



College of Bishops

North Central Jurisdiction

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

September 1, 2021

To: The Elected Delegates of the North Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church

From: The North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops

Dear Friends in Christ in the North Central Jurisdiction,

In early July, when we issued a call for a special session of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference, we hoped that we might engage in robust, thoughtful, grace-filled and prayerful conversations about our denomination and its future, and do so in person. At the time, vaccination rates against COVID-19 were rising and case rates were falling. We were optimistic that the most severe days of the coronavirus pandemic were behind us.

In the two months since then, COVID-19 has roared back, fueled by the Delta variant, a variant of the virus that is more communicable than previous versions of the coronavirus, while being equally capable of causing severe disease. While this recent surge in COVID is primarily a surge among the unvaccinated, vaccinated persons are susceptible to breakthrough infections and when so infected are able to transmit COVID to others. All this to say that the health situation since issuing our call for an in-person special session of the jurisdictional conference has changed dramatically.

Yesterday, the resident bishops of the jurisdiction met and made the difficult and disappointing decision that we will not hold a special session of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference as an in-person event in Fort Wayne. Part of the difficulty in making this decision is that deposit monies at Fort Wayne hotels, which were carried over from reservations for the 2020 regular session of the jurisdictional conference, will be lost. Nevertheless, the current health risks of gathering hundreds of people inside confined spaces were too significant to ignore.

We are not cancelling the special session. We have begun work on holding the special session virtually on November 10-12, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Eastern time. We will use these sessions to:

- To worship and pray;
- To receive reports on work being done in our jurisdiction and annual conferences on dismantling racism and to consider how we might further this essential work in our jurisdiction and its annual conferences;
- To utilize the processes being developed by the Connectional Table and other denominational leaders, including jurisdictional leaders, to discuss the future of The United Methodist Church, such discussion could include the development of a covenant for living together as The United Methodist Church in the coming months, regionalization in the



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future of The United Methodist Church, the future of jurisdictions in The United Methodist Church, and the future work of the North Central Jurisdiction;

- To receive reports from the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy, the NCJ Episcopal Leadership Task Force and other appropriate persons on the future shape of episcopal leadership including episcopal areas, and to engage in a conversation about the future deployment of bishops and the role of bishops in The United Methodist Church.

We will not hold a memorial service, nor celebrate the retirements of Bishop Sally Dyck and Bishop Bruce Ough. We think those moments are better marked together in person, and we joyfully anticipate being together in 2022.

With these revisions, the remainder of our earlier call to this special session remains intact. In the event that we are unable to secure the resources and logistics to hold this special session virtually in the time given, we will re-schedule the session. We remain committed to important conversations on dismantling racism, episcopal leadership, and the future of The United Methodist Church. Please know we will make every effort to hold this conference on these dates, but need to acknowledge the complexities of organizing a virtual conference session.

Please save the dates November 10-12 and watch for additional communication in the near future.

Grace and Peace,

David A Bard

Bishop David A. Bard
On Behalf of the NCJ College of Bishops