

THE NICENE CREED AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS ON THE WORLDWIDE NATURE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This year's Annual Conferences throughout The United Methodist Church will vote on twenty-three (23) Constitutional Amendments which relate to the worldwide nature of The United Methodist Church. If approved by an aggregate vote of 2/3 or more, these Constitutional Amendments would, in effect, begin the process of creating Regional Conferences throughout the denomination and around the world. In our denominational structure, such Regional Conferences would be located under General Conference and above Jurisdictional Conferences.

The question is: Why? Why regionalize The United Methodist Church? Various reasons are given. Reasons related to worldwide and/or contextual mission, equity, avoidance of US-centrism, and urgency of change are now in play. Organizational reasoning prevails, while theological (or ecclesiological) rationale is absent.

There would be only four (4) compelling reasons for moving The United Methodist Church toward regionalization. Those four (4) reasons would be derived from The Nicene Creed (The United Methodist Hymnal, No. 880): "We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic [C]hurch." With regard to the issues before us, The United Methodist Church should move toward regionalization after, and only after, compelling demonstration that such a move would:

- 1) advance the unity of The United Methodist Church (John 17:20-21);
- 2) deepen the holiness of The United Methodist Church (I Peter 2:9);
- 3) broaden the catholicity of The United Methodist Church (Matthew 28:19);
- 4) and increase the apostolicity of The United Methodist Church (Jude 3).

The Nicene Creed reminds United Methodists that the Church's "oneness [has] a special relevance in the face of the divisions of the fourth century [and of the twenty-first century]. Its holiness refers to the fundamental fact that the Church belongs to the Holy One and is called to

fidelity. Its catholicity means that it is the gift of God for all people whatever their particular country, race, social condition or language... The apostolicity of the Church expresses its obligation and commitment to the norm of the apostolic gospel of God's action in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ." (Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed [381], WCC, 1991, par. 220, p. 83).

Unfortunately, these reasons have not been discussed in a detailed way, to date, in the church's deliberation over the twenty-three Constitutional Amendments. Because Nicea's description of the Church has been neglected, Annual Conference members should vote against each of the twenty-three Constitutional Amendments on the worldwide nature of The United Methodist Church.

In the "Worldwide Ministry through The United Methodist Church" (Interim Report from the Task Group on the Global Nature of the Church, Council of Bishops and Connectional Table, Spring 2007), footnote 12 truthfully admits: "To this author's knowledge, a comprehensive presentation of United Methodist ecclesiology is still lacking, though most desirable..." (p. 8)

Before attempting significant changes in its present denominational structure, The United Methodist Church should undertake a serious, probing study of the ecclesiology that is ours and how our church might more fully conform to the "one holy catholic and apostolic [C]hurch" of The Nicene Creed.

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