

Joint Communication from the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on the Episcopacy and the North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops

To: Delegates to the North Central Jurisdictional Conference 2022

Re: The number of bishops to be elected in 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

This is a follow up communication to the August 8, 2022 press release. As we gather in Fort Wayne for jurisdictional conference, you will be asked to make a decision about the number of bishops to elect. At our special session in November 2021, you approved a proposal, to reduce the total number of active bishops in the jurisdiction to eight. It was a decision we supported, at that time, given the information we had available prior to the pandemic, including a likely reduction in bishops being proposed by the next General Conference and the sustainability of the Episcopal Fund.

When the judicial council in decision 1445 authorized regular session of the jurisdictional conference for 2022, permission was given for jurisdictions to elect bishops based on the current formula. The North Central Jurisdiction may, then, elect to have nine active bishops, which is our current number. If approved, this would mean electing three new bishops at jurisdictional conference in November. We think doing so is missionally advisable and fiscally permissible and manageable.

These have been challenging years for our annual conferences in the North Central Jurisdiction, and one of those challenges has been stretching the leadership of our bishops in unprecedented ways. Active bishops have been asked to serve more than one conference across areas and retired bishops have been called upon as never before. We commend the good work done while also recognizing that some of our conferences have not been as equipped for moving into the future under these arrangements. Leadership during COVID and disaffiliation can be wearying, and we have asked a great deal of our bishops. There is healing work to be done. There is work to be done envisioning a new future. Electing three new bishops so that we have nine active bishops in this shortened quadrennium (until 2024) allows annual conferences to do needed work and allows our jurisdiction needed time to determine the shape of episcopal leadership moving forward.

Financially, the Episcopal Fund has rebounded because of the generosity of United Methodists and the savings accrued due to limited travel by bishops during the pandemic and moving Council of Bishops meetings on-line. A decision to elect three new bishops does not compromise our fiscal responsibility.

We are aware that denominational circumstances, including shrinking membership and disaffiliation will require that we have fewer bishops moving into the future. However, electing so that we have nine active bishops will not be detrimental to our needed flexibility for the future. Anticipated retirements in 2024 will allow us all the flexibility we think will be required to make necessary adjustments in the number of active bishops in our jurisdiction.

We continue to be in ministry together for Jesus Christ in a liminal time, requiring openness and the willingness to reconsider previous decisions in light of new circumstances. We hope you support the recommendation to elect three new bishops for 2023-2024. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to speak with your bishop or your representatives to the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy. Additionally, you can find updates and information at <http://www.ncjumc.org/2022-jurisdictional-conference-index/> or follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ncjumc>.