

## **UNITED METHODIST CHURCH WORLDWIDE ASSEMBLY ADOPTED REGIONAL AUTONOMY**

A press conference statement released by the 2020/2024 General  
Conference delegates UMC Nigeria Episcopal Area

**Jalingo, 14/5/2024**

The Conferences Administrative Assistants,  
Conferences Secretaries,  
Conferences Lay leaders,  
Conferences Directors Connectional Ministries,  
Other Conferences officers,  
District superintendents,  
District lay leaders,  
District Council Director,  
Subgroup leaders,  
Members of the press,  
Ladies and gentlemen

To pastors, members, friends and well-wishers of the United Methodist Church  
in Nigeria.

We bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

This press conference is deemed necessarily in light of the recent developments  
in our Church and the false information that is being circulated by the separatists  
and breakaway group whose intention was to divide the United Methodist  
Church. They failed and are now embarking on a campaign of calumny against  
the church that fed them. Their claims that the worldwide United Methodist  
Church has adopted same sex marriage at its just concluded General Conference  
held April 23 – May 3, 2024 in Charlotte North Carolina, United States of  
America is false and a misrepresentation of what actually took place at the  
General Conference.

We were part of over 800 delegates who gathered from the four corners of the earth for the 2020 General Conference held in 2024 because of the interruption of the Covid-19 pandemic. We joined millions of United Methodists in rejoicing for the success recorded at this General Conference. Our church held the most peaceful, respectful, and spirit filled General Conference in more than 40 years. We have witnessed increased energies in hospitality, and a willingness to listen among delegates, bishops, and presiding officers alike.

We are glad that our church, among other legislations, adopted the **“Worldwide Regionalization Plan”** a viable solution to the long standing conflict in the church over involvement of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer plus (LGBTQ +) persons in the life and ministry of the church, mostly in America and Europe, which has been truncating the vital ministry of our church. This was because the United Methodist Church is a global denomination with presence in many countries around the world. It has historically operated with a centralized structure, where decisions and policies are made at the General Conference level, impacting all regions equally.

### **What is “worldwide regionalization” and why it was adopted?**

The United Methodist Church's (UMC) concept of **"Worldwide Regionalization"** refers to a proposed structural change within the denomination aimed at addressing global diversity and regional differences in theology and practice, including but not limited to the conflicts over human sexuality, without splitting the denomination worldwide.

Historically, the United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 through the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Throughout its history, the church has held traditional views on human sexuality, defining marriage as between one man and one woman and prohibiting the ordination of openly LGBTQ+ clergy.

Starting in the 1970s, debates over human sexuality within the church intensified. Progressives within the church advocated for greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals, arguing that the church should welcome and affirm people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

As the United Methodist Church expanded globally, it became apparent that different regions had diverse theological perspectives, cultural contexts, and

social issues. This led to tensions and challenges in implementing uniform policies that suited every region.

The General Conference, the highest legislative body of the United Methodist Church, has been the arena for these debates. Various proposals have been presented over the years, ranging from affirming LGBTQ+ inclusion to maintaining traditional teachings. This ugly situation has been going on in the church unabated for over 40 years and has been affecting the mission and ministry of the church negatively.

In 2019, the Council of Bishops summoned a special called session of the General Conference to find lasting solution to this problem. However, the General Conference ended up approving the Traditional Plan, which reinforced the church's traditional stance on LGBTQ+ issues across the globe. This plan affirmed the ban on LGBTQ+ clergy and same-sex marriages within the church.

The approval of the Traditional Plan led to significant backlash from progressive members, clergy, and congregations within the church, especially in the United States. Many argued that the plan was discriminatory and not reflective of the inclusive values they believed the church should embody. It also elevated concerns about human sexuality above any other issues, even missions.

