

## **Central Conferences in Europe after 2022 Towards the future**

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## **Central Conferences in Europe after 2022/23 A Task Force Mandate for a continuing UMC**

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## **Central Conferences in Europe after 2022/23 On Separation from the UMC**

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## **Proposal for a discussion and preparation process within the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe**

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## **Additional motion for the installation of a Round Table of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe**

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## **Report of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Executive Committee from March 12 - 13, 2021 Online**

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**The United Methodist Church**

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe



## **The United Methodist Church**

Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

Report of the 74<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Executive Committee  
from March 25 - 26, 2022, Mulhouse (France)

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# **Facts of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe**

## **General Information**

### **Annual Conferences of the Central Conference**

Provisional Annual Conference Bulgaria-Rumania  
Provisional Annual Conference Austria  
Annual Conference Poland  
Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa  
Provisional Annual Conference Serbia-Macedonia  
Annual Conference Czech Republic-Slovakia  
Provisional Annual Conference Hungary

### **Episcopal Supervision since May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006**

Bishop Dr. Patrick Streiff

#### **Bishop retired**

Bishop Heinrich Bolleter

### **The agents of the Central Conference**

Chair: Bishop Dr. Patrick Streiff  
Badenerstrasse 69, Postfach 2111  
CH-8021 Zürich 1  
Mail bischof@umc-cse.org  
Fon +41 44 299 30 60  
Fax +41 44 299 30 69

Vice-Chair: Helene Bindl  
Wienerstrasse 254, AT-4030 Linz  
Mail helene.bindl@umc-cse.org  
Fon +43 699 190 663 72

Secretary: Markus Bach  
Bahnstrasse 31, CH-8619 Uster  
Mail markus.bach@umc-cse.org  
Fon +41 44 940 12 43

Treasurer: Iris Bullinger  
111, Chemin des Verjus, CH-1228 Plan-les-Ouates  
Mail iris.bullinger@umc-cse.org  
Fon +41 22 794 34 05

## **The Bishops-Office and Headquarters of the Central Conference**

Badenerstrasse 69, Postfach 2111  
CH-8021 Zürich 1  
+41 44 290 30 60 / +41 44 290 30 69 (Fax)  
bischof@umc-cse.org

### **Employees in the Bioshops-Office**

Urs Schweizer, Assistent of the bishop  
+41 44 290 30 60  
urs.schweizer@umc-cse.org

André Töngi, Finance and Administration  
+41 44 290 30 63  
andre.toengi@umc-cse.org

### **The »Geneva Area«**

The "Geneva Area" was founded in 1936 and assigned to the Southeastern Jurisdiction Conference in the United States. His first bishop, Dr. John Louis Nuelsen, chose Geneva as residence. Since it is customary in the United Methodist Church to name the parish according to the respective residence of the bishop, the new parish was given the name "Geneva Area". Until 1954, all bishops resided in Geneva. In these eighteen years, the "Geneva Area" became a household name. To preserve this connection, the Central Conference in Brussels decided in 1954 to "keep the name of the Genevan Area and let the bishop have a free hand, to choose his residence, where he considers him right according to the circumstances."

### **The bishops of the Geneva Area**

John Louis Nuelsen	1936 - 1940
William W. Peele	1940 - 1941
Arthur J. Moore	1941 - 1944 and 1952 - 1954
Paul N. Garber	1944 - 1952 and 1965 - 1966
Ferdinand Sigg	1954 - 1965
Ralph E. Dodge	1965 - 1966
Franz W. Schäfer	1966 - 1989
Heinrich Bolleter	1989 - 2006
Patrick Streiff	2006 -

### **The Central Conference of Central- and Southern Europe**

The "Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe" was founded in 1954. It was formed from those Annual Conferences, Provisional Annual Conferences, and Missions left over after the dissolution of the "Central Conference of Central Europe" and the "Central Conference of Southern Europe" and summed up in the "Geneva Area".

## The Meetings of the Central Conference

- 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting from October 14 to 17, 1954 in Brussels, Belgium
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting from February 7 to 10, 1954 in Geneva, Switzerland
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting from October 13 to 16, 1960 in Linz, Austria
- 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting from September 22 to 27, 1964 in Strasbourg, France
- 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting extraordinary from September 2 to 4, 1966 in Lausanne, Switzerland
- 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 5 to 9, 1969 in Berne, Switzerland  
Theme: »Die Kirche lebt«
- 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 21 to 25, 1973 in Schaffhausen, Switzerland  
Thema: »Es ist in keinem anderen Heil«
- 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 15 to 20, 1977 in Zofingen, Switzerland  
Theme: »Seid dankbar in allen Dingen; denn es ist der Wille Gottes in Jesus Christus an euch.«
- 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 18 to 22, 1981 in Niederuzwil, Switzerland  
Theme: »Dienet einander, ein jeder mit der Gabe, die er empfangen hat, als die guten Haushalter der vielfältigen Gnade Gottes.«
- 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March, 13 to 17, 1985 in Zurich-Zelthof, Switzerland  
Theme: »Gott dienen - ein Leben lang.«
- 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 15 to 19, 1989 in Baden, Switzerland  
Theme: »Christus der Weinstock - wir die Reben.«
- 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 10 to 14, 1993 in Berne-Bümpliz, Switzerland  
Theme: »Wo der Geist des Herrn ist, da ist Freiheit«
- 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 12 to 16, 1997 in Aarau, Switzerland  
Theme: »Mit Grenzen leben - in Christus überwinden«
- 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 14 to 18, 2001 in Bülach, Switzerland  
Theme: »Lasst uns aber Gutes tun und nicht müde werden« (Gal. 6,9)
- 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting from April 13 to 17, 2005 in Berne-Altstadt, Switzerland  
Theme: »Furcht ist nicht in der Liebe« (1. Joh. 4, 18)
- 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 11 to 15, 2009 in Bülach, Switzerland  
Theme: »Seek God and Live - the Methodist Way
- 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 13 to 17, 2013 in Winterthur, Switzerland  
Theme: »Faith, Hope and Love - these three«
- 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting from March 8 to 12, 2017 in Zurich-Zelthof, Switzerland  
Theme: »Jesus is Lord«

# Rules of Order of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

## Paragraph 1 - Foundation

1. The United Methodist Church (Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche) in Central and Southern Europe is part of the United Methodist Church.
2. The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe is issuing for its area a *Discipline* in accordance with *the Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church.
3. The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe is made up of all annual and provisional annual conferences as laid out by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church.
4. The United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe is organized in accordance with the powers granted by the 1952 General Conference of the former Methodist Conference and in accordance with the *Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church as the "Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe". (See Constitutional Document from October 14, 1954 in the Minutes of the Central Conference 1954 in Brussels, pp. 39 - 40.)
5. The "Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe" has its office in Switzerland, Badenerstrasse 69, 8004 Zürich. In the following it will be referred to in short as "Central Conference".

## Paragraph 2 - The Central Conference

1. The Central Conference shall be composed of the Bishop, of voting delegates, delegates with advisory voice as well as guests, who have received an invitation from the conference chair or secretary. Guests may be restricted to public sessions.
2. Central Conference members with voting rights are the delegates of the annual and provisional annual conferences elected according to the provisions of the *Discipline* and the rules of order. Only regular members have voting rights.
3. Members with advisory voice are:
  - Retired Bishops;
  - Delegates of the associated Churches within the Central Conference borders;
  - The secretary, treasurer, chairperson of the judicial court, chairpersons of the working groups, if they are not already voting members.Advisory members may participate at all sessions of the Central Conference and submit motions to the Central Conference.
4. The delegates of the annual and the provisional annual conferences shall be elected according to the proportion determined by the executive committee. The provisions of the *Discipline* are to be observed.
5. The Central Conference shall convene once every four years within the twelve months following the General Conference. The Central Conference shall be convened by the Bishop in agreement with the executive committee. If the Bishop is prevented from doing this, the secretary may make notice of the conference session. If the Central Conference has not already decided otherwise, time

and place of the upcoming session, the executive committee shall determine time and venue of the upcoming session. If necessary a special session of the Central Conference may be called.

6. The Bishop shall lead the meetings and is chairperson. If he or she is unable to lead the conference, the conference shall elect from the clergy members an interim chairperson.

7. A quorum shall be established when notice of the conference is extended at least one month prior to the conference and at least half of the members with voting rights are present. If there are too few members, the conference shall be postponed from day to day. If on the second day there are still too few members, on the third day without regard to the number of members in attendance the Central Conference shall have a quorum.

8. Without prejudice to specific provisions, the Central Conferences decides with a simple majority of the votes cast. Abstentions are to be ignored.

9. The official languages of the Central Conference shall be German and English. The Central Conference minutes shall be published in one of the two languages only.

10. The rights and responsibilities, which the Central Conference has received from the General Conference, are laid out in the *Discipline*. In the area of the Central Conference it shall have the sole legislative power.

11. Further tasks of the Central Conference shall be:

- To promote the work which has been entrusted to the conference;
- To establish all necessary rules and regulations for administration and supervision;
- To install necessary organs and to elect their representatives;
- To assign the tasks to the organs and to supervise their work;
- To approve the budget for the quadrennium.

12. The Central Conference, where the laws of the land permit, can organize and incorporate itself and its institutions in order to acquire legal status and apply the appropriate legal provisions.

### **Paragraph 3 - Agents and Organs of the Central Conference**

1. The agents of the Central Conference are:

- The Bishop;
- The secretary;
- The treasurer.

Through nomination the Bishop can petition that a voting member of the executive committee be elected vice chair of the executive committee.

2. The Organs of the Central Conference are:

- The Executive Committee;
- The Office;
- The Council on Finances and Administration;
- The Judicial Court;
- The Committee on Investigation;
- The Committee on Appeals;
- The Working Group on Episcopacy;
- Other Working Groups.



## **Paragraph 4 - The Bishop**

1. The Bishop embodies the unity of the Central Conference with the entire United Methodist Church. He or she is supervisor (proctor) of the entire work within the Central Conference (geographical) boundaries. He or she shall represent the Central Conference outside of the conference and determines, if he or she is prevented and deems it to be prudent, a deputy. The Bishop may *ex officio* participate in all meetings of the Central Conference.
2. The Bishop shall be elected through secret ballot with a three-fifths majority of the voting delegates present. The Executive Committee may establish a preparatory process for the election of a bishop. All ordained elders in full connection, who belong to an annual or provisional annual conference of the Central Conference, may be elected.
3. The newly elected Bishop has a term of four years. When the Bishop's first term of office is closing, the executive committee shall determine whether a re-election for life or an election of a new Bishop shall take place and makes the appropriate motion to the Central Conference. For a re-election for life a three-fifth majority is required.
4. If the office of Bishop becomes vacant (due to death, retirement or resignation) the executive committee in accordance with the *Discipline* shall determine the necessary steps. The executive committee shall decide whether an extraordinary session of the Central Conference shall be announced and makes the motion to elect a new Bishop.
5. A retired Bishop shall be an advisory member of the Central Conference and the executive committee. He or she shall remain member as long as his or her residency is within the Central Conference borders. He or she is to be invited to all meetings of these organs.

## **Paragraph 5 - The Secretary**

1. Based upon the nomination of the executive committee the Central Conference shall elect a secretary for a four-year term. The candidate does not need to be a voting member of the Central Conference. Re-election is possible.
2. The term of office shall begin with the adjournment of the session during which the election occurred and continues until the closing of the next regular session of the Central Conference. The secretary shall *ex officio* be member and secretary of the executive committee and the office.
3. The secretary shall write the minutes of the Central Conference, the executive committee and the office and shall publish and mail these as required through their by-laws. In consultation with the Bishop, he or she shall manage as need dictates the correspondence for these organs and shall administer to the tasks which the *Discipline* places on him or her. The Central Conference, the executive committee, and the office may name additional tasks.
4. If the office of secretary becomes vacant during the quadrennium, an interim secretary may be appointed by the executive committee or by the Bishop.

## **Paragraph 6 - The Treasurer**

1. The Central Conference shall elect following nomination by the executive committee a treasurer for a four-year term. The candidate does not need to be a voting delegate of the Central Conference. Re-election is possible.
2. The term of office of the treasurer shall begin with the adjournment of the Central Conference session, during which the election took place, and continues until the conclusion of the next regular Central Conference session. He or she shall be *ex officio* a member of the executive committee.
3. The treasurer shall manage the finances following the framework of the approved budget. He or she shall annually prepare a fiscal report of all transactions, which is given to the executive committee for review. He or she shall submit motions regarding the budget of the current year as needed. He or she shall write and in consultation with the executive committee submit a budget proposal for the quadrennium to the Central Conference for approval.
4. If the office of treasurer becomes vacant during the quadrennium, an interim treasurer shall be appointed by the executive committee or by the Bishop.

## **Paragraph 7 - The Executive Committee**

1. The executive committee shall be composed of the following members with voting rights: the Bishop, the secretary and the treasurer, as well as one superintendent and one lay delegate from each annual and provisional annual conference, as well as the chairperson of the working group on episcopacy. Lay representatives must be elected members of the Central Conference.

Retired Bishops are members with advisory voice. If a conference consists of more than one country, then beyond the two voting delegates the superintendent of each additional country shall be a member of the executive committee with advisory voice.

Through invitation the Bishop may also invite the chairpersons of the working groups.

2. The representatives of the annual and the provisional annual conferences shall be nominated for election for the executive committee by the Bishop after consultation with the elected delegates of those annual and provisional annual conferences. Vacancies in the interim shall be filled by election of the executive committee upon nomination of the Bishop.
3. The term of office for the executive committee shall be four years. It shall begin with the adjournment of the Central Conference session, during which the election took place and continues until the conclusion of the next regular session of the Central Conference.
4. Chairperson of the executive committee shall *ex officio* be the Bishop.
5. The executive committee shall meet at least once a year. The meetings shall be announced by the Bishop, if he or she is prevented in doing this, by the vice-chairperson or the secretary. There is a quorum if half of the voting delegates are present. The executive committee shall decide through majority vote of the voting members present.

6. The executive committee shall manage the business of the Central Conference between sessions. Most particularly:
  - To attend to the completion of its resolutions and decisions and to do what is necessary to further the standing and development of the work;
  - To receive the financial statement of the treasurer and to discharge him or her on the basis of the audit report;
  - To make the necessary adjustments and extensions to the Central Conference financial budget;
  - To attend to the preparation of the Central Conference sessions.
7. The executive committee elects through the nomination of the Office the persons who shall represent the Central Conference in the worldwide church bodies, as long as no other voting regulations exist.
8. The executive committee shall report to the Central Conference on its work and make the necessary motions.

