

INITIAL TALKING POINTS TO REFLECT THE CONCERNS OF THE CHURCH

1 – The 2008 General Conference mandated a Task Force to study the structure of The United Methodist Church. This group is instructed to bring recommendations to the 2012 General Conference. It will be a diverse group with appropriate representation from around the church. It is prudent and necessary that we allow and support their work and receive their report with prayer and discernment. Adopting some of these amendments before they can make their report hinders the scope of their task and sets a bad precedent for how we organize the church and shape future visions.

2 – The originators of these amendments (i.e., a small and not representative group) hurried to indicate to the leadership of the Central Conferences a willingness to change. They short-changed the church on carefully reasoned and well coordinated alternatives which might have guided the denomination into the future with confidence instead of uncertainty. The hurried nature of the work indicated “change for the sake of change” instead of “carefully designed steps which address concerns and inform future choices”. The close votes on some of the key amendments indicated the uncertainty. The current Judicial Council in Decision 1100 wrote, “Further study is needed to explore how to live more fully into our worldwide nature.”

3—Certainly, the haste of passing these amendments is a concern, but it is not our intent to oppose change—specifically, the changes in the name from “Central” to “Regional” Conferences if the current Central Conferences desire that change. It is our understanding from speeches made in the West Africa and Congo Central Conference sessions that our African brothers and sisters are questioning why any of these amendments are being offered. Since they are to be adopted before the task force reports, there is legitimate fear of a hidden agenda.

4 - Of the twenty three (23) Constitutional Amendments eighteen (18) of them do nothing but cosmetically replace the word “central” with “regional”. The other five (5) amendments make it possible for substantive shifts to be enacted by a 50% plus one vote at the 2012 General Conference. Long tested practice requires amending the Constitution of any organization be more difficult than simply altering the organization’s rules. How wise is it to change the Constitution quickly to allow future proposals to be approved by a 50% plus 1 vote of the General Conference rather than the current 2/3 vote of the entire church?

5 -- At this point, the church has no knowledge as to what the task force or other groups might propose. The proposal might be practical and well conceived, in which case it would stand the test of the 2/3 vote requirement in the legislative committee, the 2/3 vote of the General Conference, and, finally and most importantly, a 2/3 vote of all the annual conferences voting. Or, in the worst scenario, the proposed recommendations of the task force or other group might lack wisdom and clarity but be able to garner approval with a 50% plus one vote of the General Conference if this legislation is adopted. What a HUGE difference the kind of support required (i.e., 50% of one legislative body compared to 66.7% of all Annual Conference membership) could make to the adoption of marginally wise or unwise alterations to the structure of The United Methodist Church.

6 – The five (5) amendments strike at the heart of our church because they move us away from connectionalism. To increase the number of issues on which we can by *Discipline* differ from one another makes us less connectional. To reduce the number of issues about which we all have the same position makes us less connectional. To create a body, as a US Regional Conference, that holds powers similar to General Conference makes us more fractured.

7 – The formation of a US Regional Conference is to form one big, rich, and, perhaps, dominant (intentionally or unintentionally) North American Church leaving the rest of the church divided into smaller, less affluent pieces.

8 – The rejection of Constitutional Amendments for paragraphs 10, 28, 31, 38 and 48 has at its heart continuing to include the various regions as one general (connected) church. The issue is what is best for the whole church in all expressions. Judicial Council Decision 1100 (in regard to Para. 10) said, “The proposed amendment does nothing to harmonize its content with the remaining provisions of the *Discipline*.” Clearly, all of us want to know what the structural changes will mean and how they will affect the work of the church. Absolute clarity is essential.

9 – Why subject our denomination to uncertainty when both the Conferences Legislative Committee of the 2008 General Conference which dealt with the proposals and the Judicial Council call for further study on the worldwide nature of our church? We want to review finished or carefully considered proposals in 2012.

P. S. FYI – Identifying the Constitutional Amendments We Oppose

There will be over 30 constitutional amendments voted on by 2009 conference sessions. A voting identification number will be associated with each amendment. Of these, there are 23 “Worldwide Nature UMC” amendments. Each was identified at 2008 General Conference by a number and a Book of Discipline paragraph number. Identifying the five amendments we oppose will be very confusing because there are several numbers associated with each. (See #8 above.) It is critical for our effort to focus on the identity of the five amendments we are opposing. They will be referred to in the annual conference voting as follows:

Proposed Constitutional Amendment #IV --- this relates to BOD ¶10

Proposed Constitutional Amendment # X --- this relates to BOD ¶28

Proposed Constitutional Amendment # XIII --- this relates to BOD ¶31

Proposed Constitutional Amendment # XXIII --- this relates to BOD ¶38

Proposed Constitutional Amendment #XXVI --- this relates to BOD ¶48