



The United Methodist Church

The Germany Episcopal Area

The Nordic & Baltic Episcopal Area

The Central and Southern Europe Episcopal Area

OPEN LETTER TO THE WESLEYAN COVENANT ASSOCIATION

Can we maintain mutual respect amid separation?

In anticipation of the likely passing of the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation” at General Conference, the four European Bishops established documents laying out the different decision-making processes on central conference, annual conference and local church level for separation.

We, bishops Streiff, Rückert and Alsted, have publicly declared our commitment to the United Methodist Church, while also pledging to be respectful and to care for conferences, local churches, and clergy that may decide to disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church. Knowing that separations would severely affect the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church Europe and most likely lead to extensive changes, we nevertheless are committed to do our utmost to help them move into a future, where they can serve with integrity.

We remain convinced “... that all of our members, clergy, local churches and annual conferences will continue to have a home in the ‘Future United Methodist Church’, whether they consider themselves liberal, evangelical, progressive, traditionalist, middle of the road, conservative, centrist or something else.” (*Our commitment, February 2021*). Though we are committed to the United Methodist Church we are equally committed to serve all the church including those who think differently. We love and care for our conferences, churches, and clergy, and we want to be as fair as possible.

Our efforts were publicly recognized and applauded in an article by the Rev. Tom Lambrecht published 14. May 2021 on the Good News Magazine website entitled “European Bishops Provide Stellar Leadership”. Furthermore, we have had conversation with Rev. Keith Boyette on how to respectfully handle separations from the United Methodist Church for joining to the Global Methodist Church.

On April 1st the Provisional Annual Conference of Bulgaria and Romania decided to separate from the United Methodist Church and joining the Global Methodist Church on May 1st. When bishop Streiff, the presiding bishop, declared the motion to separate “out of order”, the outgoing district superintendent Daniel Topalski was elected as chair and led the conference in a decision, which is a clear violation of the process laid out in the BoD ¶572 and ¶603.6. The



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Church in Bulgaria wanted to implement this decision immediately and join the Global Methodist Church.

We would have expected the Wesleyan Covenant Association and Good News to uphold the discipline and promote respectful ways of separation. However, not even the faintest expression of reservation towards the Bulgarian violation of the discipline and disregard of episcopal leadership has occurred. Rev. Keith Boyette, who chairs the Transitional Leadership Council of the Global Methodist Church and is president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, is quoted in a UMNews article to say, “the Bulgaria-Romania Annual Conference will be among the first annual conferences to align with the Global Methodist Church”. Rev. Tom Lambrecht in a Tweet on April 6th says: “Fascinating account! The Bulgaria/Romania Annual Conference Ratifies a Resolution to Leave the United Methodist Church.” Rev. Chris Ritter a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association council writes in a blog “The GMC will no doubt start small. But if the recent actions of the Bulgaria-Romania Conference are any indication, the spunky persistence of traditional, Methodist, Christian faith will cause it to flourish. Shouldn’t we all rejoice in that?”

The reaction to the Bulgarian vote raises the question: What standards do leaders of the Wesleyan Covenant Association and of the Global Methodist Church want to uphold? Are they willing to exercise respect and fairness in the future? Can we expect stellar leadership? As European bishops we have been respectful and fair and want to continue in this attitude towards our United Methodist members in Europe, even if we are disappointed by what we have experienced.

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