### **Paragraph 8 - The Office**

1. The office shall be composed of the Bishop, the vice-chairperson, the secretary, and the treasurer. Chairperson shall be the Bishop.
2. The office can through a motion of the Bishop include a fifth person, who is elected by the executive committee from among its members.
3. The office shall have the following responsibilities:
  - Preparation of the executive committee meetings and supervision or administration of its decisions;
  - The determination of the language, in which the minutes of the Central Conference shall be written;
  - Administration of all financial and personnel matters for the office of Bishop and the secretariat of the Bishop, which are not otherwise supervised;
  - Nomination of members to the Council on Finances and Administration passed on to the executive committee, which confirms the nominations;
4. In pressing situations, for which the Central Conference or the executive committee have not made any provisions, the office can act for the interim on behalf of the executive committee.

### **Paragraph 9 - The Council on Finance and Administration**

1. The Council on Finance and Administration shall be composed of three persons to be nominated by the office and confirmed by the executive committee.
2. The council shall annually examine the disbursement of funds of the Central Conference and shall submit the written report of the review to the executive committee.
3. The council shall resolve the budget issues of the Bishop and his or her office with the appropriate bodies of the General Conference. The accounting is done through the association "Hilfe im Sprengel". The council supports the Bishop and the Bishop's office in advisory capacity.

4. The members of the council are also members of the pension board of the Central Conference. The executive committee can elect further members to the pension board.

### **Paragraph 10 – The Committee on Investigation**

1. The Central Conference shall elect a committee on investigation in accordance with the disciplinary and arbitration regulation of the Central Conference, consisting of seven clergy members in full connection (if possible not more than one pastor per annual or provisional annual conference), two laity with advisory voice, and six substitutes (five clergy members in full connection and one layperson). The election takes place upon nomination by the Bishop.
2. The committee on investigation is responsible for any complaint against the Bishop.
3. The committee on investigation constitutes itself and gives itself rules of procedure and by-laws. Seven clergy members in full connection respectively their substitutes build the quorum. Members of the committee on investigation, who might be party to the dispute, are to be replaced by substitutes.

### **Paragraph 11 - The Committee on Appeals**

1. The Central Conference shall vote for a committee on appeals in accordance with the disciplinary and arbitration regulation of the Central Council, made up of five pastoral members (four in full connection and a full-time local pastor) as well as four laity, who have at least six continuous years as a professing member of the United Methodist Church, also as many substitutes. The election takes place after the recommendation of the Bishop.
2. The committee on appeals of the Central Conference is responsible for appeals in disciplinary proceedings against pastoral members.
3. The committee on appeals shall constitute itself and choose its rules of order and bylaws. Committee members, who might be party to a dispute or feel biased, shall be replaced by a substitute.

### **Paragraph 12 - The Judicial Court**

1. The judicial court shall be composed of five persons of which at least two must be clergy members in full connection. At the same time four substitutes shall be elected, two of which shall be clergy members in full connection and two lay members. The candidates shall be persons of integrity and qualified for this task. They must not for the same period of time be members of the Central Conference, the executive committee, the working groups or the organs of the disciplinary and arbitration regulation. Their election follows the nomination prepared by the executive committee.
2. The judicial court shall constitute itself and shall provide its own procedural and working rules. A quorum shall be established by the presence of three members. A tie decision shall be decided by the vote of the chairperson. A member shall be excluded from a judicial process if he or she is a member of a church body, which is party to the case.

3. The judicial court shall meet as necessity calls at a place, which the chairperson shall name. The chairperson or a substitute shall be invited to the meeting of the Central Conference.
4. The judicial court shall make all judicial decisions in accordance with the constitution, excluding the jurisdiction of the Judicial Council of the General Conference.
5. The Central Conference may charge the judicial court with additional tasks.
6. The decisions of the judicial court shall have immediate effect. The option to invoke the judicial council of the General Conference in accordance with the constitution is hereby not affected.
7. The decisions of the judicial court shall briefly outline the facts and points of controversy as well as the rationale for the decision. All parties shall receive this document as well as the secretary of the Central Conference. It shall be published in the minutes of the following Central Conference session.
8. Petitions to the judicial court may be made by:
  - The Bishop of the Central Conference;
  - At least one-third of the voting members of the executive committee;
  - At least one-fifth of the delegates with voting rights present at the Central Conference;
  - At least one-fifth of the voting members present at the annual or provisional annual conference; in provisional annual conferences, which have fewer than 25 members, half of the voting members present.

### **Paragraph 13 - The Working Group on Episcopacy**

1. The Central Conference shall elect a working group on episcopacy, which consists of one executive committee member from each annual and provisional annual conference. The nomination shall be suggested by the office. The Bishop shall choose one fifth of the members.
2. The working group meets at least once a year. It fulfills the tasks in accordance with the *Discipline* and reports directly to the Central Conference and the executive committee.

### **Paragraph 14 - Other Working Groups**

1. The Central Conference can elect further working groups and authorize them to undertake specific tasks. The members of the working groups need not be members of the Central Conference.
2. In general, the working groups shall be comprised of three members. Vacancies shall be filled by the executive committee.
3. The chairperson of the working group shall be determined by the Central Conference. Otherwise the working group shall constitute itself.
4. The chairperson shall report annually to the executive committee on the activities of the working group. The reporting has to take place in writing and in the official languages of the Central Conference.

### **Paragraph 15 - The Session of the Central Conference**

1. The session committee of the Central Committee consists of the chairperson, the secretary, the treasurer, the chairperson of the ushers (counters of votes), and the conference host. This committee shall make all decisions in all procedural or organizational questions, which are not disciplinary question or which are not otherwise regulated in these rules of order. All members of the Central Conference have the right to appeal a decision made by this committee.
2. The approved program prepared by the preparations committee of the Central Conference is the official program of the session.
3. At the beginning of the first meeting the executive committee shall place a motion for election of the following persons:
  - 6 ushers (vote counters) (3 clergy delegates and three lay delegates) and a chairperson;
  - Two auditors of the conference minutes;
  - The reporters;
4. The Office lays the to do list before the conference for acceptance.

### **Paragraph 16 - The business meetings**

1. No member of the Central Conference may be absent from the business meetings without permission, unless it is due to illness or other legitimate reason. In this case a written note indicating the reasons shall be given to the secretary in a timely manner.
2. The chairperson shall announce the presence of a quorum. The times of opening the meetings, recess, and conclusion of the day's deliberations shall be the decision of the chairperson. He or she shall preside over the deliberations.
3. The meetings of the Central Conference shall generally be public. Visitors shall sit in the area designated to them.
4. The chairperson may for selected business call for a closed meeting. He or she must announce a closed session when at least one-fifth of the members require it. Before the closed meeting begins all guests shall leave the conference room. The business of the closed meeting shall be confidential. The decisions of the closed session shall recorded in writing.

### **Paragraph 17 - Deliberations**

1. Business may reach the Central Conference:
  - By motion of the chairperson
  - Through the reports of the organs of the Central Conference named under paragraph 3;
  - By motion of the annual and provisional annual conferences;
  - By motion of members of the Central Conference.
2. For the business meetings the following rules shall apply:
  - All motions and amendments shall be submitted by a member of the Central Conference and be supported by another member;
  - All motions and amendments shall be written in one of the official languages of the Central Conference and given to the secretary;
  - When an amendment is proposed and has been supported, the chairperson may limit debate to the proposed amendment. The same shall apply to amendments to the amendment. The discussion shall follow the reverse order of the submitted amendments;

- A motion for reconsideration after the concluding vote on a petition may be made by a member of the majority vote fraction only.
- The following motions must be voted on immediately after consideration of the list of speakers: close of debate and motion to vote, motion to recess and postpone the meeting, point of order, matter regarding the agenda, commit to refer the matter for consideration to a Central Conference organ.

## **Paragraph 18 - Voting Procedure and Elections**

1. Unless otherwise designated, voting is public. Elections may be public or by ballot.
2. Prior to the vote the chairperson shall offer a brief review of the amendments, which are on the table. Amendments to the amendment shall be voted on prior to the vote on the amendment and the vote on the motion itself, which is voted on a last.
3. Voting shall generally be a showing of hands. Only the votes of the delegates present at the time of the vote shall be counted. Abstentions shall be ignored. When there is a tie vote the motion is defeated.
4. When elections are open, the candidates shall be voted on in the order of their nominations.
5. Ballots shall be used for secret elections. Empty and invalid ballots shall not be considered in determining the majority. The ushers shall see that each voting ballot has a different color, format or print. They shall also count the number of voting ballots passed out. If the number of voting ballots turned in to be counted is higher than the number passed out, the vote is invalid and must be repeated. The ushers shall record the result of the election as follows: number of voting members, number of invalid voting ballots, and number of empty voting ballots and distribution of valid ballots.
6. If the election is to take place without nominations, the first two votes shall be open. After the second vote no further candidates must be included. As of the third vote the Central Conference may, following a motion of a member, declare in an open vote that the candidate with the highest number of votes below the absolute majority is elected. For the election of a Bishop paragraph 4 applies.

## **Paragraph 19 - Thematic Events**

1. In regard to the tasks of the Central Conference as defined in the *Discipline* thematic events can be organized in connection with the meetings of the executive committee. The theme is selected by either the Central Conference or the executive committee.
2. Further persons who in their country work in this area or may offer further impulses to the annual and provisional annual conferences may be invited to the thematic events taking place in connection with the meeting of the executive committee. Generally not more than one person per country may be invited in addition to the executive committee members. The additional persons will be invited by the Bishop after consultation with the respective superintendent.
3. At the Central Conference the themes may be taken up again for consolidation and continuation or new themes can be initiated.

## **Paragraph 20 - The Conference Minutes**

1. All Central Conference accepted reports, petitions and decisions shall be integral parts of the conference minutes and shall be included in the minutes in full.
2. After the revision through both of the auditors of the minutes and through the chairperson the minutes are valid and will be published.

## **Paragraph 21 - Final Provisions**

1. Petitions to change these Rules of Order of the Central Conference require a two-thirds majority to pass.
2. These Rules of Order were adopted by the 2013 Central Conference and replace the previous Organizational Structure and Rules of Order from 2009. They shall take effect on March 16, 2013.
3. On March 10, 2017, the Central Conference amended the second sentence of Paragraph 4, point 2. The amendment takes effect immediately.



# **Procedural and working rules of the Judicial Court**

## ***General provisions***

### **Article 1: Jurisdiction of the Judicial Court**

The competences of the Judicial Court shall be those listed in Article 12 of the Rules Order of the CC CSE.

### **Article 2: Working mode in general**

1 Wherever possible, the Judicial Court shall do its work in writing, in particular with the help of electronic communication (e-mail).

2 If special circumstances require so, the Judicial Court shall hold a meeting. In such a case it shall be able to take decisions if at least three members are present. The president shall decide on the order of the day. In principle, meetings of the Judicial Court shall not be public.

### **Article 3: Procedure**

Without prejudice to the present rules, the Judicial Court shall proceed based on its free decision, provided that equality of treatment and fair hearing are guaranteed.

### **Article 4: Decision-making**

The Judicial Court shall decide with the simple majority of the votes cast. Abstentions shall not be taken into account for these purposes. In the case of equal votes, the president of the Judicial Court shall decide.

### **Article 5: Working languages and languages of procedure**

The working languages and the languages of procedure of the Judicial Court shall be German and English.

## ***Procedure for formal decisions of the Judicial Court***

### **Article 6: Standing**

Applications for a formal legal decision to be taken by the Judicial Court within the meaning of Article 12(4) of the Rules or Order of the CC CSE shall be brought by the persons and groups of persons listed in Article 12(8) of the same Rules of Order.

### **Article 7: Written submissions**

1 Applications for a formal procedure before the Judicial Court shall be made in writing. The written application is to be sent to the secretary of the CC CSE. An application by e-mail shall be deemed to have been received where the secretary has confirmed its receipt within 7 days after the application was sent.

2 The written application shall in any case contain the following information:

- a) Names of the parties

- b) Addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers and (where applicable) e-mail addresses of the parties
- c) The application
- d) The grounds on which the application is founded.

3 The Judicial Court shall forthwith send to the defendant a copy of the written application. Within 30 days after the receipt of the application the defendant shall to the Judicial Court send a reasoned answer to the application in writing.

4 The Judicial Court shall forthwith send to the applicant a copy of the written submissions of the defendant.

#### **Article 8: Oral procedure and procedure in writing**

1 The formal procedure before the Judicial Court shall be conducted in writing. In special cases, the president shall be entitled to decide in favour of an oral procedure.

2 In the case of an oral procedure, the president shall decide on the place of the session and on the order of the day. At the beginning of the meeting, the Judicial Court shall appoint one of its members as secretary.

#### **Article 9: Communication with the parties**

1 Without prejudice to section 3 of the present article, the communication of the Judicial Court with the parties to the procedure shall, wherever possible, be carried out by e-mail.

2 Parties who receive e-mail messages shall immediately confirm their receipt. Absent such a receipt, the sending party shall repeat the sending of the message in an appropriate manner. Without prejudice to registered mail, the communication shall be deemed to have been received once its receipt has been confirmed.

3 The following documents shall be sent by registered mail as well, where applicable, by e-mail:

- a) The written submissions by the application (to be sent to the defendant)
- b) The written submissions by the defendant (to be sent to the applicant)
- c) The setting of any additional dates for action by the parties by the president of the Judicial Court
- d) The formal decision by the Judicial Court.

#### **Article 10: Participation of experts**

The president of the Judicial Court shall be entitled to appoint experts, in particular from among the members of the United Methodist Church who may be experts in the relevant field.

#### **Article 11: Decisions of the Judicial Court**

1 The decisions of the Judicial Court shall contain information about possibilities of appeal. They shall be sent in writing to the parties, the secretary of the CC CSE and to the Bishop of the CC CSE.

2 The decisions of the Judicial Court shall numbered consecutively and shall be published according to Article 12(7) of the Rules of Order of the CC CSE in the next protocol of the CC CSE.

## ***Further procedures***

### **Article 12: Further tasks and informal requests**

1 Where the CC CSE assigns further tasks to the Judicial Court based on Article 12(5) of the Rules of Order of the CC CSE, the president of the Judicial Court shall decide on the procedure.

2 The president of the Judicial Court shall decide on informal requests put to it by the Bishop or by other leaders of the church.

## ***Entry into force***

### **Article 13**

The present procedural and working rules shall enter into force on 1 January 2009.

Done by the Judicial Court on 21 December 2008 and adapted on 30 March 2013 to the terminology of the Rules revised by the Central Conference 2013.

For the Judicial Court:

The president: Prof. Dr. Christa Tobler, LL.M.

# I. Minutes

## of the 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe

### Minutes of the Executive Committee of Friday, March 12, 2021

*Unauthorized translation - Original in German*

Friday, March 12, 2021, 10.00 a.m.

#### **Online session via Zoom**

*Bishop Streiff* welcomes all members of the Executive Committee, the additional superintendents, and the delegates to the General Conference. He asks if a digital recording of the meetings may be made to aid in writing the minutes. All are in agreement.

