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# A Statement from the Holston Conference Invitation Team

September 13, 2022



*"Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another."*

Before the Holston Conference Invitation Team had a name or even a specific focus, the familiar words of invitation in our communion liturgy drew us together and gave us hope.

Seventeen people representing the diversity of Holston Conference and longing for a better way forward needed the hope and challenge found in those words.

We are under no illusions. We know there are no easy solutions and yet, we came together, to discern and then offer a path forward that will allow as many of us as possible to remain in the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity in this moment to create a living document and re-commit to one

another. We desire to listen to the lessons of the past, work to build a peaceful system together at present, and cast vision for our future. We know this task is too big for any or all of us and is only possible with God at the center of all that we say and do.

Remaining together for the sake of familiarity or an institution will not suffice. We are called to a renewed vision and passion for being and making disciples of Jesus Christ. Because the invitation is for all who love Him, for all who repent of their sin, for all who seek to live in peace with one another, we believe there is hope for our future, together.

Jesus prayed for unity among his people, and this kind of holy and God-breathed unity is lived out in our commitment to one another. It is a commitment to keep showing up, not a shallow sweeping aside of our theological differences for the sake of peace. Our identity, rooted in the mission of Jesus Christ and guided by the witness of scripture fosters an intentional connection which leads to accountability, wisdom, and partnership.

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Within the bounds of the Holston Conference, we are blessed with many rivers that mark our landscape. The Holston River, of course, but also the New River, the Clinch River, the Powell River, the Nolichucky, the Hiwassee River, and others. Rivers are powerful forces, cutting through mountains and both nourishing and shaping the landscape over time. But a river is only as powerful as the streams and tributaries that feed it.

In our differences, we are like the many streams feeding into one river. We are as currents in the river that move uniquely but combine to be a powerful force. Each of our churches are different, with varying traditions, ministries, and gifts. But together we make a powerful difference for God's kingdom.

The common source that flows through and binds us to one another is our shared faith in Almighty God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our historic creeds and confessions summarize our understanding of Christian truth including the virgin birth, life, ministry, teaching, crucifixion, and bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the holy Trinity. We believe the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are signs of God's grace and good will, available to all, and by which God works invisibly in us.

God calls us through our baptism to the ministry of servanthood. We embrace the principle that laity and clergy are partners in ministry working together.

Our ministry encourages and elevates the leadership of women and men of all races and in all places, speaking to all varieties of life experiences.

We study the Holy Scriptures together and seek God's guidance as we apply it to our lives as disciples and as a church.

We express this understanding by linking personal salvation with Christian service and mission to the whole world.

Maintaining the theology, doctrine, and polity of The United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, we envision a future where our distinctive practices of ministry and the convictions of our pastors and local churches complement our witness. We envision a future where our differences allow us to reach more persons for Christ.

- **We commit to being gracious with one another, attend to one another in prayer, and seek the mind of Christ as we humbly put ourselves toward the task at hand.**
- **We commit to honoring theological and biblical convictions in the appointment making process. We will identify new systems and improve long standing practices to accomplish this.**
- **We commit to seeking paths for a gracious exit beyond General Conference 2024 for congregations that wait and then discover that their relationship with The United Methodist Church is no longer tenable.**
- **We commit to focusing our efforts on discipleship and shared mission.**

Our differences, though real and substantial, will not get in our way when it comes to responding to missional and ministry needs.

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We gain more working together to support shared ministries like Conference Camps and Colleges, Wesley Foundations, Resurrection, and Youth Assembly. We give more working together to dig wells and build schools in South Sudan and Uganda, when we send shipping containers of Hands-on Mission Kits to Zimbabwe and Liberia, and when we raise over a million dollars for Imagine No Malaria. We grow more working together to encourage new small groups, worship services, and Fresh Expressions. All of these connections, our connections, allow us to reach more people for the sake of the Gospel.

With God's help, we will continue to be a **missions-loving** conference known throughout the connection. We will be **whole-hearted** followers of Jesus Christ. We will be **grace-filled** leaders in The United Methodist Church as we hold onto one another while experiencing the movement of the Holy Spirit.

**Holston Conference, it is time for us to choose to move forward together.** Our connection has never been perfect. We believe God has never stopped working with us, through us, or even in spite of us. One of the most countercultural witnesses to the gospel is our relentless commitment to one another when we disagree on matters of substance. Our connection to each other, with our differences, becomes a witness to the sufficiency of Christ.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As we seek to fulfill our common mission, we look for opportunities God is providing in response to our petition in the prayer of the Great Thanksgiving:

*“Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”*

#### **Holston Conference Invitation Team**

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