-calling and finger-pointing have begun. Just before the close of GC2019, a delegate took to the floor of the conference and made a motion to investigate potential ethical problems with Central Conference delegate influencing. The motion was approved, and the results of the investigation are still pending. Fellow United Methodists are beginning to accuse each other of lack of integrity, transparency, and biblical faithfulness. It is obvious, even to a clueless observer, that the debate is sensitive and divisive. The moral, ethical, cultural, and theological perspectives (as well as experiences) of United Methodists from around the world are as varied and different as can be, even on this subject of human sexuality. In some sense, one can truly say that GC2019 was a clash of values, cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Further, I want to even say that GC2019 was an early-warning system, signaling the birth of a new day in The United Methodist Church.

This new day is not mainly about human sexuality, although it seems so. It is a day when the power of the American Church to control and steer the denomination's policies and priorities is no longer the same. GC2019, although

called to find a way forward regarding human sexuality, revealed the emergence of a new ecclesial power-alignment. With the American Church losing membership and influence, while the Church in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southeastern Asia gains membership and influence in their nations and within the denomination, a new day is looming. This day may not be or feel familiar to the typical American United Methodist. It is the dawn of a new day; a new reality; a new global Church; a paradigm shift. It is a day, no longer defined exclusively by American and Western European ethos or theological dominance, but by the values and priorities of an emerging new majority. This emerging new majority belongs to a newer brand of evangelistic United Methodism, that is losing its patience with a Church increasingly dominated by institutionalists whose priorities are based on institutional survival, maintenance of the status quo, balancing budgets, fearing decline, and catering primarily to wealthier segments of the demographics. American traditionalists may have a mistaken impression that their priorities are perfectly aligned with those of Africa. But this emerging majority is emerging to highlight the oppression of the powerless, to seek redress of global inequities, and to realign the Church's power with the cries of oppressed people everywhere. Sooner or later, American progressives will see how many of their priorities align with those of the emerging majority.

Further, this new emerging majority lives with the challenges of evangelism in some of the most repressive regions of the world. These are regions whose dictatorships have either been abandoned by Western powers to their own devices or are being constantly manipulated by Western and Eastern powers determined to exploit their resources at all cost. Their congregations must find ways (sometimes without moral support from their United Methodist brothers and sisters in the affluent West) to address their plight. Even with the support of UMCOR (which is highly regarded and appreciated), there remains concern for long-term redress to their ongoing problems. Short-term relief without long-term resolution of the root causes of some of the most daunting problems facing these nations, only postpones their suffering. They see a denomination addressing many of the priorities of America and Europe, without doing the same for Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. They come and leave General Conference after General Conference without a meaningful policy to help their people and nations recover from centuries of abuse, enslavement, and dehumanization at the hands of Western powers. They are beginning to see a new colonialism from places like China and Russia. They leave each General Conference with a resolution to remain faithful despite decisions which do little to remedy their plight. Hence, they are shocked that American United Methodists are in such an uproar over GC2019. Don't get me wrong, I get the reasons for the uproar. But, when taken in consideration with all the daunting issues facing humanity across the global Church, people from the Central Conferences are trying to understand the uproar in America.

They have come to believe in the democratic process of General Conference, thinking that their western counterparts also believe in it. They have lived with decisions that were not in their best interests because they believe that the will of the majority matters. They also understand and value opposition, and

conscientious objection. This means that those who are not satisfied with the decision of GC2019 should seek to change it in 2020. But each side to this conflict has an obligation to value the Church and not further diminish it in the eyes of the onlooking world. My heart breaks because so many leaders are trashing the Church at a time when the nation is so divided.

Having been born and lived in Africa (for 23 years), and after 36 years of living in America, I have a good sense of both continents and their challenges. I see progressives wanting change on a policy that violates their sense of ethical justice. I see why they want change and why they want it now. I also see why traditionalists wanting to maintain the current restrictions in the Book of Discipline and why they do not want this change. To the extent that we draw the line in the sand so rigidly, how can we reasonably expect to be taken seriously when we say we want to live together under one big-enough tent as sisters and brothers of the same household of faith? My heart breaks.

My heart breaks for us to give some breathing room to each other. I pray for wisdom among the flock. I hunger for openness. I thirst for truth – truth beyond human comprehension. Until our minds can accept the emerging reality that the global Church is no longer the Church we were used to controlling, we will continue to hurt and be hurtful. If my presence in Michigan and in the North Central Jurisdiction can be of any meaningful use, I commit myself to openness and personal integrity in dealing with all persons. My heart breaks because I believe that the world does not need a progressive Church or a traditional Church. The world needs a faithful Church!