*Bishop Streiff points out* that he is always impressed by the way Paul begins his letters to the churches. After naming who is writing the letter, he always begins with thanksgiving and prayer to God for those to whom he is writing. When he writes to churches that he has planted, it is understandable that he is thankful. But even in churches like Rome or Colossae, which he did not found himself, he still speaks of gratitude that God is working in these churches and mentions that he prays for these churches. This attitude can also help us to stand up for each other and pray, even if we cannot meet physically and perhaps do not know each other too well. This network of thanksgiving and prayer for God's action among us gives a good foundation for what we want to do together. He reads Paul's greeting in the letter to the church in Colossae (Colossians 1:3-8):

*We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and pray for you always, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, for the hope that is ready for you in heaven. You have heard of it before through the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you. As in all the world, so also among you it bears fruit and grows from the day you have heard of the grace of God and have known it in truth. Thus you learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ for you, who also told us about your love in the Spirit.*

*Bishop Streiff* offers a prayer.

The following people are participating in today's online meeting:

#### Voting members:

##### **Bishop**

Chairman Bishop	Bishop	Patrick Streiff	present
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##### **Office**

Vice Chairwoman	Layperson	Helene Bindl	present
Secretary	Pastor	Markus Bach	present
Treasurer	Layperson	Iris Bullinger	present

**Executive Committee**

Bulgaria-Romania	Sup.	Daniel Topalski	present
	Layperson	Desislava Todorova	present
Serbia-Macedonia	Sup.	Daniel Sjanta	present
	Layperson	Daniela Stoilkova	present
Austria	Sup.	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	present
	Layperson	Helene Bindl (office member)	(present)
Poland	Sup.	Andrzej Malicki	present
	Layperson	Olgierd Benedyktowicz	Excused
Switzerland-France-North Africa	Sup.	Claudia Haslebacher	present
	Layperson	Lea Hafner	present
Czech Republic-Slovakia	Sup.	Stefan Rendoš	present
	Layperson	David Chlupáček	present
Hungary	Sup.	László Khaled	present
	Layperson	Henrik Schaueremann	present
<b>Chair AG Bishop's Office</b>	Pastor	Jörg Niederer	<u>present 17</u>

Members with voice, but not vote:

<b>Retired bishop</b>	Bishop	Heinrich Bolleter	excused
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**Additional superintendents**

France and Belgium	Sup.	Etienne Rudolph	present
Algeria and Tunisia	Pastor	Freddy Nzambe	present
Macedonia and Albania	Sup.	Wilfried Nausner	present
Czech Republic	Sup.	Ivana Procházková	present
Romania	Sup.	Rares Calugar	present
Macedonia	Sup.	Marjan Dimov	present
Switzerland	Sup.	Serge Frutiger	present
Switzerland	des. Sup.	Brigitte Moser	present

**Chairmen of the Working Groups**

WG Theology and Ord. Ministries	Sup.	Stefan Zürcher	present
WG Liturgy	Pastor	Stefan Weller	present
WG Church Order + Legal Affaires	Sup.	Daniel Topalski (ExecMem.)	(present)
WG Children and Youth	Pastor	Boris Fazekas	excused
WG Women's Ministry	Pastor	Monika Zuber	present
Coordinator	Layperson	Barbara Bünger	<u>present 12</u>

**General Conference Delegates (as guests on Friday)**

from Austria	Layperson	Thomas Fux	present
from Bulgaria	Layperson	Mariella Mihaylova	excused
from Czech Republic	Pastor	Petr Procházk	excused
from Slovakia	Layperson	Lenka Procházková	present
from Hungary	Layperson	Bence Vigh	present
from Hungary	Pastor	István Ambrusz	excused
from Hungary	Pastor	David Csernák	present
from Poland	Layperson	Bozena Daszuta	present
from Serbia	Layperson	Dusan Tordaj	excused

**Present as guests are:**

Assistant to the bishop	Urs Schweizer	present
Bishop's Office	André Töngi	<u>present</u> 7

**Total present: 36**

The *bishop* points out the schedule for the next two days.

**Documents of the European Bishops (Enclosures 1 - 3 to the Report of the Office)**  
represented by Bishop Patrick Streiff

*Bishop Streiff* points out that the documents of the European bishops do not yet include the renewed postponement of the General Conference and the schedule is planned before the postponement. This will still be revised and adjusted. The goal is for all Central Conference executives to discuss these documents and provide feedback to the bishops on what should be revised or changed.

*Bishop Streiff*: Let us start with the 1st document "Towards the Future". As European bishops, we have found that if the "Protocol on Reconciliation through Separation" is adopted by the General Conference, it will be helpful if we proceed together in all Central Conferences. In this way we will know what the consequences of any decisions will be and also know how to proceed. The Methodist map in Europe will change in the future as a result.

In Part A, we have shown the schedule from 2021 - 2024. The dates still need to be adjusted due to the General Conference being postponed again. As Episcopalians, we assume an amicable separation, as stated in the preamble to the minutes. But not all traditional Methodists may choose to separate from The United Methodist Church and join a new Methodist denomination. We assume that after the separation, the UMC will be a church in which traditional Methodists can continue to minister.

The document lists the dates on which the Central Conferences will be held. It is important to note that the decisions to belong to the UMC will proceed from top to bottom, i.e. from General Conference to Central Conference and then to Annual Conference and so on.

Part B indicates that there should be a task force for a "Post-Separation UMC" for those Annual Conferences that wish to remain in the UMC. Another document shows how the separation is to be done based on the Protocol and the Church Order.

*Wilfried Nausner*: This is all based on the fact that the protocol is accepted. Is that correct?

*Bishop Streiff*: Yes, that is true. That applies to all three documents.

*Wilfried Nausner*: Is it also true that this protocol is only binding for those who have signed it?

*Bishop Streiff:* That is correct. The protocol has now been submitted as an official motion to the General Conference. That means it has arrived at the General Conference level. The General Conference will have to deal with it.

*Wilfried Nausner:* I would simply like to point out that the General Conference has never adopted a document as it was presented to it. So we cannot know yet what exactly will be adopted then for our Central Conference.

*Bishop Streiff:* The General Conference can indeed change anything at any time and has done so repeatedly in the past. The difference between this and other motions is that all the leaders of the various interest groups have agreed to the protocol and are asking their representatives at General Conference not to support other amendments or alternative ways of doing things. That is a strong indication that this is the way to go. But it will be up to the General Conference to decide how to proceed.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* The documents that you have written as European bishops assume that they are intended for countries that want to remain in the post-UMC. What is the goal and purpose of the post-UMC Central Conference? What is the goal and vision for the UMC in Europe, where do we want to go?

*Bishop Streiff:* All documents are based on the protocol, which assumes that the traditional part of the church will leave the UMC and form a new church of its own. A later General Conference can then decide what the future church will look like.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* That is the technical part. But I don't think the General Conference will decide what we should do in Europe as Methodists and why we should do it together. There is nothing in the motion about why we should stay together. Why should an Annual Conference stay in the Central and Southern Europe Central Conference, what is its advantage? Is there still a need for the Central Conference? For me, this is one of the central questions. Only then does it make sense to consider how we organize ourselves in the future, if we have a common vision of why we want to be together and work together. We have had few points of contact in recent years and have only talked about whether we are open or anti-gay. But there must be other issues that connect us. Why else would we spend so much time, energy and money meeting? I'm not just asking the bishop. If we want to belong together, we have to face these issues. But that is not included in the motions for this process. It's just about organization and a point in the Church Order about homosexuality. But the questions around our journey together are not asked. I will come back to this question at a later time.

*Bishop Streiff:* We will have to focus on these questions on Saturday when we will be together as the Executive Committee. But for now, it is important that we refer to the three documents.

*Henrik Schauermann:* Thank you for the documents. If the post-UMC becomes smaller, I wonder how many central conferences and bishops we will have in Europe then? Who will decide how it will go on then? Will it be the three remaining Central Conferences or the bishops or someone from the Council of Bishops? How will we decide then how to go on, how to organize? Who will decide that? Will bodies outside Europe also be involved in this?

*Bishop Streiff:* These questions are answered in the 2nd document by talking about the mandate for the task force. No one outside of Europe or the bishops alone can decide how we organize ourselves in Europe. In the conversation of the bishops we have noticed that in Northern Europe and in our Central Conference probably not all countries will remain in the future UMC. This will change the map of Europe and we need to ask ourselves what is most helpful for the common mission in Europe. We therefore need to look at the whole situation in Europe in order to be able to plan the work so that future work is possible. From here, a proposal must then be made to the General Conference as to how many central conferences and bishops there should be in Europe. The 2nd paper first gives the background, and a timetable and process for the UMC after the separation. At the end is a proposal for a joint task force, which must be agreed to by all three Central Conferences concerned. If we have questions or suggestions about this document, it will be helpful to bring them up in conversation with the bishops.

*David Chlupáček:* Is it possible at the European level that the European Council of Methodist Churches also plays a role?

*Bishop Streiff:* The European Council of Methodist Churches is a helpful instrument in Europe. But here other Methodist churches belong to it. All these churches have their own structure and are autonomous. As the UMC, we have a connexional structure beyond that. The charge to the task force is to figure out how we can keep that connexional structure for us. This, of course, includes working together in Europe. But the Council cannot do that task for us.

*Thomas Fux:* The question remains, what is the goal of the study group? We had a study group in our Central Conference that worked out where the differences are and what the problems are. Before we strive for a solution for the whole of Europe, we should find a way for us to go together.

*Bishop Streiff:* I remind you again that the dates in the papers still need to be revised. In the papers, we assumed that a task force would begin its work only after the decisions of a Central Conference and Annual Conference. The dates will all be pushed back a year so that we have clarity on the decisions of the conferences. It is right that we first have to look for ourselves how we want to deal with this. We will do that with the motion to the Executive Committee on Saturday. These documents look further into the future when the decisions on separation have been made in the Central Conferences and Annual Conferences. Don't get confused by the dates.



*Henrik Schauer mann:* When will the next ordinary General Conference be held after the postponed General Conference?

*Bishop Streiff:* There is a lot going on. We have no idea when the next but one General Conference will take place. But I don't think that the next regular General Conference will take place two years after the one in 2022.

*Thomas Fux:* I think setting up a task force can be helpful. But I don't know if the majority in our Central Conference wants to stay together. I also don't know if it will be possible to set up such a task force at all, because we don't know the decisions of the 2022 General Conference.

*Bishop Streiff:* It is indeed not easy. We all need patience. I would also like to talk about the mandate and the composition of the task force. These are described under point 3. The composition is mentioned on page 4. Due to the costs, the task force will mainly meet online.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I can only repeat my question. This is about technical and organizational things. I am much more interested in asking why? Why should we stay together? What do we want in Europe and what do we want in our Central Conference? What is our vision for staying together? I don't find this question in the documents. It only says how we organize ourselves. I miss that. It is comparable to the questions I have to ask myself when I get married. It's about who do I want to be with and what future do we see for ourselves. I'm not interested in the details of a marriage contract. I want to know what our shared vision is. I can't find that in any of these documents. What is our vision for Methodism in Europe? How we organize ourselves belongs in the second row. If it is only about how we organize the church between those who want to stay in a traditional or more open church, we will only find a small common reason to stay together. I don't have a specific proposal for how we can include that in the mission. But that's what I'm missing. Why and where do we want to go together?

*Bishop Streiff:* It will be helpful if you bring this question into the conversation with the bishops this afternoon.

*Wilfried Nausner:* I would like to reiterate what Stefan has already said. It is a question that also arises for me: Where is our commitment and where is our trust in each other? The further away the commitment is made from our own personal situation, the less trust we have. But the more binding and the more important other decisions are in our church. That is the very special thing about our organization.

The General Conference does not take responsibility for what I do, but tells me what to do. That's a very difficult situation, and if that doesn't change structurally, and if they're not places of commitment, of trust that we have in each other, then it's going to be very, very difficult.

So the question Stefan has raised is: What is our relationship to each other? Are we still committed to each other? Do we want to?

What is being proposed here only affects us as a Central Conference or Annual Conference and believes that we can then just move on. But if this issue is not resolved somehow, then we will spend a lot of time on things that we will then delete later.

*Bishop Streiff:* Tomorrow, we will have a conversation with the General Conference delegates about what else will be talked about outside of the protocol at General Conference. And some of these thoughts and plans are aimed at giving more authority to the regions of the Church.

*Bischoff Streiff:* Let's move on to the third document. It deals with the question of what to consider when an Annual Conference wants to separate from the UMC. Many proposals in the minutes have mainly the USA background. Therefore, it was important for us as European bishops to show how a separation would have to take place in our context. We have some experience with countries that have left the Church (e.g. Sweden). But it is a very complex procedure. It will also be important that all conferences that want to leave the UMC are aware of what this would mean before the vote.

For the members in the Executive Committee, I point out that on Saturday afternoon we will be dealing with a motion from the Bureau proposing to set up a working group on how to proceed and what to consider.

*Bishop Streiff:* In the afternoon, we will meet online at 1:00 p.m. with the other bishops. They will first inform us about their situation in their Central Conference. After that we can ask questions. After a break we can then bring in our questions and hints for the European situation.

In the 2nd part, Bishop Harald Rückert will be with us. They had an intensive process in Germany, how they want to deal with the question around homosexuality. They are going the way with a community covenant. He will inform us about this way.

We hoped that Superintendent Stefan Kraft would be able to participate in this conversation. I received an email yesterday that he has heart problems and therefore cannot participate in our conversation. No other person will be able to attend in his place, so Bishop Rückert will attend alone.

We interrupt for the lunch break.

Friday, March 12, 2021, 1:00 p.m.

**Online session via Zoom**

## Meeting with the European Bishops

Bishop Patrick Streiff

*Bishop Streiff* welcomes the newly connected Bishops Harald Rückert, Eduard Khegay and Christian Alsted. He invites them to read together a liturgical text on the covenant in the Worldwide Church:

### A Companion Litany to Our Covenant for the Worldwide United Methodist Church

**Leader:** In covenant with God and each other, we affirm our unity in Christ.

**People:** We will take faithful steps to live as a worldwide church in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

**Leader:** In covenant with God and each other, we commit ourselves to be in ministry with all people.

**People:** In faithfulness to the gospel, we will cross boundaries of language, culture, social or economic status as we grow in mutual love and trust.

**Leader:** In covenant with God and each other, we participate in God's mission as partners in ministry.

**People:** We share our God-given gifts, experiences, and resources recognizing that they are of equal value, whether spiritual, financial, or missional.

**Leader:** In covenant with God and each other, we commit ourselves to full equality.

**People:** We uphold equity and accountability in our relationships, structures, and responsibilities for the denomination.

