



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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I have become all things to all people, so I could save some by all possible means. All the things I do are for the sake of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:22f

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The General Conference will soon be past. I am grateful that our conferencing was characterized by a good and respectful atmosphere - even when dealing with difficult topics. I sensed a strong will to be mindful of each other in the challenges we face as a church and at the same time to look ahead and take steps into the future together on the path of following Jesus and his mission.

The delegates made decisions that are also important for us as a central conference. For example, they approved a package of eight petitions on regionalization by a large majority. The existing rights of the central conferences remain unchanged or are strengthened by their inclusion in the constitution. The right of adaptation will be more clearly regulated. The "Central Conferences" are renamed "Regional Conferences". A separate regional conference is to be formed for the church in the USA. This will significantly reduce the workload of the General Conference. Regionalization will make it possible to better adapt the ministry and mission to the circumstances in the various regions. The necessary constitutional amendments have to be ratified by all Annual Conferences worldwide before they become effective.

The revised Social Principles will continue to mention the traditional understanding of marriage but give also the possibility to define it in a different way. Neither the revised Social Principles nor the Book of Discipline of the worldwide United Methodist Church make any qualifying statements on sexual orientation. *Important for us: Instead, the General Conference expressly gave the Central Conferences the authority to determine the definition of marriage and rites for marriage ceremonies as well as the standards for candidates for pastoral ministry and ordination within their own area. The Central Conferences may delegate these powers to their annual conferences. What we decided at the Extraordinary Central Conference in Basel in November 2022 can now be implemented with the full support of the General Conference. We are ensuring the protection of the various convictions in our Central Conference.* As a reminder, the decision of the Central Conference allows an annual conference or a country to maintain the understanding of marriage and human sexuality according to the 2016 Book of Discipline or, where the civil laws in a country are based on a different understanding, to establish its own regulations. We will now be able to finalise these decisions in our Discipline at the Central Conference in March 2025.

Two things are important for me to share with you: On one hand, there are big changes that happen at present that are evoking very different emotions and thoughts. Therefore, let us continue to be very mindful and respectful towards each other. On the other hand, our mission

continues in accompanying persons on their journey to follow Jesus for transforming the world. The General Conference enables us to adapt our mission even better to the respective context and culture - while at the same time protecting our different convictions. Such contextualization is not new. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"I have become all things to all people, so I could save some by all possible means. All the things I do are for the sake of the gospel."* The good news of Jesus Christ is and remains the centre of God's mission in the world. It was the centre for Paul, and it remains the same for us as The United Methodist Church today. Guided by God's Spirit, let us always seek new ways to reach persons in order to tell them the Gospel where they are and where they live. Together with the persons to whom God has sent us, let us search for ways of being church that open the door to becoming disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us boldly experiment with creative forms of proclamation so that our neighbours and friends can hear and accept the Good News with their questions and needs. Let us learn from each other and support each other.

I am grateful to be in this great ministry with you and to participate in God's mission in this world! Thank you for your love for God and people and for all the prayers, gifts, time and energy you give to this ministry. May God bless you and fill you with his deep peace!

Shalom in Christ



Bishop Stefan Zürcher