



**Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche** Gebiet von Mittel- und Südeuropa  
**Eglise Méthodiste Unie** Région de l'Europe du Centre et du Sud  
**United Methodist Church** Area of Central and Southern Europe

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Pastoral Letter to the members and friends of the  
UMC in Central and Southern Europe

*„TURN AWAY FROM EVIL! DO GOOD! SEEK PEACE AND GO AFTER IT!“ (PSALM 34:15)*

Dear United Methodists in Central and Southern Europe,

I heartily greet you with the biblical motto for this year 2019 from St. Louis, Missouri where the called session of General Conference just closed. Over modern social media, news spread rapidly everywhere. I have at heart to inform you in a more traditional, but timely way about the decisions of the General Conference and the next steps in our Episcopal area of Central and Southern Europe. But at first, from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank all those who have accompanied with their prayers the delegates and all the Church on this long journey to the conference in St. Louis. We will need this journeying in prayer also as we continue on the way which is ahead of us.

In a brief summary, General Conference has decided the following ...

The first decision in the plenary on February 26, 2019, affects the central conferences outside the US. It allows them time up to the regular sessions of the respective Episcopal area for deciding on adaptations of the Discipline. This gives us in the Episcopal area of Central and Southern Europe an additional time window up to March 2021 that we need to use wisely.

The delegates have voted in majority for the so called "Traditional Plan" (438 in favour – 384 opposed). This means that the present rules are confirmed. Practiced homosexuality is considered as non-compatible with Christian teaching. Ordination of persons who live in same-sex partnerships, or blessings of such partnerships continue to be prohibited. Furthermore, additional paragraphs are added which shall safeguard a stricter application of these rules. On many details of such stricter applications, the petitions could not be finalized in a way that they are or will not be ruled unconstitutional. It is to be expected that General Conference 2020 will again have to deal with such stricter applications.

I am aware that this decision will be received among you in very different ways. Some will receive it with gratitude, others with general incomprehension. Already in preparation to the General Conference it became evident how different opinions were in the Episcopal area concerning Christians who live in same-sex partnerships. In all these times, it has been important for me personally and for all those who participate in leadership functions in the Church, as far as possible to prevent divisions or splits in the Episcopal area and to continue our journey into the future together. The exclusivity with which the "Traditional Plan" condemns other convictions, presents for many an image of Church which they consider non-compatible with Biblical and Methodist foundations.

What will all of this mean for us in the future?

**This is certain: Up to the next session of the central conference of Central and Southern Europe, the same church discipline is still valid in all our Episcopal area (central conference) of Central and Southern Europe. The Executive Committee of the Central Conference will discern next week, how this additional time window may be used in a helpful way in our Episcopal area. Will we find ways to continue into the future after 2021 together? As your bishop I plead with Methodist sisters and brothers who feel pain with the decisions of General Conference, not to leave the Church precipitated.**

On the level of the Episcopal area of Central and Southern Europe, the Executive committee will meet next week, from March 6-10, in Macedonia. In this group of leaders with representatives from each country, we will consult on how the decisions of General Conference can be implemented in the context of the Episcopal area (central conference) and what ways we can find for keeping the community among us alive. Further deliberations will follow in the annual conference and/or district councils of each country and in the annual conferences in this spring and early summer. Votes which may be needed in annual conferences should only occur after General Conference in May 2020 in order to decide on the future journey of us together in the Episcopal area at the central conference in March 2021.

The decisions of General Conference will lead to discussions in many places in our Church. That's a good thing. The following counsel may be helpful for such discussions:

- Share your conviction in a personal way in using "I"-sentences. For example: "I understand the Bible in the following way..." "I have experienced ..." "I am convinced that our Church should..." Such "I"-messages leave space for other persons to share their own, perhaps different or opposite convictions.
- If you get a chance, talk with Methodists who have a different personal conviction from your own or live in other contexts. Particularly social media have a tendency to connect us with those who already think as we do. For sharing with persons who think differently, we need two ears and only one mouth, as the primary role is to listen to the other.
- Among us as Methodists, we may dare in such sharing to ask the other person: What is important for you in your faith in Jesus Christ? How do you want to live the mission of the Church, namely to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? – In such sharing, we dig deeper into those experiences that may connect us in our faith! This may hopefully help us to fill the prayer of Jesus for the unity among his disciples with life and a common mission.

The biblical motto for 2019 takes up two of the three rules in the *General Rules* for Methodists: to turn away from evil and to do good. If we add the third rule, to use the means of grace, we will stretch out personally (e.g. in prayer and fasting) and communally (e.g. attending the worship service in our congregation and holy communion) to be nourished by God's grace. This will strengthen us for seeking peace in the connection of our Church and in the witness to the world.

In looking up to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior who is also the head of the Church, I greet you all,

Yours



Bishop Patrick Streiff