**Leader:** In covenant with God and each other, we enter afresh into a relationship of mutuality.

**People:** With God's grace, we joyfully live out our worldwide connection in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

*Bishop Streiff:* In Europe we work together in different ways. In doing so, we also discover a richness. For this meeting, the members of the Executive Committee, all the superintendents and the delegates to the General Conference are invited. I would like to invite now that we introduce ourselves country by country.

Round of introductions of all connected persons.

*Bishop Streiff:* I now ask Bishop Khegay to report to us from his episcopal area.

*Bishop Eduard Khegay* reports from his diocese: I am very happy about the cooperation of the bishops in Europe. The church leadership in Russia has a different context and view of the protocol than those who drafted it. We have a very traditional attitude towards homo-

sexuality. Usually I am asked why we should spend time on this issue. Poverty or alcoholism, violence in families are much more pressing issues for us. Of course, there are also homosexual persons in our country, but this is not considered with the same urgency. The traditional orientation would be compatible with our understanding, another orientation would not. So in the future we and I will work with people who have a traditional orientation. I am in conversation with various groups. This triggers the question of what our cooperation in Europe will look like in the future. I hope that we can talk to each other in respect and help each other. I have a lot of respect for the difficult task he has in his central conference. We will probably separate, which is not desirable, but probably the only possibility for our future. I hope that we can continue to stay in contact. We can learn a lot from each other if we listen to each other. I feel like Martin Luther, who once said: Here I stand and can do no other. Amen.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much, Eduard. I now ask Christian Alsted to describe his situation.

*Bishop Christian Alsted:* I too appreciate the collaboration with the other bishops in Europe. Thank you for the faith we share and the Methodist understanding we may have together. When I speak with my responsible leaders, much time and energy goes into dealing with the pandemic and little into the question of the future of the church. People are preoccupied with how we can be the church in this situation, what the future means for us.

And when they think about the future, they are not thinking so much about the future of the UMC as they are about the future of ministry in their local church. For many pastors to whom I have posed the question of what the church should look like as it opens up, as things change, other questions and decisions for the present are more important than making meaningful decisions for the future. In the midst of this present management, we have the question of the common denomination, which involves a separation of some kind, though of course we don't know what that separation will look like. That all depends on what is decided at the General Conference, whenever that conference is held. A year ago, we also thought there would be a Central Conference this year. So, who knows what the future will look like, but for now we will focus on our process and the processes that are going on in the church. I will report on my parish and how things are looking.

My field, as you probably know, is quite diverse: theological, social, economic, cultural. But also, in terms of language and so many other elements. Nevertheless, as in your episcopal area, we have very strong and good relations, and we have been working together and supporting each other for many years, we have been celebrating services together and praying together for many years. But we also know that there are disagreements. These disagreements are not new. It's that in some parts of my bishopric there are countries or annual conferences that have been very clear about which direction they want to move. Whether it's that they want to move to a fully inclusive church or they say if the current stance of the church is to move in a more open or diverse direction, that would mean they could no longer stay in the UMC, and then there are a number of annual conferences that are undecided. Some of the annual conferences, similar to what Bishop Khegay said, are not interested in

getting into the conversation about this. But now, of course, it's becoming more urgent to have a conversation about this. We have a roundtable set up that has been put on hold because of the postponement of the General Conference, which of course is not good for a process like this. For us, it's also a big financial cost to gather people from our bounds in one place, so we can't meet that often. We know where the different positions are, but we have not yet reached a point where we can talk about it.

So what are the possible solutions that we will propose to our Central Conference when it will be in 2023? We are committed to making a proposal to the Central Conference, and this proposal could include how we want to deal with each other even if we decide to separate. In the Nordic and Baltic regions, we will still have to talk about how the relationships will be, because we will all still be there. And some of the relationships between the local churches will hopefully continue, some of the missions or projects that we have done together will hopefully continue, our relationships will hopefully continue.

We are not concerned with convincing anyone of anything. But we are trying to have conversations about how we can create enough space for different theological positions and practices that allow as many as possible to live and serve in the church with integrity and true to their convictions. And we believe that we can create a respectful space, and I would say that the statement of commitment that Bishop Rückert, Streiff and I made a couple of weeks ago should be seen in that context. It's a desire to create a respectful space where people can live in probity to their beliefs.

I would like to thank you again for the invitation, and I would like to thank my colleagues Streiff, Khegay and Rückert for the good cooperation and the collegial relationship, which is really one of the blessings in my daily service, so thank you very much.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much, Christian. We continue with Bishop Harald Rückert.

*Bishop Harald Rückert:* Thank you for allowing me to be with you, to hear and to learn. I also want to emphasize again that the cooperation of the European bishops is very helpful for me, and not only with regard to the issue of homosexuality. Even if we disagree, it is helpful for all of us to be able to do this in the best of fellowship at this challenging time.

My Central Conference consists of only one country. That is what makes us different from each other. We have three annual conferences, but only one country and one language. Each conference has its own atmosphere and culture, but is far less apart than you live in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. However, even in Germany we have the whole range of understanding in dealing with human sexuality. The discussion started here 10-15 years ago. In 2018, for example, in all of our three annual conferences, we started a broader discussion on these issues within the conference session. We didn't adopt any wording. But there was a clear trend that most conference members in all three annual conferences, although more than 75% would describe themselves as traditional, a clear majority wanted to open up the church.

Then we tried to prepare for the upcoming special session of the General Conference. The option of something like the "One Church Plan" passing General Conference would have been acceptable to many in Germany, not all, but many. Then in St. Louis in 2019, the "Traditional Plan" was adopted by the General Conference. However, not only was the traditional view affirmed, but additional regulations were made that those who did not have this view would have to leave the church. This was not acceptable to many Methodists in Germany. It was not about the traditional understanding, but about the whole trappings, the punitive sense of the whole decision. And when we met as an Executive Committee two weeks after that General Conference in St. Louis, there was a unanimous vote. Both the more progressive members and the conservative members felt that these additional regulations were not acceptable to us, even though we have very, very different opinions on the subject. Once we communicated that, a really tough discussion started not only in the executive, but in all three conferences and in our communities. Our conviction in this executive meeting was that we want to move forward to become a church in Germany that is fully inclusive on the one hand, but at the same time provides a basis for different opinions, that provides space and respectful space for people who really hold to a traditional view of marriage and homosexuality. And we're trying to find a way to be honest about our own beliefs, but also stay together as a church. Not all, but many felt that these issues around homosexuality should not have the power to divide us as a church. We want to seek and find ways, for a common mission, because we realized very clearly that we need each other, despite all our differences.

The task of staying together despite differing opinions was really huge, and the Executive Committee then tasked me as a bishop to bring people together for a round table discussion. And they asked me to bring people from across the spectrum to the table and talk about what each of us needs so that the EMK in Germany can continue to be a real home for all these needs and perceptions, but also for the LGBTQ community.

I invited 22 people to the round table. We worked for 18 months. We had physical and online meetings. It was really one of the most intense times I have experienced as a bishop in my Central Conference, we were not sure if we would succeed. Always at the beginning of a meeting, it wasn't really clear if it was going to be the last one or not. And it was really open where we would end up. In the end, it was like a miracle when the Round Table unanimously agreed on a compromise in January 2020, which it presented to the Central Conference. Roughly outlined, our compromise consists of two pillars: One, the deletion of some sentences in our church order in the German version that would allow local churches and pastors and annual conferences to open themselves to ministry with LGBTQ persons. Second, we want to create a new community covenant that is home to people who want to hold to the traditional view but do not want to leave the church. It is to be a vessel within the structure of our church. This was a unanimous vote and we will submit it to the Central Conference.

Because of the postponement of the General Conference and therefore our Central Conference, we had a broader discussion with the Central Conference Board in November 2020 and all the delegates of the Central Conference deliberated for one day on this proposal from the Round Table and then the Board made an interesting decision. The decision is that until the next or extraordinary Central Conference meeting,

the few sentences of our Church Order will be suspended so that local congregations and pastors can be intentional and open to LGBTQ persons, and at the same time we will begin the process of establishing the Community Alliance. This is our way forward on how we want to stay together. This proposal was approved by the Executive Committee after much discussion, and it was published in the church, and I received much, much gratitude that we are at least providing an idea of how we can stay together as a church in Germany and move forward with integrity.

Now the work has begun to do the detail work on this community covenant, and we are trying to think of many details. But there is still a lot of conversation needed to shape and form this community covenant. At the same time, I have learned that same-sex marriages are to take place in some local churches in the next few months. We have not yet made a definite decision in the EMK in Germany, because this can only be done by the Central Conference, probably in 2022, but the way we want to proceed seems to be very clear: We want to be a church that includes a broad spectrum of different opinions, because it is in the genes of Methodism that there is some diversity within the church. And at the same time, we want to stay together in mission, even if we have different opinions on certain issues. I always encourage my people to figure out what our way might be to stay together as a church in probity. We want to be connected to the whole church. But at the same time, I encourage people to figure out what will best help us in our common mission. So if the "protocol" is adopted by General Conference or not, then there is a place for the EMC within post-separation UMC or UMC, whatever you want to call it.

Immediately after the 2019 Special Session, there was a feeling in Germany that we had been kicked out of the UMC with the decisions of the General Conference. But now things have changed. Because we still want to stay part of the global connection and bring our ideas and we want to be in good fellowship, especially with the EMC all over Europe and with all the other Wesleyan Methodist churches in Europe that are gathered in the European Methodist Council.

So the common path seems to be open for us in Germany. A lot of detail work still needs to be done and the compromise that we have found and that has been decided is still very fragile. We have to be very careful and we have achieved some things, but we are not through with everything yet. There is still a lot of work to be done.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much. We will have time later to talk with Bishop Rückert. So we want to take time now to be in conversation with Bishop Khegay or Alsted. Are there any questions?

*Thomas Fux:* I have a question for Christian Alsted. I like very much what you said about the relationship between all countries and Annual Conferences, although there are differences that I would be interested in. By when do these Annual Conferences or countries have to say they want to break up or stay together? In what time frame does this process have to take place?

*Bishop Alsted:* They have not decided whether to go or not. But they have written a statement that clearly expresses their position and the direction they are going. We are moving toward full inclusivity. But a conference that has endorsed the so-called "Traditional Plan" has issued a series of statements expressing that their position is not a negotiable position for them.

*Rares Calugar:* Do you see a possibility of compromise like in Germany?

*Bishop Alsted:* In my episcopal area, the situation is a little different. At least in one of my conferences, the diversity is so great that we have to take it into account. We are working on setting up something similar to Germany. But I don't know if we will be successful with it. There is a lot of diversity between the different Annual Conferences. Some conferences are clearly conservative or the vast majority of their members are clearly conservative. But it's also about the relationship with the other conferences and the episcopal oversight. And there is the question of being an annual conference in an episcopal area that is moving in a more moderate direction. Can this conference be allowed to have its own order? The deciding factor will be what the General Conference decides to do. If the General Conference moves in a direction where it changes the definition of marriage, where it begins to expand the way marriage is described in church order, then it will be very difficult for some of these conservative conferences to remain in our church. But if the General Conference is wise, it will prescribe as little as possible on this. I even think that what is written about marriage in the proposed new global social principles is wise, because they have chosen to say as little as possible. But this is just a draft.

So it's about how much space we can give each other and how much respect there can be between us.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* What does the church look like after the pandemic? Can you tell us something about that?

*Bishop Alsted:* This question is very much on our minds. If we can't celebrate services and have little opportunity to be together, then one does wonder what it will be like in the future. How do we want to start again with worship services and fellowship. Many believe that we are still far from a normal time. Therefore, they are not so interested in what the General Conference will decide.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I can understand that: The world is no longer the same as it was before. What are the implications of that? The church has to be rethought (Re-think church). Have you started this process?

*Bishop Alsted:* We were just talking about this in Cabinet last week. How can we make the church fit for the future? We also have approaches like Fresh Express.

*Bishop Streiff:* This morning we talked about the three documents. Of course, the question came up what we will do in our Central Conference. That is, of course, our main question. But it is helpful to hear what is happening in the other conferences. We



know that the protocol still has to be approved . But we don't have any big questions about these documents.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* Bishop Rückert has emphasized that we need each other and I would therefore like to ask how he comes to this statement, what is behind it. And on the other hand, I would like to ask what is the reason for this large common organization, what contents are connected with it, what connects us with each other. The papers regulate the technical things, but what is the content?

*Bishop Rückert:* One aspect is of course the question of resources. We are a small church and cannot afford to split into two churches. If we split up, it will weaken us for mission. We have been different in our opinions in the past. We don't want to give up the diversity; it helps us stay awake and move forward. I learned two or three decades ago that only by remaining different and learning from each other can we be true Methodist Church.

*Bishop Alsted:* In this worldwide covenant, what we are becomes visible, for example in "In Mission together". Wesleyan Christianity has a future in Europe. As Europeans we can learn from each other by supporting each other. We need the relationship with other Methodists in other countries. a church focused on the country has the danger of going in a small separatist direction.

*Wilfried Nausner:* My question is: Do they as bishops consider this problem as a question of trust or as a question of doctrine? I would be interested in that. Probably it is a mixture, but what do they think is the basis of our problem? If it is not a doctrinal issue, then we would have to talk about the trust issue. We will have to think about where and how to build trust, and this issue would be important for our conference in America. As I see it, trust is not being built right now by large organizations. It is built in small ways, it is built in close relationships. So I would be interested to hear how you think about that. Because that is the issue that we need to work on in our conference, because there seems to be a problem in the discussions that we are having.

*Bishop Kheday:* I think this is a very important and profound question. I would say both doctrine and trust. The problems we have are first and foremost a doctrinal controversy. You know I agree with my fellow bishops on the importance of unity and connection, and I myself am a product of the EMC, and I feel a great blessing from it and benefit from it myself, so that is undoubtedly our strength.

But at the same time, the question of human sexuality is a question of doctrine, and I would say moral standards. Since we believe in them, in my field this becomes a conflict with unity and connection wisdom, and therefore we are preparing for a scenario whether we like it or not.

When the separation occurs, we adhere to doctrine or something other than unity, to make a long story short. How I see the situation in my area, but it is also a question of trust, how I see it.

You know, the problem is that there are some activists on the progressive side who are not happy with the model of the century or the moderate model, and so the issue of trust, at least from my conservative perspective, is this.

Will they really settle for a one-church plan or some kind of compromise? My conclusion is that they will not. They will continue until full inclusion is accepted by all, at least that's how I see it in U.S. politics, I think.

This may be another controversy that I'm bringing in here, but the way I see it, from their perspective in the U.S., let's say, for example, "black lives matter," you know, people claim that now and it's a very hot topic, but then there are people who say, for example, "all lives matter."

And I find it unbelievable that these people are now criticized, marginalized and pushed away.

In many corners of social media and up until the release, because they just said that all lives matter, because they're not in the mainstream of "black lives matter," they're now being pushed into the corner and they have to be ashamed of that, and that's just unbelievable to me as an outsider.

