

## Claiming our vision for the current and future Iowa United Methodist Church

In the Book of Discipline, we read that “United Methodists as a diverse people continue to strive for consensus... Our task is to articulate our vision in a way that will draw us together as a people in mission”<sup>1</sup> The reality is that proposals to the 2020 General Conference include legislation regarding separation and dissolution. So perhaps now, more than ever, it is important to re-articulate our vision and remember who we are so that the Iowa Annual Conference may discern our steps in the future. The vision that we have claimed for our conference as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world is: God’s hope for the world made real through faithful leaders, fruitful communities, and fire-filled people. So, let’s recommit ourselves to being the church we say we are.

1. As **faithful leaders** we will take our theological task seriously, knowing that we will come to a variety of conclusions on theological and political matters. We will have the lengthy and difficult conversations necessary at Annual Conference, Orders events, circuit meetings, and through whatever other means guided by the Holy Spirit to bring us to a place where we can trust, serve, and remain united in love.<sup>2</sup> As a diverse body of Christ, we will be faithful to the example of Jesus’ ministry to and with all persons<sup>3</sup> as we seek to grow in mutual love and trust<sup>4</sup>. We commit to working together, to respecting one another, and to enhancing healthy and redemptive relationships as we engage with one another in decision making.

2. As **fruitful congregations** we will put faith and love into practice<sup>5</sup> through personal and social witness, seeking to do no harm, do good, and help people to stay in love with God<sup>6</sup>. We will reject systems and structures that would divide and devalue people and will work to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel. We claim our role of both seeking and welcoming people into the community of the body of Christ and sending people into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ, whose story they share unapologetically with others.<sup>7</sup>

3. As **fire-filled people**, we accept the calling we received through our baptism to a ministry of servanthood. We will be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit and will recognize one another as partners in ministry. We will celebrate the diverse, God-given gifts, experiences, and resources of one another and commit to full equity and accountability in our relationships, structures, and responsibilities towards one another. We will enter afresh into a relationship of mutuality, creating a new sense of community as we joyously live out our connection.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 Book of Discipline, ¶105, p. 89

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, ¶105

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, ¶140, p. 101

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, ¶125, p. 96

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, ¶102-105, p. 51

<sup>6</sup> ¶102, p. 54; ¶105, p. 78-80

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, ¶122

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, ¶ 123, 95-96

In realizing these claims, we call United Methodists in Iowa to engage in the following concrete actions:

1. We call upon circuits and local church leaders to remember who we already say we are by reading, studying, and discussing together the following sections of the Book of Discipline: Our Doctrinal Heritage (§102), Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules (§104) Our Theological Task (§105), The Mission and Ministry of the Church (§120-140), and the Definition and Function of the Local Church and their Relation to the Wider Church (§201-203)
2. We will accept and acknowledge that remaining united in love does not mean that all current United Methodists in Iowa will remain a part of this denomination. As faithful clergy, laity, and congregations discern that they are called into new denominations and communities, we will bless and release them according to policies established by the Book of Discipline and our Conference Board of Trustees and Conference Board of Pensions. In doing so, we will remember that acting out of our convictions does not mean that we cannot continue to be in relationship.
3. We invite the Iowa Annual Conference to be creative and innovative by calling the Ezekiel Team and Cabinet to consider how best to support congregations and pastors that plan to depart following the postponed 2020 General Conference. Let us think beyond geography and current structures to help these churches have fruitful conversations about their future.
4. We call the Iowa Annual Conference Sessions Committee and Conference Rules of Order Committee to the following task: help us embrace a robust Christian Conferencing, end the use of Roberts Rules of Order in our legislative deliberations, and return us to a legislative committee process that allows for consensus building, individual voices to be heard, leadership development, and relational formation. We ask that a task force be formed including members of these committees to present to the 2022 Annual Conference a more faithful way of engaging with one another.
5. We confess a spirit of apathy that sometimes hinders our work and long for all of our ministries (even committees!) to be places where we are joyously living out our connection. We call upon Annual Conference, Board, and Committee leaders to increase communication and transparency so we can see how Jesus is at work in those ministries and how others can join the effort. We lift up our work of our Antiracism Leadership Team and re-imagining our Conference Connectional Ministries as steps towards becoming a conference of “fire-filled” people.
6. We re-affirm, as we did in 2019, “that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God”<sup>9</sup> and we call for the removal of language in the Book of Discipline that declares the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teaching.
7. We will trust each clergyperson’s prayerful and faithful discernment in officiating wedding ceremonies for any prepared couple who comes to them by not filing charges against clergy who officiate at same-gender weddings.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, ¶161.G

8. We will trust the prayerful and faithful discernment of our Board of Ordained Ministry, who has determined the criteria they will use for evaluation of clergy. We support the Board of Ordained Ministry's decision to evaluate candidates for ordination, licensing, and candidacy on the basis of these characteristics alone.
9. We support Bishop Laurie Haller's decision to hold complaints related to LGBTQ+ ordination or marriage in abeyance until after the postponed 2020 General Conference.

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