

Count Me In

By Carolyn Moore – January 10, 2020

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/2020/01/10/count-me-in/>

I have been on social media enough in the last few days to know that the latest plan for denominational separation along theological lines is not without its detractors. I'm not among them. This agreement comes to me as a deep relief. For several years I have worked as a member of a much larger group toward some kind of resolution. I realize just how much time, energy, prayer, and even compromise – poured out on all sides of our current divide – it took to get here. I'm breathing a sigh of relief and praying for the passage of this protocol at the 2020 General Conference. Let me share why.

Without context, the headlines in the national media might seem harsh and this plan to separate may come as a surprise. But for many who have been on this journey for years, this represents a significant and hopeful step forward. Most headlines last week led with the idea that the crux of the crisis is a disagreement over our sexual ethics, teachings on marriage, and the ordination of LBTQ+ clergy. I want to emphasize that the crisis in the UM Church does not rest on just these issues. Others agree. In a recent essay accurately entitled, "[The Sad, Necessary Division of the United Methodist Church](#)" David French writes:

“The secular media will cast the divide primarily in the terms it understands—as focused on “LGBT issues” – but that’s incomplete. The true fracturing point between Mainline and Evangelical churches is over the authority and interpretation of scripture. The debate over LGBT issues is a consequence of the underlying dispute, not its primary cause... there is a strain of Protestant Christianity that views the Bible as valuable but not infallible or inerrant. Evangelical Christians, by contrast, strongly dissent from that view.”

That seems an accurate statement to me. Our divide has been forming for years over multiple issues that are very real and very deep. They strike at the fundamentals of historical Christian orthodoxy. How we interpret scripture and relate to the person and work of Jesus Christ is at the headwaters of this crisis, but it is also important to note that our inability to hold one another accountable where we disagree only exacerbates the problem. When some of our leaders are unwilling to hold us accountable to the time-honored way we make decisions at our General Conferences, the result is a kind of disorder and dysfunction that is excruciating.

The hard reality we must admit today is that while we traditionalists have won votes at General Conference, we have not really held the line of orthodoxy within the UM Church. While we are thankful for the reaffirmation of our teachings, some of our American colleagues openly resist what we have reaffirmed. With no theological or ethical

accountability and no will among many bishops to establish accountability, there is no line left to hold. Most of us – from across the theological divide – recognize we can no longer go on this way.

Some would implore us to stay in the current situation and keep voting for traditional values at General Conference, as if we might eventually wear down our progressive colleagues and compel them to leave. I have zero faith in that eventuality. A colleague in my conference who serves on the board of a progressive movement within the UM Church told me without blinking an eye, “We will never leave.” And I believe her. Why would she? With accountability on these matters gone – and it is – her approach is working to a degree; it is a functional response. So, we frustrate her sincerely held views on very important matters, and in return she and colleagues in her theological camp frustrate our sincerely held beliefs. This is not a healthy dynamic for a supposedly *united* church.

Friends, let’s support this protocol. Let’s get ourselves out of an Egypt filled with conflict and bitterness. The protocol might not be the promised land, but once we are out of the Egypt we are living in, we traditionalists can participate with the Holy Spirit in building a vital and fruitful movement that reflects our faith and the faith of our fathers. Our ground – the ground I want to be standing on – is on the other side of separation, where we can make choices from a place of strength, and without the anarchy we live in now.

Please pray for our UM Church. These are hard days for many people. I sense the anxiety among my clergy colleagues and cannot imagine the stress our bishops must be carrying. There are so many more questions than answers for how this will play out structurally, so they have great responsibilities on their shoulders. If we can manage this well, however, our effort will be historic. We are all praying for a better witness than what we have had.

We grieve the pain of so many in the UM Church who really do not want any kind of separation. We hear the words of Jesus who said of divorce in general that Moses allowed it only because of the hardness of our hearts. “But this wasn’t so from the beginning,” he said. If you have ever been divorced, you understand that sometimes the thing we want least is also the only option left. And sometimes that thing represents hardness. We grieve the public witness of irreconcilable differences, and I grieve my own shortcomings and the things I do not even know that I do not know. It seems right to approach anything like this with deep humility, understanding the impact it can have on a lost and hurting world.

The UM Church is my tribe, and I will be sad to separate from it. But before I am a United Methodist, I am a follower of Jesus. I will preach the faith of our fathers – a faith that billions have lived and died for. I will not step back from that Gospel. It is life to me. It is life to us. It is our hope and our peace.

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