I see U.S. society as a society of freedom, but now some people are sort of being pushed into a corner because there are norms from different parts of society. And the same thing is happening with conservatives in the US.

If you have a business and you're not friendly to sexual minorities, you're going to be bombarded with criticism and social media from other parts of society to the point where you might lose your business, and to me that's the other extreme.

*Bishop Alsted:* I would also say it's both. But when I look at the General Conference debate, in many ways it shapes the debate in the Church and the attitude in the Church. In the U.S., it's more a matter of trust than doctrine, because the church hasn't debated doctrine or theology on this issue for decades. They have fought each other and made it a battleground of opinions and accusations, but it has been a very long time since there has been a substantive, theological conversation in the church on this issue. But I think it has happened in some central conferences, and it has happened in Europe. I think this is a very important issue and one where there is some reluctance to discuss this issue, at least in my area. But I notice that the tendency is to discuss what is right or wrong.

*Bishop Rückert:* I would also say: it is probably both. In our case, we now emphasize the trust side, because we cannot solve the question theologically. In trusting each other, we can have good theological discussion. At the round table we had little theological discussion but worked intensively on mutual trust. When we have trust in each other, we can have good discussion. I believe that we need to invest as much as possible in trust in order to have good theological discussion.

*Bishop Streiff:* How was it then, with the Lutheran Church in Norway, Christian? Can you say something about how they dealt with this issue? Can we learn something from that?

*Bishop Alsted:* I am not sure because the situation is so different. It is a national church with a very high membership. Many church leaders are politically elected and there is a very different dynamic there. In this church, I think they did well that they decided to speak with one voice. They knew they had different positions, but they decided that they would speak with one voice to keep the church together as much as possible. They decided that the church should open up to same-sex marriage. Ordination wasn't really a big issue, but same-sex marriage was. The church was open to same-sex marriage, but at the same time they wanted to protect the minority, and allow them to act according to their conscience. And somehow they managed to keep the church together. There have been some who have left, but not very many, and so they've done much better in that regard than some of the mainline denominations in the United States. Those have lost 15 to 20% of their members, which was not at all the case in Norway, and it was mainly some pastors who left, whereas in my country, in Denmark, it was a government decree. It was decided that the church would allow same-sex marriages. And that the bishops had to develop a ritual for it. So it was not the church's own decision. But even there, they managed to keep things together, including by protecting the minority. And I think that's the key that we can learn, that the Church has to protect its minorities, even when it comes to theological positions.

*Bishop Rückert:* Supplementing Wilfried Nausner, I would like to point out that all these questions are based on the cultural background from which we come. We have to take into account in which context we are having the theological discussion and the trust discussion with that. We have to be aware of the differences whether we are having the discussion in Africa or in Switzerland.

*Wilfried Nausner:* In Albania, there is only one word for it: trust. There is no word for faith. Trust comes first. I would like to have this discussion, but it must be characterized by trust.

*Bishop Alsted:* Would it be helpful now to respond to the questions that have been asked from Northern Europe about the documents?

*Bishop Streiff:* Please tell us about it.

*Bishop Alsted:* The questions are now more related to the papers and the task force because we had discussed it more intensively. The following questions have come up:

- Why is Task Force made up of elected members of the Annual Conferences and not members of the Executive Committee?
- Why don't we reach out to "non-UMC Methodists in Europe" to walk this process with them?
- Shouldn't that start more quickly than the documents suggested?
- Don't we need a task force in every case?
- Are there important issues we need to work on as European Methodists, whether or not the protocol is adopted by the General Conference?
- Shouldn't regional unity in Europe be part of the mandate?
- By when can we expect the Annual Conferences to know what they want to do?
- What if a central conference decides to leave?

*Etienne Rudolph:* Are there congregations that will leave the church no matter what direction the church goes?

*Eduard Khegay:* Not for us. We are Methodists and want to remain so. We just have a different view regarding human sexuality.

*Harald Rückert:* We have lost a small community who have left us. Conservative congregations have the opportunity to belong in the Community Covenant.

*Christian Alsted:* I know of a few congregations and pastors who want to leave the churches.

*Urs Schweizer:* When I look back at the discussion we had in the past 90 minutes, I realize that on the one hand it was a conversation among men. We had only male speakers, and on the other hand I think it was a conversation of men, especially from the western part of our Central Conference, and I wonder if this reality tells us something about listening more to those who don't speak up or who don't want to speak up. Are there recommendations on how to listen to those who are reluctant to speak up or who don't speak up? That's kind of the question I have now after this time together.

*Eduard Khegay:* I have this experience every day. In my culture, you don't have the right to speak when older people are present. Then I ask people directly: What are you saying?

*Harald Rückert:* I don't have a solution for you either, Urs. But the question brings us back to the question of trust. If there is trust, we can speak more openly with each other. There is no other solution: sensitivity and trust.

*Lea Hafner:* I think it's more about language difficulties and an online meeting doesn't necessarily help either. I would like to thank you very much for your work, which helps us to shape our future. For me, the conversation was helpful.

*Bishop Streiff:* Many thanks to the three bishops who helped us to hear and understand their situation. We wish you God's blessing for your further journey.

We interrupt the meeting.

Friday, March 12, 2021, 3:30 p.m.

**Online session via Zoom**

### **Meeting with Bishop Harald Rückert**

Bishop Patrick Streiff

*Bishop Streiff:* I have already informed this morning that Stefan Kraft cannot be with us. I ask Bishop Rückert to give him our greetings. Thank you, Harald, that you now have a little more time to inform us about the path you have taken in Germany. Whoever sees the result of your way may think that the way was easy. We experience it partly similar in our conferences, especially in the Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa.

*Harald Rückert:* It all started with a cabinet meeting of the Central Conference with all my superintendents, two weeks after the 2019 special session in St. Louis and the results there. We had a four-day cabinet meeting trying to figure out what these decisions in St. Louis would mean for our church. The whole spectrum was there: Some were relieved about the St. Louis decision. Others said that this was no longer their church and wanted to leave. Those four days were some of the most intense times we have ever had. We in our Central Conference Cabinet, that is, the nine district superintendents and the bishop, did not have the same opinion on the issues on the table. We had no idea how to continue the conversation as superintendents about these issues, so we took breaks. We had worship services, we had communion services with each other, we had quiet times where we could each be by ourselves, and after four days of deliberating and wrestling and praying and tears, we came up with a very good proposal for the executive session to meet right after the four-day cabinet meeting. It is the idea that we should at least make an effort to keep the church together, despite different fundamental different opinions. We wanted to become a church that was more open to LGBTQ people in our congregations and in our society, while trying to protect the traditional views and perceptions within the church. We deliberated this with our board, which consists of just over 30 people, and it was a very intense experience. In the end, the board passed a resolution. You will find the decision in their documents, that we want to remain or become a church that offers a spiritual home to as many people as possible.

And then the executive decided that the bishop will invite to a round table. It's not about voting, it's about talking about how we can realize the idea of staying together. 22 people participated, from all sides, lay, pastors, open and conservative. The 1st meeting was held on May 1, 2019. We sat in a circle. We looked at each other, and there was so much tension in the room, we didn't have a clear idea of how to interact, how to approach all of this. We just felt like we were faced with an almost insurmountable task of finding a way forward. And there was an image that was passed on to us from the executive branch, which was to try to create a kind of vessel where people could be comfortable with each other, but at the same time not be too closed off. It should be open so that there is interaction on all sides. And at this meeting I thought, let's try, and maybe this was the first and the last meeting at the same time, because there was so much tension, so much reluctance to talk to each other. And it was really hard in the beginning, we also had the question of whether or not we could do a communion service at the end of the meeting, it

wasn't clear if that would be possible among us. And then we got into conversation for half a day and at the end we did a communion service, a very short service. And it was a kind of test of blessing to go to the Lord's table, together with these people who seem so difficult to me. But sharing the bread, sharing the cup and forming a circle and being blessed by the same body, that encouraged us for a second meeting and so on, and so we had a process of almost 18 months and we reached many, many, many times points where we thought we could not continue.

I had to withdraw people from the round table because they did not keep to the agreements. That was very difficult and took a lot more discussion at the round table, but in the end it was possible to build trust with each other. There was some irritation from outside and inside, but we kept trying to talk and listen to each other. And the question was: What do you need as a conservative person, what do you need as an open liberal person to stay in this church and feel at home? We asked that question not as a theological question, but as a question about personal and spiritual needs. Another very important decision was that we agreed on some rules for the conversation, and one of those rules was that we try to be responsible for each other. And we agreed that the more liberal people at the roundtable would try to speak for the conservatives in public and vice versa. It was a hard lesson, I can tell you, and we failed at it a lot. But we tried again and again. That was the case at the board meeting in November and also when we presented the compromise proposal to the entire executive and delegates of the Central Conference. The liberal part of the roundtable presented the conservative part of the compromise and Stefan Kraft, who is really a very conservative person, said, "Yes I want to be part of a church that is open to homosexual people in the local congregations, and that's why we are suspending some sentences in our church order for a certain time. "

In January 2020, we had our sixth physical meeting and eighth meeting overall. We met for two days in Fulda. And we tried to work on the compromise. And about an hour before the meeting was supposed to close, it was not clear whether we would be able to reach a compromise or whether the whole thing would burst an hour before the end. We discussed and deliberated very intensely and honestly, we took breaks for personal and community prayer and came back for further deliberation. And then it was like a miracle of the Holy Spirit for all of us that we were able to come to a final unanimous decision that day for the compromise that we want to propose to the Central Conference. That was a deep spiritual experience for all of us. At the end, we went to the small Catholic chapel of the place where they offered us wine and consecrated bread. We stood around the altar and shared the bread and wine. And it was as if a lot of tension fell off of us, and we felt like sisters and brothers in that moment, knowing that we are so completely different.

And then we tried to present this compromise to the executive branch. We thought we were done, but that was wrong. We had to get into the detailed work of how to form and shape this community alliance, for example. There are still many discussions to be had as well.

But on a new level of trust it was really possible to have this conversation and try to shape and form this community covenant. In November 2020, after discussions with the delegates, the executive decided to suspend a few sentences of our German version of the Church Order. And at the same time, the Gemeinschaftsbund should get going. Because we thought that this Gemeinschaftsbund is something new that we don't have any

experience with yet, we decided to just start, and make any readjustments, so that the Central Conference, which is to be held in November 2022, can make the final decision on all this.

That's the current state of affairs, there's still some irritation, there's still a lot of need for discussion, there's still a lot of questions that can't be answered now, but we're slowly making progress. Many or most of our members have signaled their relief that there is a compromise that will allow us or at least give us the opportunity to stay together. Some are not so happy about the community covenant, and the conservative people are not so happy about the opening of the church, but that is the nature of a good compromise, that it does not satisfy everyone.

The compromise looks similar to what was proposed to the General Conference with the "One Church Plan." But there are a few differences. The main difference is that in our church, it's not a decision made by some kind of majority to which the minority must submit. It's a compromise at the end of a long, long conversation that was a unanimous compromise that we came to, and that's our hope, the basis that this could become real and really help us as a church, rather than a decision. So much for my report on that.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much for this detailed report. Are there any questions about it first of all from Southeastern Europe, even if your situation does not have the same dimension?

*David Chlupáček:* What do you mean by the word compromise? I love more the word consensus. Is it the same thing? In compromise, you give up something. In the documents, they talk about the covenant. Does the idea come from the round table or from some other place?

*Bishop Rückert:* The second part of the question is simpler and shorter: The idea from the Community Covenant comes from the Round Table. To the first part of the question consensus versus compromise, I would like to say: this compromise has both in it. Each group of the church had to go to its limits and also go a little bit beyond, that is the compromise. Because we were willing to do this on both sides, the consensus came with the unanimous vote. But we also felt: there was not only the joy of reaching consensus, there was also the pain of compromise. This was very hard worked. It was very difficult because everybody had to give something. But at the same time, it's also the expression that we want to stay together and we don't want to let go. That is the consensus.

*Andrzej Malicki:* You talked about consequences for local churches. You mentioned that the EMK is small in Germany. Aren't you afraid that you will lose members?

*Harald Rückert:* There are people who have left the church because of this issue, even before the decision of 2019. Mostly because they were homosexual. After 2019, we lost even more of them. When we started the process with the round table, there were also resignations again. I received nasty letters. All these people left us. They would have left us anyway. I think the compromise helps us keep people. Maybe the church will become

interesting to others again because we are showing a way to stay together even if we disagree. I am hopeful.

*Andrzej Malicki:* The Church in Poland is much smaller. Our situation is different.

*Rares Calugar:* If the General Conference accepts the protocol, how do you deal with it?

*Bishop Rückert:* If the protocol is accepted, that is in line with our approach. With that, we can continue to be a church in the UMC. We assume that the General Conference will make a decision and then we have to react to it.

*Helene Bindl:* Do you doubt that the General Conference will adopt the Protocol?

*Bishop Rückert:* The General Conference can always act surprisingly. We have experienced that again and again. We now have a new date for 2022, but what will happen between now and then? We do not know.

*Lea Hafner:* You said that some people had to leave the round table. Can you say something more about that?

*Bishop Rückert:* When I took over the chairmanship and the invitations for the round table, I also requested that I could uninvite people if the situation required it. It was then my own decision to invite these people out.

*Henrik Schauer mann:* I have another question about the Community Covenant. Is it something like a separate annual conference or like a matrix structure? What do you think, if the protocol is adopted and the traditional part leaves, will the covenant leave or will it stay in the EMK?

*Bishop Rückert:* The Community Covenant is explicitly not a separate conference, but a Community Covenant. At the very beginning, the conservatives wanted to found their own conservative conference. But that would not have worked. Both parts belong to the EMK in Germany. There is only one annual conference for all. So that this covenant can also function on the CC level, we also give them the possibility to have certain people elected for it.

On the second question, I hope that this covenant will not separate from the EMC. The relationships among them are strong. At the moment I don't see any congregation leaving the church. The covenant is open to individuals and congregations. So they can form a conservative covenant within our structure.

*Henrik Schauer mann:* When a ministry is assigned, is care taken to ensure that only conservative pastors are assigned to conservative congregations? Is attention paid to compatibility or do you just have to accept that then?



*Bishop Rückert:* All ministry assignments have always tried to take into account which pastor fits into which congregation. We have been doing that for many years. There are many criteria to consider. Nothing will change. This question is now being added to these criteria. We will take that into account. But on the other hand, there are only a few pastors who belong to the community alliance. If there is now the possibility to accept each other in spite of different affiliations, a ministry assignment of a liberal pastor to a conservative congregation is possible.

*Bishop Streiff:* A little earlier you said that you are small. But in Europe you are the largest Methodist church. This is what distinguishes our countries from each other. Moreover, most of our countries have a common conviction on this issue, with the exception of Switzerland.