In 2020, due to these internal conflicts, the United Methodist Church announced plans to split into separate denominations. For example, the so called “**Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation**” and “**Indianapolis Plan**” envisioned the disbanding of the United Methodist Church and creation of new denominations for traditionalists, centrist/progressives and progressives that will share a common heritage from the roots of Methodism. This split would allow for different branches to uphold varying views on human sexuality while maintaining ties in areas such as shared history and mission work.

However, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic that caused several postponements of the General Conference, this plan gradually failed and the need for the United Methodist Church to remain one indivisible church continued to grow strong among the majority members of the church.

God answered the prayer for the unity of God’s church when in 2022 groups within the church known as **Christmas Covenant, Connectional Table, and Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters** came together and crafted the widely accepted proposal called “**Worldwide Regionalization.**” This

plan changes the structures of the church by granting regional autonomy to every region of the church to determine its contextual theology and practice while maintaining the connectional nature of the church and unity in the essentials of our faith. In the words of Bishop Mande Guy Muyombo of the Democratic Republic of Congo **“Regionalization decentralised power in the United Methodist Church, that no region can claim to be the center and others the peripheries. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ remains the center of God’s mission.”**

Worldwide Regionalization approves a restructuring the United Methodist Church into more autonomous regional bodies while maintaining some level of global connection and shared identity. This would allow regions to have more flexibility in decision-making, particularly on issues like human sexuality, where views vary widely.

### **The difference worldwide regionalization will make**

With worldwide regionalization, Nigeria will make decisions and policies that are more responsive to Nigerian contexts and challenges. It offers Nigeria the autonomy to continue to adapt the Book of Discipline based on our context. It allows our churches to address their unique theological, social, and cultural issues without strict oversight from other bodies of the church including the United States.

Regionalization will allow more equitable resource allocation, ensuring that Nigerian churches receive the support they need for their ministries and missions.

Regionalization will enhance mission and outreach efforts by allowing African churches to develop strategies that are tailored to their communities, languages, and cultural norms.

Within the context of Worldwide Regionalization as adopted by the General Conference, Nigeria will hold its definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman and still hold its traditional views regarding homosexuality.

Therefore, it is a great distortion of fact to give the impression that the United Methodist Church is enforcing every region of the church to accept same sex marriages.

We wish to make it clear that the statements issued by a few individuals stating otherwise does not represent the action of the General Conference or the voices of the majority of United Methodists in Nigeria. We are excited to be in the United Methodist Church today and in the years to come. Our church has obeyed the prayer of Jesus in John 17:6-19 to be one. We have chosen love over hatred, peace over rancour, and unity over division.

### **The United Methodist Church in the future**

Going forward, each region in will determine its theology and practice independent of other region while maintaining our connectionalism as United Methodists and our core doctrine.

Regionalization is not a new thing in Nigeria, as Nigeria operates with regional laws. For example, under the criminal jurisprudence, crime varies from place to place and, from time to time. In other words, what amounts to a crime in the Northern part of Nigeria may not qualify as a crime in the Southern part of Nigeria.

Therefore, on behalf of the majority of the members of the United Methodist Church in Nigeria, we wish to categorically state that we shall continue to remain in our beloved church, the United Methodist Church, and we call on our members to disregard any individual or group calling on them to break away from the United Methodist Church. Furthermore, we wish to let the public note that the formal complaints filed against the bishop has reached a “Path Forward” Resolutions and a Special Called session of the four Annual Conferences in Nigeria has been scheduled for June 1, 2024 to unveil the peaceful building steps in the Path Forward document and elect new leaders for the United Methodist Church in Nigeria. We want to use this medium to call on all Annual Conference delegates to attend this special session unfailingly.

Thank you very much, signed:

**Rev. Dr. Isa Audu Dunah – Head of delegation Northern Nigeria Annual Conference.**

**Rev. Eli Sule Yakku – Delegate Central Nigeria Annual Conference**

**Rev. Ande I. Emmanuel – Head of Delegation Southern Nigeria Annual Conference.**