



GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH

Transitional Leadership Council Members and the Formation of the Global Methodist Church

By *Walter Fenton*
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“Like so many United Methodists, I am ready for the Global Methodist Church to launch,” said Mrs. Cara Nicklas, an attorney and a laywoman from the Oklahoma Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. She is also member of the Transitional Leadership Council, a 16-member body charged with the task of creating the Global Methodist Church.

The council itself was created nearly two years ago, just two months after a group of UM Church leaders offered an amicable and orderly way of dividing the conflicted denomination. The plan, called the *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation*, had quickly won the support of theological conservatives, centrists, and progressives across the UM connection. Its implementing legislation was then adopted by four annual conferences so it could be properly added to the legislative agenda for the 2020 General Conference scheduled for May of that year. To many United Methodists it appeared the plan would be approved and so allow the church to begin the process of separating shortly after the conference.

In light of the Protocol’s probable adoption, leading theologically conservative bishops, pastors and laypeople promptly convened a *meeting* in Atlanta, Georgia. They hammered out a broad agreement clarifying the central confessions and the mission of a new theologically conservative Methodist church that would be global in nature. They then set about identifying experienced leaders that could lead the new church through an inevitable period of transition. The group of leaders would eventually become known as the Transitional Leadership Council.

“The council members are keenly aware we’re an *ad hoc* body with only as much credibility and authority as individuals and local churches are willing to grant us,” said the Rev. Keith Boyette, the council’s chairman. “But like the people who asked us to serve, we too realized a new, theologically conservative church required a team to help it navigate a necessary time of transition, and we knew we needed to move quickly in light of the Protocol.”

That fast-paced period in early 2020 now seems like it happened a decade ago. Almost as soon as the Transitional Leadership Council was created the Covid-19 pandemic struck and forced the postponement of the UM Church’s General Conference. Suddenly, a commitment council members thought would involve 12 to 18 months of their time now had no definitive end date. “We quickly

acknowledged the date of the General Conference was out of our hands, but we still had an important task to fulfil, so we plunged ahead,” said Boyette.

Over the next two years the council members accomplished far more than they ever imagined. Drawing on major work completed by the Wesleyan Covenant Association, a number of task force groups, and a three-member writing team, the council created a *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline* to guide the fledgling church until it could hold a convening General Conference. And leaning on surveys of its global rank-and-file constituency, meetings with theologically conservative leaders, and professional guidance, the council selected a name - the Global Methodist Church – and a logo for the new denomination.

“I have been inspired by the dedication and faithfulness of the many laypeople and pastors who served on numerous task forces,” said Nicklas. “They provided us with valuable insights, professional support, and critical advice that made our work possible. We never could have made the progress we did without their time and talent. And I pray and enthusiastically look forward to the day when the council can hand off its responsibilities to the Global Methodist Church’s convening General Conference so more Methodists around the world can participate in this great and humbling endeavor.”

Several members have noted they never realized how much time they would need to dedicate to their work. In addition to meeting nearly once a week for the past two years; the members have read, reviewed and edited reports and numerous iterations of its *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline*, a resource it continues to add to and refine.

“We’ve made good progress, but it wasn’t always easy; there have been internal and external challenges” said Mr. Simon Mafunda, an automotive industry entrepreneur and a highly regarded leading layman in the UM Church’s Zimbabwe East Annual Conference. “Trying to find common ground on important matters when people come from different social, geographic, demographic, and cultural settings posed significant challenges. And despite our operating by the terms and spirit of the *Protocol*, some council members have been labeled as rebels simply because they are being honest about their convictions.”

Despite its uncertain beginnings and its challenges, the Transitional Leadership Council has gained the support of many theological conservatives in the UM Church. In March 2021, when the council announced the name of the new church and shared all of its detailed work on a *new website*, many theological conservatives embraced it even as they recognized much work remains to be done. Clergy and laypeople attracted to the proposed new church regret the deep division in the UM Church that has brought it to this point, but they recognize the necessity of creating a new, global Methodist church.

“For over fifty years The United Methodist Church has been mired in differences of opinion and interpretation, and we have expended a great deal of energy and time attempting to resolve disagreements,” said Dr. Robert Hayes, Bishop-in-Residence at The Woodlands Methodist Church in The Woodlands, Texas, and a member of the Transitional Leadership Council. “In the meantime, our ministries have been crippled, and our church is dying. Surely there has to be a better way. I decided to join the council in the hope that it will enable us to get back to doing what we do best – making disciples of Jesus Christ. On the council, I serve alongside individuals who are as passionate as I am to see the church grow and thrive, and who also are not bogged down in being mean-

spirited, punitive, or angry at anyone. The reward for me has been finding a spirit of grace in the difficult work of separation and conflict.”

In addition to Hayes, Nicklas, Mafunda, and Boyette, the following individuals are also council members: the Rev. Philippe Adjobi (an elder and district superintendent in the Cote d’Ivoire Annual Conference), the Rev. Dr. Joe Connelly (an attorney and elder in the Louisiana Annual Conference), the Rev. Adrian Garcia (an elder in the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference), the Rev. Dr. Jeff Greenway (an elder in the West Ohio Annual Conference), the Rev. Jay Hanson (an elder in the South Georgia Annual Conference), the Rev. Dr. Leah Hidde-Gregory (an elder and the executive director of the Smith Center for Evangelism, Mission and Church Growth in the Central Texas Annual Conference), the Rev. Andrei Kim (an elder and district superintendent in the North West Russia and Belarus Annual Conference), Senator Patricia Miller (retired member of the Indiana State Senate and a laywoman in the Indiana Annual Conference), the Rev. Martin Nicholas (an elder in the Texas Annual Conference), the Rev. Keihwan Kevin Ryoo (an elder in the Dakotas Annual Conference), Mr. Gideon Salatan (an attorney and layman in the Northeast Philippines Annual Conference), and the Rev. Steven Taylor, (an elder in the Upper New York Annual Conference).

The Transitional Leadership Council will continue to meet on a regular basis to prepare for the launch and the oversight of the Global Methodist Church while it is in formation. In close consultation with the Wesleyan Covenant Association’s Global Council and its regional chapter leaders, and with theologically conservative advocacy groups and theologically conservative UM bishops, it will decide when to officially launch the new church. And with many people in the UM Church, the council members pray and trust the UM General Conference will meet this year, adopt the Protocol, and so create the conditions for a just and fair inauguration of the Global Methodist Church.

To see photos of all the members of the Transitional Leadership Council, click [HERE](#). To learn about the Global Methodist Church (in formation), click [HERE](#).

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