*Bishop Rückert:* I sent you the guide for our roundtable, which shows that we are still trying to frame our discussion within the whole church, and maybe the last two points of this paper are other crucial points, the last point says that we believe each other's faith. We acknowledge love for Jesus Christ, for the Scriptures, for our church and for our mission, one on one. That seems so nice, but that is the real challenge for the church in Germany and also for the people in the community covenant. Because it means a liberal has to acknowledge the love of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures and the church of the conservatives and the conservatives have to accept and acknowledge the same thing on the other side. That is the core, so to speak, for our common way into the future, that we do not question each other's faith, but that we believe each other even if we come to different conclusions on this or that issue. I cannot guarantee that we will succeed. It is easier to separate than to stay together on this basis, that is the challenge. But that is the real challenge that comes from the gospel, and the gospel also enables us to accept that challenge and at least try to move forward in the ways.

*Bishop Streiff:* What can we learn from this for our Central Conference?

*Ivana Prochazkova:* In the Czech Republic, we don't feel like a partner in the round table.

*David Chlupáček:* I heard that Bishop Rückert said that the basis for the conversation was the desire to stay together. That seems to me to be very important. The two sides are so opposite that it is difficult to get them together. The German brothers and sisters have shown us that dialogue and compromise are possible. I am not sure that we can do it the same way.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you for this helpful vote, it points out what we can learn.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* The important thing for me was that we have to learn to trust each other. I don't believe that good structures and papers and procedures can help us. We have to decide whether we want to trust each other. If we don't trust each other, we won't get anywhere.

*Lenka Procházková:* I would also like to emphasize what Stefan says. The trust has to be there before. You came to the conclusion that you need each other to be in the same mission. I am not sure if we are in the same situation, that we need each other.

*Andrzej Malicki:* We have to stand together. We are stronger when we stand together, we need each other. In Germany, it is a country with the same language. In our Central Conference we are with very different cultures and languages. That makes it much more difficult. We have to try harder. We need to be clear about how solid we want to be together. Yes, we have to trust each other.

*Bishop Streiff:* When you, Harald look back to the beginning of the Round Table. I could imagine that not everybody said: Yes, I trust you. What steps did you take so that the trust grew?

*Bishop Rückert:* No, that was so difficult and took a lot of energy. I also kept thinking whether it wouldn't be much easier if each side proceeded on its own. This required trust in each other was also the reason why I had to unload someone. Not because he was conservative, but because trust was at risk. The trust-building process does not proceed in a straight line. It takes time for prayer, silence. Sometimes we felt it was like walking on Peter's water. We never knew if the next step would hold. We had to have trust in God's way with us before we could find trust in each other. We also had very different cultures, for example between West and East Germany.

*Bishop Streiff:* What can we learn from this?

*Wilfried Nausner:* It is very helpful to hear what Bishop Rückert says. We have a mandate to be in dialogue with God and to be in conversation with each other. We do not need the proposed process.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* We have heard about the situation in many countries and regions. But I haven't heard anything from Switzerland yet. Can you tell us where you stand?

*Bishop Streiff:* It would be good if Claudia Haslebacher could give us an insight into the discussions in Switzerland.

*Claudia Haslebacher:* We started after the General Conference. In our Annual Conference we have two languages, French and German. And we have people from Switzerland, from France and from Tunisia who are at the same table, in the same room. So it's a very diverse annual conference and let's say also difficult situation.

We found out what we already knew, that the tensions between us are very great. And at first they seemed to be mainly between Switzerland and France. But then we realized that it's not just a question of country or nationality. We have different opinions in both countries and also radical opinions on this issue. I exclude North Africa, because with the Muslim background in these countries, they are in such a different situation than all of us in Western Europe.

We wanted to put together a working group with people from Switzerland and France, women and men. People also with experience as homosexuals. It should be people from very conservative to very liberal and everything in between. And we did a process of trust, talking openly and honestly with each other, for a year.

This working group came to a conclusion on how we want to go into the future as the Annual Conference Switzerland-France and North Africa. And the idea now is that at an upcoming Annual Conference we will make a decision on how we envision the future. It won't be a binding decision yet, because we can't do that. I think the process was maybe not the same as in Germany, but a little bit similar.

Finally, the Board adopted the conclusions of the working group and gives them in the discussion of the Annual Conference. We work in Zoom meetings and with written feedback. The main point is that we are an Annual Conference that has a mission. The mission is to invite people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ to change the world. We want to focus on that mission and not be divided by different opinions. The documents from Germany were available to us and were a very good help.

We came to the conclusion that we need to put aside the issue of 'homosexuality or heterosexuality' or whatever sexuality, in order to live as a missional church in the future. Our documents are not meant to make general statements about this so that there is greater freedom for people and churches who feel free in their conscience to work with LGBTQ people and homosexual marriages. And this would also give freedom to those people and those congregations who say in their conscience, no, that's not right, that's not correct, that's not biblical, we're not going to do that. The great challenge would be to accept and respect each other, to live in the future with these different convictions and to live one's own conviction without limiting others.

In Switzerland, I am quite confident that it will be possible to find a way together, with some adjustments or changes, but I think that the basic idea is widely accepted in Switzerland. In France it will be more difficult, there it is a minority which thinks in this direction. You have already heard that from Etienne. In France there are congregations that want to leave the Methodist church altogether. But it is not only about this issue. And so at this year's conference we will have further discussions with the intention of coming to a declaration of intent.

We will only have the people at the table who are willing to at least try to find a way, and with those who are not willing, there will be no way. And that is what saddens me. I'm not sure where we're going in our Central Conference. Many people here are willing to find a way. And we need that willingness to at least try and find a way. And for those who are not willing to at least try, there is no point in discussing.

*Bishop Streiff:* We would now also have time to ask questions about Switzerland-France.

*David Chlupáček:* Was that also a round table like in Germany?

*Claudia Haslebacher:* We are an Annual Conference with several countries and different cultures, that makes us different. As a working group we had a good way. But individual congregations, especially in France, do not care about this process, but decide on the basis of their own convictions alone. We will not be able to continue with 100% of all Methodists.

*Bishop Streiff:* I ask Etienne Rudolph to say something else about France. They have always emphasized there that we do not listen to them. When we asked them to participate in the working group, no one was willing to tell us what we should listen to.

*Etienne Rudolph:* You have said what needs to be said. People were not at all willing to embark on a common path because they were convinced that it was a wrong path. That's why they didn't help. If you don't want to join in the discussion, it's not possible. In France, when we point out that a common way is possible in Switzerland, they emphasize that the church in Switzerland does not follow a biblical way and that you have to obey God more. One of the problems is also that it is always the most radical who set the tone. The moderates are silent and then one has the impression that this is true for the whole church in France. But the moderates also often let themselves be led by the radicals.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I am very grateful for this insight. The Annual Conference Switzerland-France-North Africa is the largest conference in our Central Conference and makes up half of the Central Conference. When the Swiss decide something, the Central Conference has nothing more to say. All the more we have to be in dialogue with each other. I urge the Swiss to participate in the conversation.

*Etienne Rudolph:* I would also like to point out that those French people who are present in the discussion are those who get elected for a central conference. Those who do not discuss do not get elected to this body.

*Claudia Haslebacher:* One reason why few Swiss have spoken is that the bishop wanted the others to speak. But it is also because of the online meeting that we can't really be in conversation. It would be so important that we can meet. Last year's meeting was also not a real meeting. So it has been two years now since we really met. And it is important not to forget: we all speak different languages.

*Bishop Streiff:* I would like to point out that Claudia Haslebacher is leading this working group Switzerland-France.

*Jörg Niederer:* I realize that I am well informed about the situation in Switzerland and Germany. But I don't know anything about the other countries of our Central Conference.

*Bishop Streiff:* We will have time on Saturday afternoon to learn and share about the situation in our countries.

*Bishop Streiff:* Now I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Bishop Harald Rückert for the insight he has given us.

*Bishop Rückert:* I, too, thank you very much for the opportunity to be present in this discussion. The differences are even greater than in my Central Conference. I do not envy you. It is nice that we can be united in prayer. May God bless you on your way.

*Bishop Streiff:* I now ask three people to pray for the work of Bishop Rückert and the Central Conference in Germany. This may be done in their own language.

The afternoon session closes at 6:00 p.m. after prayers by *Markus Bach, Lea Hafner* and *Bishop Streiff*.

Unauthorized translation - original in German

## Minutes of the Executive Committee of Saturday, March 13, 2021

*Unauthorized translation - Original in German*

Saturday, March 13, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

**Online session via Zoom**

*Bishop Streiff* welcomes all members of the Executive Committee to this afternoon's meeting with a prayer from the Prayer Book of the British Methodist Church.

*Bishop Streiff:* We will be discussing this afternoon how we want to be a Methodist church together. You have received a proposal from the office for a process of conversation and preparation. This proposal is a result of a mandate the office received at the last meeting in Vienna when we could no longer go through all the reports. The office was given the task of further developing the written reports of the CC MSE Study Group and the Theology and Ordained Ministries Working Group, as well as planning the next steps. Therefore, we will need to consider today how we want to move into the future and not just wait for the results of the General Conference.

But we will not start with the report of the office. We will continue where we left off yesterday afternoon, when the Swiss and the French told about the current situation with regard to dealing with homosexuality from their conference. We will deal with the report of the bureau later.

At the beginning of our mutual information, I will ask the individual countries to give us an insight into their current situation with regard to the issue of homosexuality.

*Bishop Streiff:* Let's start in the north with Poland.

*Andrzej Malicki:* We have not had the opportunity to talk about this topic at the conference so far. We had to postpone the 2021 conference until October. But before the pandemic we could talk about it among the pastors. 90% of the pastors represent the traditional way in this topic. I am convinced that we need more discussions so that understanding for another way can grow. All church board members also represent the traditional way. We will also need some kind of round table so that we can understand and respect each other. I hope that this will be possible in the coming year. But I also have to admit that we need to talk to people in our church who are not pastors or lay people in the conference.

*Bishop Streiff:* Are there any questions about that?

*Andrzej Malicki:* Maybe Monika Zuber wants to complement me.

*Monika Zuber:* Maybe I can say one or two things about that. I wonder how the Polish superintendents want to get people's opinion. I think that most people are conservative and therefore not open to a conversation at all. I also think that our church is not open to another solution at all. At most, it's young people who are thinking about it. We are a very

traditional society, but the youth are rather open. I think we are leaning towards the traditional way. I would like to encourage the conversation about this because there is a need for conversation in our society, especially among the young, both inside and outside the church. These people need a voice in the conversation that will start in Poland in the next few years.

*Andrzej Malicki:* There is a big controversy in our country. People take to the streets every week to demonstrate against abortion laws. This has primarily to do with women's rights. Our law prohibits abortion, and that's what these people are turning against. It also has to do with trust in the church. For example, with problems of pedophilia in the Catholic Church. Therefore, many Poles no longer have confidence in the churches. Churches have lost trust and people. To the question of how we want to listen to people, I can only say that our pastors are sensitive enough to hear the opinions. In the pastors' meetings, these opinions can then be exchanged. I also believe that the younger generation is more open or liberal.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you for the assessments. If we listen carefully, we will find in many of our situations that there is a majority opinion and a minority opinion in our countries and churches. And we have to ask ourselves, how do we deal with this together? This will not only be a question in Poland.

*Bishop Streiff:* We continue with the Annual Conference Czech Republic-Slovakia.

*Stefan Rendoš:* We talked only with Slovak pastors and that was a year ago. If the protocol should be accepted by the General Conference, we discussed whether we then want to establish a traditional Slovak church and as a Slovak Methodist Church we will leave the UMC to join a traditional Methodist church.

*Ivana Procházková:* I was instructed by the Czech Church not to participate in any study group on the subject of homosexuality. However, we have not yet made a decision about our future affiliation with the UMC and do not want to do so now. But the consensus is that we do not want to participate in any study group. We want to be part of the worldwide church, but it is difficult if we cannot be part of a round table if we are not seen as partners. We have not made a decision to leave the CC. It is not acceptable for the Czech Church to think about a different understanding of marriage. We have no room for a new or different understanding in the field of LGBTQ.

*Bishop Streiff:* Is this the position of the church board that was given on the study group survey a year ago?

*David Chlupáček:* Yes, that is so. I was not part of all the discussions. It actually has to do with the decision of the church board a year ago. Since then, we haven't discussed it.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much. Let's go to Hungary.

*Laszlo Khaled:* In recent years there has been a discussion at various levels of the Hungarian Methodist Church, triggered by the 2016 General Conference. We had discussions in the conference, in the church council and also among the pastors. The Hungarian Methodist Church responded to the questions of the 1st study group of the Central Conference, which ended a year ago. There we said that we can stay together on the basis of the current church order. If something changes in this, we have to talk about it again. If there is a 2nd study group, the church board has decided that Henrik and I cannot be involved when it comes to changing the church order in any direction. Postponing General Conference has given us more time to think about it.

*Henrik Schaueremann:* It is true that we cannot participate in a study group that has the goal of working on the church order in the direction of an opening. That would not make sense if we would then reject every proposal. We would like to stay in the UMC, that is our family. If the Central Conference wants to change something about it, we can no longer stay in this church. If we do something like in Switzerland or Austria, we would have to join another Methodist church.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much. It is very good that we exchange about where we stand in the different countries.

*Markus Bach:* I hear in the rationale that your position is based on possible decisions in Switzerland or Austria. But the Book of Discipline may be changed by the General Conference. Does that change anything in your stance?

*Henrik Schaueremann:* It doesn't matter if the change of the Church Order or the Social Principles is done by Switzerland or Austria or by the General Conference. It remains the same result. I did not want to offend Austria or Switzerland by referring to them. But we have the impression that at some point such a proposal will come from there, since there is such a round table in Switzerland or Germany that is looking for new solutions.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I can understand you well.

*Jörg Niederer:* Under the current circumstances, only the General Conference can change the church order. Our church order is defined by our Central Conference, which is done together and not country by country.

*Bishop Streiff:* We move on to Bulgaria-Romania.

*Daniel Topalski (on Bulgaria):* We do not have an official decision by the conference whether we can participate in a round table or a study group. But the statement on the occasion of the first study group we made very seriously with pastors and lay members, but also with representatives of all districts. Based on those interviews, we made the decision that you know. We made the decision not to participate in any study group that is about changing anything in the understanding of marriage, homosexuality or ordination. We can accept that there are other opinions. But we cannot and will not accept the beliefs of others as presented to us, for example, in the German model.



I have one recommendation: if you want to hear what people think, give them more space and encourage them. We had very little time at the conference to talk about this. It was very unsatisfactory. Our impression is that our opinion is not important to the bishop. Then why should we share? But when we are asked to be part of a study group, we speak for ourselves. We are not ashamed of our position. You are all invited to hear from us. There are many ways to do this. An official stance from our church will not be possible until the protocol is adopted. What it will look like, I cannot say, because I cannot see into the future.

