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David C. Teel

May 24, 2021

Greetings and Blessings in the Name of Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

As your Conference Lay Leaders, we affirm that active lay persons in vital local congregations are crucial for accomplishing the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We celebrate all that the laity and clergy of our churches are doing, especially during this challenging pandemic time to reach out to each other and neighbors with the love of Jesus. We give thanks for the connectionalism of our global denomination and our common ministry as United Methodists for meeting the needs of so many throughout the world.

Being in partnership with clergy leaders in mission and ministry, we recognize that there are differences among faithful leaders, both lay and clergy. It is not unusual to have rigorous discussions ongoing within the United Methodist Church. We are a global and diverse group, unafraid to address difficult issues. This shows our strength in diversity; it challenges us and ultimately helps us to continue to stretch and grow. Sometimes this process results in pain and conflict when those differences loom large and become divisive.

The 2019 General Conference was an example of this process. Our long-standing differences over how we are to be in ministry with LGBTQIA persons and our understandings of Scripture are diverse. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the postponement of General Conference for a second year. This delay has only magnified our differences and challenges.

We lament the resulting pain for all and the negative impact on our connectional Church. We mourn the reality that we may not be able to reconcile our differences, and that conflict and division are likely to continue if we go on without deep and meaningful change. We cannot ignore the debilitating impact of our conflict on the mission and ministry of the Church as well as the strain on our essential connectional relationships.

In light of the above, we lift our delegates to General Conference and pray that these individuals, being duly elected and fully empowered by their Annual Conference, would seek to discern a path forward based upon our common Wesleyan tradition and our common commitment to the mission field. We seek a sustainable peace that gives our church the freedom to move into the future with integrity and wholeness in a relationship with each other, connecting our past with a hope-filled future. Delegates to the postponed General Conference carry a heavy responsibility, as we charge them with leading us forward on a path with the most unity possible.

We encourage legislation for the postponed General Conference that resolves our denominational conflict, while blessing each other's ministry. We call for a non-punitive, gracious avenue to multiply the Methodist witness in ways that are true to the conscientious, sincere convictions of our members, and respectful of our church's global reach. We recognize that this may involve structural separations and difficult changes in church connections that require time and grace. We therefore encourage all to remain mindful, we are now and shall remain brothers and sisters in Christ.

God will lead us through this difficult journey and, where others might see uncertainty and cause for hesitation, we see opportunity and a call for boldness in our faith. As a church alive in mission and ministry may we come together as the body, to intentionally seek out and take advantage of every opportunity to show the love of Christ and to share the Good News.

Finally, we pledge to continue serving faithfully as your Conference Lay Leaders, encouraging all laity to focus upon following the way of Jesus in ministry, witness, and mission. Together, we will continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

God's blessings,

The AACLL Executive Committee

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