



The North Central Jurisdictional (NCJ) Conference met virtually for two days on November 10-11, 2021.

Approximately 250 delegates participated in an official Zoom meeting Wednesday and Thursday, and others from across the 10-conference jurisdiction watched live online. Delegates spent the majority of their time on three big topics of

conversation—dismantling racism, the future of episcopal leadership, and the future of The United Methodist Church.

The reports from these discussions, and other pre-work reports, helped a six-person writing team (selected by delegation heads) to develop a covenant. The writing team that developed the covenant waded through fifty-four pages of comments from delegates to find out what was particularly important to them. The five key priorities they named, which shaped the document, were: anti-racism, inclusion, amicable separation, regionalism, and connectionalism.

The writing team brought the “Covenant to Build a Beloved Community” to the floor. On Thursday morning, by a vote of 135-32, it was approved. The covenant, written using United Methodist baptismal vows as a framework, calls on the jurisdiction to work to end racism and to create a culture that welcomes and affirms LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) people, connecting our sacramental life to our praxis of faith.

The covenant (linked here) calls on the North Central Jurisdiction to:

- ❖ Name colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism as sins.
- ❖ Commit to the ongoing work of ending racism.
- ❖ Request the NCJ Bishops of Color convene all BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) delegates to address the trauma in communities of color.
- ❖ Request the NCJ Mission Council to address white supremacy and Christian nationalism at the next NCJ session.
- ❖ Support the work of the Conference Commissions on Religion and Race and Annual Conference anti-racism task force.
- ❖ Avoid pursuing charges to LGBTQIA+ clergy.
- ❖ Request the Bishops to dismiss charges related to LGBTQIA+ identity or officiating same gender weddings.
- ❖ Convene a special session of the NCJ on November 2-5, 2022, if the 2020 General Conference, currently scheduled for 2022, is further postponed or canceled.
- ❖ Use existing disciplinary and conference provisions to accommodate local congregations and clergy seeking disaffiliation; and,
- ❖ Encourage conversations about contextualization and regional unity.

Delegates spent more than two hours discussing and refining the covenant before approving it. NCJ bishops were formally asked to rule on whether some of the specific language about LGBTQIA+ individuals and same-gender weddings—namely, the call to avoid and dismiss charges—restricts the rights of bishops or other leaders from upholding the Book of Discipline and thus is null and void. The bishops have 30 days to respond.

Regarding amicable separation, the document encourages conferences, local churches, and clergy to strive for reconciliation and understanding. But for those that “may feel called to a different future in the faith,” it stipulates those annual conferences should “use existing disciplinary and conference provisions to accommodate local congregations seeking disaffiliation.”

In addition to approving the covenant itself, delegates also voted 131-31 to affirm the recent Council of Bishops document called “A Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church” and 128-31 to affirm “A Call to Grace,” a grassroots open letter that all United Methodists were invited to sign.

The Wisconsin Annual Conference delegates actively engaged and offered leadership in the pre-work, strategy development and building collaboration with other Annual Conference delegates, support the covenant and commit to live into it. We hope for the Wisconsin Annual Conference to also engage this covenant and continue the work of ending racism. Please feel free to contact the delegation at wisconsin2020delegation@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Submitted by:

Wisconsin Annual Conference General and Jurisdictional delegation