*Rares Calugar (on Romania):* It's pretty much the same here as in Bulgaria. We don't see a future in a church that has a kind of one-church plan or with a Community Covenant like Germany has. It is not a matter of making a vote now. The attitude of the church is clear, through our conversations that we lay people and pastors have had. We only see ourselves in a church that has the previous understanding on marriage and ordination. We can already discuss, but as soon as the result goes in the direction of an opening, we do not agree.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much. Let us hear from Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania.

*Daniel Sjanta (on Serbia):* We also do not have an official statement by the conference. We also have not established a round table or a study group because this is not our issue, neither in the church nor in the country. We have not talked about it in our congregations, but we have talked about it with the pastors and in the church council. We had first answered David Field's questions when he was on the global study group, and then we answered the study group's questions. We are very disappointed that this question divides us, but we want to stay in the conversation. As a church and society, we are opposed to redefining the concept of marriage, nor do we have the ability to speak beyond that. There were also a few discussions on the record, and we were disappointed with the outcome. We have the impression that liberal forces have taken over. But we don't know how we will decide if the protocol is adopted. All paths are open. We also did not talk about a path like the one Germany is taking.

Another thing that troubles us is the difficult situation in the U.S. due to the various interest groups. The tone of exchanges on social media has become so toxic that it is quite bad for our church. I hope we can find a common path, but I have lost my optimism.

*Bishop Streiff:* I appreciate that you are very open about your situation in your countries, even if it is not easy. But it is helpful.

*Marjan Dimov (on North Macedonia):* We have not made a big deal out of it so far. At individual meetings and places, there have been discussions, for example, in pastors' meetings or in the church council. This issue does not appeal to us because the answer is clear in our view. We are convinced that marriage can only be a matter of a man and a woman. The pastors' view is that this problematic has been imposed on us by the General Conference. The brothers and sisters in America have this problem, but we do not. Whether it will come to us one day, we don't know. We believe that the Americans should solve this among themselves. We want to stay with the current church order and in the same central conference, together with those who also want the same and want to stay with it. It is

important that we can be in conversation with each other. No one can come from America or elsewhere to tell us who can be a pastor and who cannot. We want to solve that for ourselves, who can be a pastor. It is not possible to go to another country and make the rules for that country. We want to stay with the current church order and in the Central Conference with all who want to do the same.

*Wilfried Nausner (on Albania):* Our discussions go in the same direction as in North Macedonia. There were various discussions among the pastors. But it would not be good for the discussion with other churches or with the Muslims if we change something. It would put us under pressure. That is why we decided that we do not care about this issue. We want to take care of our mission, our projects and cooperation with others. In Switzerland, Austria and the USA, there is a completely different background and culture. In Albania there is a common understanding that homosexuality is a problem. We live in this country with this background. For us, this is a hopeless discussion, so we refuse to engage in it. And we live with it quite well and don't want to change anything.

*Bishop Streiff:* We go on to Austria.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I can only pass on a not too differentiated account from a completely different situation. In the society of Austria homosexuals have the same rights as heterosexuals. Homosexuality is basically accepted, but not always in the church. Our churches are very different there, depending on where people come from. We had no discussion about this in our church before 2019. Many in our church were very disappointed with the 2019 General Conference decision because the church order states that if you don't agree with it, you immediately lose your job. As a result, trust was lost in understanding how the church functions and operates. In the last 2-3 years it has not been an issue that we have discussed because it has been imposed on us from the outside. Our churches are quite capable of dealing with different situations and people. We know we don't always think the same way about it. But we keep it with Wesley, who says that if we don't think alike, we can love in the same way. That seems to me to be the most important thing. We also don't want to put pressure on any other country about how they should deal with this issue, because we are in completely different situations. In the last few years, we have been dealing with the question of how we want to develop in the next few years. We don't want to look back, we want to look forward. We have been guided by John Wesley: What should we teach? How do we teach? What is to be done? We want to deduce that groups are on the way with Jesus. This is not a matter of teaching, but of being on the way in community, open to learning new things. Now we are more concerned with Corona and Post-Corona. The question of homosexuality is very far away, and I don't want to bring it into the church.

*Bishop Streiff:* We heard something yesterday from Switzerland, France and North Africa. Are there any further questions about this?

*Claudia Haslebacher:* I would like to add something. I would like to say something about sentiment, since I didn't mention it yesterday. The issue on homosexuality has been addressed in Switzerland at the political level in the last 10 years. We have realized two things because of the 2019 General Conference: First, many in Switzerland and France

had the impression that our church was taken from us. This has not to do with the issue of homosexuality, but with the punishment and non-acceptance by the church order. This led to great discussions, and we will have to have many more conversations. Many in our congregations are also tired of having such conversations. There are many different beliefs among us. We therefore need the conversation with each other. We need the conversation in our Annual Conference. However, the reason for this conversation does not come from us, but from the General Conference. It is not us who have sought it. But we need a way to deal with it. The outcome of the track group that we are now talking about in our conference is that we want to focus on our mission, on our mandate. We don't want to focus on something that is not central to our faith. Therefore, we want to respect each other despite our different attitudes. In recent decades we have succeeded in doing this on other issues, and we hope that we will succeed in doing so in the future as well. Our focus is therefore not to change the church order. We want to be able to decide for ourselves which pastors we want to ordain. The task of the congregations will be to consider how they want to implement their mission, and we want to support them in this.

*Markus Bach:* It is important that we recognize that we have a very different situation in Switzerland than in other countries. At the end of last year, "marriage for all" was passed by parliament in Switzerland. This means that we as a church have to learn to live with very different attitudes.

*Wilfried Nausner:* The situations are very different. We have to discuss the question of human sexuality so that we understand each other. But the question of human sexuality is at the same time connected to the question of separation. That suggests that community and human sexuality are connected. However, I don't think for a moment that this works. We can discuss one of the questions and perhaps come to a conclusion peacefully. But we cannot solve the question of a common understanding on human sexuality, because that is a very difficult combination.

*Bishop Streiff:* We have heard about the different situations in our countries. This does not make things easier, but it helps to get a mutual understanding. Thank you very much for all your contributions. We will now take a short break.

Break

Saturday, March 13, 2021, 3:45 p.m.

**Online session via Zoom**

*Markus Bach* explains the proposal of the office for a "discussion and preparation process within the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe" (Enclosure 7).

**Motion to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe on March 13, 2021: The Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe establishes a CSE Post-UMC Study Group with the task of preparing a document for the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021 on how the CSE Book of Discipline (including Social Principles) should be designed for the Post-UMC in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe so that the different convictions on homosexuality and marriage can be maintained and respected in a common Post-UMC. The group may also propose a "covenant of mutual respect" or other helpful measures for moving forward together.**

*Bishop Streiff* points out that an additional motion from Claudia Haslebacher has been sent to the Executive Committee. He asks her to explain it.

*Claudia Haslebacher* explains the motion from her, Stefan Schröckenfuchs and Lea Hafner: This afternoon we have two motions on how the EMC should work together in Europe: First, the motion we just heard from the Office on a discussion and preparation process within the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe on how to shape the church order for the Post-UMC Central Conference. And secondly, a motion for a task force mandate in the report of the European bishops. This is to study the future of Post-Separation UMC across Europe, its central conference structure and episcopal oversight, and to make proposals for the future.

I agree that the above mentioned proposals are important. In Europe we will have to plan and decide how the common church order will look like, how the new structure of the EMC in Europe will look like, and how many bishops there will be. But these are just tasks that will have to be done at some point. It is not enough that we only talk about solutions for certain problems that are given to us by the General Conference. The General Conference will not be able to decide what the way for the Church in Europe should be.

What we really need is a pro-active way for the EMC in Europe to chart a future for the church in Europe after the Covid 19 pandemic. A future that overcomes the issues that divide us. We need to imagine a future with a new commitment to be together EMC in and for Europe. And we need to know our purpose and vision for the EMC in Europe. We need to walk this path in Europe, listening to God and to each other. We need to know what the purpose of the EMC in Europe is, how we envision our common ministry in Europe and our countries and conferences. We need to do this with respect for each other and for our very different situations (political, financial, theological...). The above tasks must then be worked on the basis of a common vision and purpose for a Methodist Church in Europe. I believe that we are at an important crossroads and we should wisely consider what our path, our vision, our

goal, our common ground, our common commitment will be or could be. Therefore we formulate the following additional

**Additional Motion to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference CSE:**

- 1. The Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe establishes a round table group with the purpose to design a way for the UMC in CSE after the pandemic. It shall seek to envision a UMC in Europe with vision and mission. The round table is empowered by the Executive Committee talk with the other two Central Conferences in Europe. The aim shall be to find a renewal of commitment and a common vision for the United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe and in Europe.  
The round table starts it's work in summer 2021. It stays in close contact with the Study Group of the Central Conference CSE (see above). It shall build a foundation for the Central Conferences in Europe Task Force.**
- 2. It shall be moderated by two persons. One of those shall be a trusted leader of the southeastern part of the Central Conference, the other from a more western perspective. The round table shall constitute itself and elect the moderators.**
- 3. It shall stay in close contact with the bishop but shall not be moderated by the bishop.**
- 4. Each District (CH-F-NA: each Country) may nominate one person as a member of the round table**
- 5. The round table may invite other persons to join and share their situation**

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much, Claudia for this initiative. I see your motion as an important and helpful starting point for further discussion. I don't think we can proceed with both motions at the same time. However, I see the importance of the second motion and assume that from the result of this round table it will also be possible, in a further step, to formulate the church order in a way that will help us. Such a group will also help us to understand and decide what structure and order we want to give ourselves. Therefore, we start with this motion from Claudia and discuss it. We know that after that we also have to clarify the other questions.

*David Chlupáček:* I have a question of understanding: the subject of the study group will not be homosexuality, did I understand that correctly? This subject divides us and divides the Church. Can we then talk about something different? Don't we then inevitably come back to the same tensions and positions again and again? If we leave out the issue on homosexuality, which is the reason for our division, I wonder how we will get anywhere. We will then simply repeat what we believe. But we will not be able to solve the problem or work on a vision. The problem is so big that we cannot solve it at all.

*Helene Bindl:* I would like to ask Wilfried to share with us what we talked about earlier about unity.

*Wilfried Nausner:* For me it is important that we talk about the question of human sexuality. We have to be able to address and embed this conversation in our different situations. That is one thing. But the other thing is that human sexuality being linked to Christian unity, that's difficult for me to understand. Surely we cannot link two such issues! Christian unity is much broader. It is like a friendship in which we are walking together. If we now want to go different ways, does that mean the end of our friendship? There are things that make us different and separate us, that cause us problems and make the way more difficult. But I think our friendship goes much deeper. Sometimes we can try that you go this way and I go that way. But we keep meeting because we are friends, and because we want to keep meeting. I don't want to preach now about why linking human sexuality with Christian unity overwhelms us. I think that the General Conference has failed us. If we continue down this road, we are failing ourselves and failing our friendship and failing the Christian unity that we need. My advice is that we talk to each other. There are still so many things we can do together. But reducing everything to a single problem cannot be the solution. That would be very dangerous.

*Ivana Procházková:* I will tell you my first impression. It is not about the question of church order, nor about homosexuality, nor about questions of structure. When I heard it, I breathed a sigh of relief. I want to open up with confidence and venture down this path. But I also see that there is a difference between postponing, making amends, putting away, delaying, and taking time to wait. It's a thin ice to walk on. But I'm ready and open and breathing a sigh of relief. But please: it is fragile when we do it this way. I very much share what Wilfried said, that the issue of homosexuality and changing the church order is being forced on us from the outside. In the Czech Republic, we feel the same way.

*Andrzej Malicki:* We realize that we have different attitudes towards human sexuality. And that is the only common thing we have. But in the proposal I see that maybe in prayer and conversation we can find a way for a common vision of how we can be EMC in Europe. We will not change our attitudes regarding our beliefs. But this motion is wise because it is not about homosexuality. We are looking beyond this issue, as Wilfried told us. Why should we link human sexuality to our future vision?

*Daniel Topalski:* For me, there is no reason why we should think about our common vision now. The question for me is why now? We are forced by certain circumstances, that's clear. Maybe that is the positive side of it. I remember an answer from Etienne when we talked about this in Macedonia, that we don't really know why we are together. Why should we talk about it now? For me, we are so completely different on this issue that a round table discussion on an imposed issue would be a mistake. The problematic issue would come sooner or later anyway. We in Bulgaria don't have time for that. We have no desire to surrender to it and destroy ourselves. Even if the intention is serious, it will separate us from each other. The cards of all of

us are now on the table, the problem is known. We have to accept what the Annual Conferences have written. They have shared their vision of it. We can turn to a current problem that does not concern us, but it will not get us anywhere. It would destroy ourselves if we did that. But that is certainly not the way we want to go.

*David Chlupáček:* I have no doubt that unity is more important, as Wilfried says. I also believe that we have a lot in common. But we are in a crisis. And this crisis is closely connected with the issue of homosexuality. So my question is whether the study group will talk about it or not. If we did not have the issue of homosexuality, we would not have a crisis. We otherwise have good connections and are on the same line on many things and can do many things together as we did in earlier years. It seems to me that this is just to put the crisis aside and take care of other things. I understand that there are more important things, but I am not sure that this will get us to the goal.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I can understand that very well. It's like having a big white elephant in the room, but not being allowed to talk about it. In the first draft of the motion, we still had the question of homosexuality in it. We have now been talking for months only about this issue, about this white elephant, so that the impression was given that there is nothing else in the room. The crisis we have is not about homosexuality. It is that we don't have trust in each other. The goal is that we find a form in which we can talk to each other and listen carefully to each other without having to talk about structures or church order texts. It's just about one issue. I'm completely against merging the groups. It's about something completely different. The goal of the Round Table is to listen to each other and try to understand each other better, and to develop something that connects us as Methodist neighbors in Europe. I have lost perspective in the last 5 years on what we want to do with each other. There has been very little contact among us in recent years. But I believe that we can play an important role together in these different countries, and not just for ourselves. There was a time when the relationships among us were very important and helpful. And I believe that this will be the case in the future as well. That is the invitation to the round table. But no one has to follow it if no sense is seen in it or if one does not want to participate in the conversation. But for those who want to hear and understand what others think about a shared vision, it would be an appropriate place. If we don't know what is important for us in the next few years, there is no point in working on any structures. But if we find something for which our connection is necessary, then it can be helpful in a second step if we talk about structures that we need for this.

