

## APPENDIX 1 – THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION ON THE POSSIBILITY OF CHURCHES DESIRING TO CHANGE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishop's had significant conversations about the possibility of churches desiring to change their relationship with the United Methodist Church in response to the legislation connected to the Commission's report and the called session of the General Conference.

Here is a brief summary of the Commission and Council's conversation:

- The idea that some churches might desire to change their relationship with The United Methodist Church in response to the decisions made by General Conference is not a new idea and precedes the formation of the Commission on a Way Forward.
- In the July Status Report of the Commission's work, the Commission noted that one of its goals for the final report was to include an "allowance those who don't adopt a revised structure." (see slide 9 of the Commission on a Way Forward's [Status Report](#))
- As the models were developed and shared with the Council of Bishops in November 2017, there was discussion about the concept of a "gracious way of exit for those who feel called to exit the denomination" being included in each sketch. (see Council of Bishop's [Press Release](#) on November 9, 2017)
- In January 2018, the Commission on a Way Forward asked the Bishops to specifically discuss the concept of a "gracious exit" at their February 2018 Council of Bishops meeting.
- In February 2018, the Council of Bishops discussed "gracious exit" and shared the following thoughts:
  - The language of "exit" should be used carefully so as not to encourage people to look for an "exit" but rather help the United Methodist Church focus on unity.
  - Gracious will be defined not by the process but by the implementation of the process.
  - *The Book of Discipline* already provides a means and reasons why a congregation might leave and the current *Book of Discipline* language could be the guide for a further process.
  - Many annual conferences have already developed practices and models in consultation with Wespath and GCFA. These should be shared.
  - Bishops need to do this work collaboratively, utilizing appropriate resources, and work on a case by case basis using best practices.
  - As plans make allowance for the possibility that some persons may depart from the United Methodist Church, we have been governed by the principle of not doing harm to one another.
- At the end of the February 2018 Council of Bishops meeting, the Council gave direction to the Commission that stated: "The Commission doesn't need to continue to use language of gracious exit or explore it further at this time but rather use current *Book of Discipline* process and invite Bishops and others (like Wespath and GCFA) to share best practices." Additionally the Council of Bishops invited the Commission to explore the possibility of adding an option to form or join an autonomous affiliated church.
- At its March 2018 meeting, the Commission discussed the autonomous affiliated possibility and worked on some other examples and models of "gracious exit" The Commission included some possibilities and options in its report to the May 2018 Council of Bishop's meeting.
- The Council of Bishops discussed autonomous affiliated and other exit possibilities at their May 2018 meeting and concluded that autonomous affiliated should not be included as recommended legislation or legislative petitions to the 2019 special session of the General Conference. Instead it should be part of an historical narrative of the work of the Commission and Council.

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- Concerns from the Council of Bishops about autonomous affiliated included the impact on ecumenical relationships, impact on relationships with current autonomous affiliated churches, the constitutionality of proposed autonomous affiliated legislation for churches in the U.S., the need to remain consistent with our connectional ecclesiology and the need for more study.
- At the same time the Council of Bishops recognized the need to maintain relationships with those who may choose to leave. The Council pondered the practical concerns around various proposed disciplinary mechanisms and explored the possibility of exploring future legislation that could be implemented at a future General Conference.
- There was a deep sense among some Bishops that the church should not move too quickly toward overly defining exit paths that do not take into account the context of each situation or using disciplinary language like autonomous affiliated or concordant relationships that most people within the church don't fully understand.
- Additionally, Wespath identified the key issues in churches and clergy exiting as it relates to the pension plans. This collective wisdom of Wespath is included in Appendix 5 to this report, and in the recommended petitions, amending ¶1504 and the Clergy Retirement Security Program, included in this report regarding the One Church Plan above.
- The conciliar work of the Commission and Council provides a model for annual conferences to do the faithful discernment that will allow them to find a way forward.