*Claudia Haslebacher:* What impresses me in our Central Conference is that we see ourselves as a church beyond our national borders, even beyond the borders of the European Union. We are one of the few organizations that are able to do this at all. Granted, this takes place on a small scale, but we still send a signal to the world that there are other things than nationalistic, financial or economic reasons for belonging together. In God and Jesus Christ, we have a Savior and Creator of this world who unites diverse people into one body that represents Christ. This is a great opportunity and possibility that we have together. To Daniel Topalski, I would like to say

that we actually would have had the opportunity to talk about this much earlier - but we did not. But if we have the opportunity now, and if the postponed General Conference is postponed again, so we have no time pressure to decide anything this summer. We now have the opportunity to talk about it. My wish is that we will find a new vision and message of the EMC in Europe. And if we don't try, we will never know if it is possible or not, if God and the Holy Spirit will guide us in it or not. We are only human beings.

*Barbara Büniger:* I want to remind you of our women's report a year ago, "Whatever happens, we stay together." We tried to give answers to why we want to stay together. We wanted to focus on what unites us. We have different perspectives on many things, and human sexuality is one of them. But it is not more important to us than the other differences. It should not have the power to separate us from each other. So it is important that we take time and be in conversation with each other. After yesterday's discussion, I asked the women if the statement was still relevant to them. Over the past year, we have not had the opportunity to meet. I think that we can live relationships across countries only if we spend more time together, face to face. I also heard yesterday that it means hard work. It takes time and energy. It's a decision we have to make, not a feeling. If we want to be together, that has to be a high priority. My wish for us is that we can do this in the future.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* Thank you for this important reminder of these voices. I would like to point out, in view of Daniel's and Claudia's votes that we had not talked about a common vision before, that I have already asked the question of why we are together several times and most recently in Macedonia. In fact, I think I have asked this question at every meeting. What are we doing together? What is our vision? Some of us have the impression that we are not being heard. I am one of those who speak a lot. But I don't have the impression that I am being heard. I just wanted to disagree that this question of a shared vision has never been asked. That would not be correct.

*Bishop Streiff:* The proposal for a round table is there. I heard some encouragement, but also some uncertainty about what this means for the topic of human sexuality and understanding of marriage. But there also seems to be a willingness to try.

*Markus Bach:* Is there a minimum composition of the round table so that it can work? I'm afraid that in two months we might find that only Swiss and Austrians could be at this table.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I do not share this fear. We have some people here who have spoken out in favor of it. And there are people who are asking themselves the same questions. Every country must be free to decide for or against.

*Bishop Streiff:* I heard some openness, but also reluctance. The motion could give us the opportunity to resolve the question of what is fundamental for us. On the basis of this basis, the difficult questions can then also be addressed.



*Bishop Streiff:* There are still two things we need to clarify. 1. is there anything we need to change in the motion so we can vote on it? 2. we need to figure out how to get it started. Should it be done through the office or do we put it in other hands? We also need to figure out how to do the financial things, since we haven't decided on a budget for it.

*Bishop Streiff:* Are there any requests for changes to the Haslebacher motion?

*Bishop Streiff:* If there are no change requests, I will ask Claudia if they have a suggestion on how to start the process?

*Claudia Haslebacher:* No, we have not been able to think about that. I could imagine one or two people, possibly together with the office. Maybe Stefan or Andrzej have an idea.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* I think that the group should organize itself. We just need someone at the beginning to collect the emails. The group will then organize itself. Right now we can only meet online, hopefully that won't be the case for the whole process. But figuring out who will participate in the roundtable and how an initial meeting will take place is easy. If we can actually meet then, there are many places where that will be possible, and I can also offer such a place.

*Andrzej Malicki:* Actually, I assumed that the office would do it. But if you Stefan are ready to do it, I suggest you.

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* Together with you, I like to do that.

*Bishop Streiff:* It is good if we have a place where everything is coordinated. I can offer that we take this coordination to the Bishop's Office and you can send your participation in the Round Table there by the end of April. All the members of the Executive Committee will then receive all the responses.

*Helene Bindl:* Didn't Stefan agree to do this before?

*Stefan Schröckenfuchs:* There are different things. I can invite with Andrzej for a first conversation. But gathering the participants can be done well through the bishop's office. But the rest of the work must then be divided in this group.

*Bishop Streiff:* It seems important to me that the initiative for this round table comes from the countries. You can send the names of the participants in this round table to the bishop's office and we will compile them at the end of April and send them to everyone. Stefan and Andrzej will then prepare together the 1st meeting of the group.

*Bishop Streiff:* That will cost something. I assume that we will cover the costs in connection with the round table from the Central Conference treasury.

*Bishop Streiff:* If there are no more questions, we will now vote on the Haslebacher motion.

**Resolution: The Haslebacher motion is approved with 10 yes and 3 no votes.**

*Bishop Streiff:* I would like to close this time with a moment of silence and prayer before we pause and come to the last part.

Silence and prayer

*Saturday, March 13, 2021, 5:05 p.m.*

**Online session via Zoom**

*Bishop Streiff:* We have done an important work together, and it is always much more difficult to conduct such a process in the Zoom meeting than when we are physically together. So I also thank you for the openness in the exchange and the honest discussion also regarding the differences we have. I appreciate that so many have also expressed their opinions, questions and situations. I think that is always the first step to move forward. I thank you guys for that. We will move on to the bureau report.

#### **Report of the Office (incl. Enclosures 7 - 8)**

represented by Bishop Patrick Streiff

*Bishop Streiff:* The first three points describe what was in the past and what we voted on in writing. Are there any queries or additions to points 1 to 3?

*Bishop Streiff:* If there are no questions, we will turn to item 4. Since the matter concerns myself, I ask Helene Bindl to chair the meeting and the Secretary to explain the motion.

#### **Re 4. postponement of the General Conference 2020 to 2022**

*Markus Bach:* We in the office were also surprised by the renewed postponement of the General Conference. For us it was clear that we had to consider two things separately. One concerns the term of office of the bishop and the other concerns the decisions around the issue of dealing with homosexuality. With regard to the former, we asked the bishop to clarify this issue of his tenure with his wife and family. It is not for us to make a decision for him.

He took a week to do this and also discussed it with the Working Group Episcopacy. In the end, it was his decision, which he made with his wife, that he is ready to continue his service as bishop for another year until the summer of 2023. The office welcomed this decision. Heidi Streiff has expressed a desire to be able to travel more often with her husband. We support this wish and have therefore requested that her travel expenses be paid from the Central Conference Fund.

*Lea Hafner:* I am grateful that the bishop has extended his service by one year. I know what it means to be able to enjoy retirement together with your spouse. The least we can do to say thank you is to make it possible for Heidi to be on the road with her husband.

*Wilfried Nausner:* I have expressed my opinion in an email and can also accept the answer from the bishop. It would have been helpful for me if the decision had been announced after the executive.

*Helene Bindl:* If there are no more questions, we will proceed to the vote.

**Motion to the Executive Committee: In the budget 2021 and 2022 a total of CHF 6,000.00 shall be included for the travels of Heidi Streiff.**

The motion is adopted with 13 votes in favor and none against.

*Bishop Streiff:* Many thanks from me and from my wife. She will be very happy about the generosity. Whenever she came with me, she had always paid all the travel expenses herself. She is very happy about it. Thank you very much.

*Bishop Streiff:* We will continue with the next motions. This is about the issues surrounding the next Central Conference. A short explanation: Up to now, the Central Conferences have taken place in March. Why now in November? We thought about holding the Central Conference in November so that we can hold the election of bishops as early as possible. This will give us more time to hand over all the business. If we were to hold the Central Conference in March 2023, the meetings of the Annual Conferences and the Council of Bishops would have to be held practically every week during that year. This would be a great challenge. If we do the election in November 2022, we can start the conferences as early as March and then have a conference every two weeks and enough time until the next one. This will help the new bishop(s) to get acclimated better. It also gives more time for the bishop/bishopess to interact with those in leadership and possibly make visits. It would also give the newly elected person more time to reorganize his/her situation and possibly prepare for a move. We have scheduled the start of the job for January 1, 2023. At the end of all conference visits, the newly elected person would assume the office of active bishop. We have also coordinated the date with CC Germany, which also holds its Central Conference in November each year. They will meet one week later. We can't meet earlier because the Bishops' Council is still meeting. Are there any questions about this?

*Andrzej Malicki:* Could you give the date again?

*Bishop Streiff:* The motion mentions the date: November 16 - 20, 2022.

*Wilfried Nausner:* I agree with the proposals. I ask that if something changes again, that we discuss this in another executive meeting. We cannot be sure how things will develop. If there is a postponement again, then we have to reconsider the matter.

*Bishop Streiff:* We do not hope that there will be another postponement.

*Wilfried Nausner:* It is important to me that the Executive Committee then determines the course of action in discussion with the bishop.

*Bishop Streiff:* Can we vote on both motions together?

**Motion to the Executive Committee:**

**The 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe will be postponed to November 16-20, 2022. It shall still be held in Basel (Switzerland). The decisions of the Executive Committee regarding delegates, meeting and topics taken in view of this meeting remain valid.**

**Motion to the Executive Committee:**

**The consecration of the newly elected bishop will take place on Sunday, November 20, 2022. The date of the assumption of office will be January 1, 2023. The transfer of all official duties is expected to occur by the end of June, but no later than by the end of July 2023.**

Both motions are approved unanimously.

*Bishop Streiff:* We continue with

**5. Revision of the nomination and election procedure of a bishop / bishopess.**

*Bishop Streiff:* The revised data must be revised again. Are there any additions on the part of the Bishop's Office Working Group?

*Jörg Niederer:* The new dates seem more helpful to me because the time between the nominations until the summer and the election in the fall of the same year is much shorter. This is even better than the previously planned spring date in 2023.

*Bishop Streiff:* Let's vote on the motion.

**Motion to the Executive Committee:**

**The Procedure for Nomination and Election of a Bishop will be adjusted in terms of dates as follows: Nominations in the Annual Conferences will take place in the spring of 2022, the evaluation of nominations by the Working Group Episcopacy will take place in August 2022, and the election will take place at the November 2022 session of the Central Conference.**

The motion is adopted unanimously.

**On 6: Dealing with Homosexuality in the United Methodist Church in Europe**

*Bishop Streiff:* In point 6 the situation regarding the handling of homosexuality in Europe is described. In point 6.3, reference is made to the separate document with the motion for a discussion and preparation process within the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. As I understood the votes we made earlier, we will postpone this motion on how to deal with the Church Order until later. First, the other group will get to work. Are there any dissenting votes on this? If so, please speak up now. Otherwise, we'll come back to it later.

There are no requests to speak. The notes on finances (7.) and on the transfer request of JK Ukraine-Moldova (8.) are noted without comment.

*Bishop Streiff:* That concludes the report of the office. Attached to the proposal for a process of conversation and preparation, we have a second request that we have not yet addressed. In the documents of the four bishops, all Central Conferences, through their Executive Committee, are asked to individually provide documentation on what it means for an Annual Conference to remain in or leave the post-UMC. The following request is made by the office in this regard:

**Motion to the Executive Committee:**

**The CC-Office submits a proposal to the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021 on how to take up this mandate from the bishops and which group should be commissioned with this work.**

This motion is approved unanimously.

*Bishop Streiff:* With that, we have dealt with all the motions that needed to be dealt with.

*Bishop Streiff:* We still have to clarify what feedback we would like to give the bishops on the three documents we have received from them. The office will then forward these notes in writing to the bishops.

*Bishop Streiff:* For my part, it would be important to point out that we have decided on a round table for the vision and mission of our Central Conference. Are there any other elements that we should include?

There are no requests to speak.

*Bishop Streiff:* I am asking the Superintendents to reserve the proposed dates for the Spring 2023 Annual Conferences. Currently we have a superintendents meeting scheduled for March 23 - 26, 2022. If we don't need that date then, we can cancel it in October 2021.

*Andrzej Malicki:* Will the superintendents' meeting take place in Braunfels?

*Bishop Streiff:* It will be a meeting within our Central Conference and not European. We have not set a place yet. It is only important that you reserve the date now.

*Bishop Streiff:* Are there any other things you want to discuss? For my part, I want to thank the office very much. We had significantly more work than usual.

*Jörg Niederer:* Usually Helene Bintl thanks the bishop. Now I want to do that. I want to hand you a loaf of bread and a bottle of good wine as a thank you. Thank you for the good leadership of this meeting on behalf of all of us. I am looking forward now when we can meet again, then you will get a fresh bread and the bottle of wine.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you very much. I am also happy to pass on the thanks to Urs Schweizer and André Töngi. They do a great job in the office and are always willing to go an extra mile.

*Bishop Streiff:* Thank you for taking the time for this special meeting. I hope that in October it will be possible for us to meet physically. The meeting is scheduled in Bratislava. We hope that the third wave of the coronavirus will not kick us too hard.

*Bishop Streiff:* I will close with a prayer.

The Secretary:  
*Markus Bach*

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These minutes of the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, held on March 12-13, 2021, were reviewed and declared correct.

*The examiner and the examiner of the protocol:  
Helene Bintl and Jörg Niederer*

## **II. Directory of Decisions**

### **of the 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe**

<b>Decisions for the Executive Committee / Central Conference</b>
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1. The Executive Committee adopts the following motion with 10 votes in favor and 3 votes against:
  - a. The Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe establishes a round table group with the purpose to design a way for the UMC in CSE after the pandemic. It shall seek to envision a UMC in Europe with vision and mission. The round table is empowered by the Executive Committee talk with the other two Central Conferences in Europe. The aim shall be to find a renewal of commitment and a common vision for the United Methodist Church in Central and Southern Europe and in Europe.  
The round table starts it's work in summer 2021. It stays in close contact with the Study Group of the Central Conference CSE (see above). It shall build a foundation for the Central Conferences in Europe Task Force.
  - b. It shall be moderated by two persons. One of those shall be a trusted leader of the southeastern part of the Central Conference, the other from a more western perspective. The round table shall constitute itself and elect the moderators.
  - c. It shall stay in close contact with the bishop but shall not be moderated by the bishop.
  - d. Each District (CH-F-NA: each Country) may nominate one person as a member of the round table.
  - e. The round table may invite other persons to join and share their situation.
2. The Executive Committee unanimously decides that the 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe will be postponed to November 16-20, 2022. It shall still be held in Basel (Switzerland). The decisions of the Executive Committee regarding delegates, meeting and topics taken in view of this meeting remain valid.
3. The Executive Committee unanimously decides that the consecration of the newly elected bishop will take place on Sunday, November 20, 2022. The date of the assumption of office will be January 1, 2023. The transfer of all official duties is expected to occur by the end of June, but no later than by the end of July 2023.

<b>Elections</b>
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No decisions.

## **Financial decisions**

4. The Executive Committee decides unanimously that in the budget 2021 and 2022 a total of CHF 6,000.00 shall be included for the travels of Heidi Streiff.

## **Decisions for Working Groups / Office of the Central Conference**

### **Office of the Central Conference**

5. The Executive Committee unanimously decides that the CC-Office submits a proposal to the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021 on how to take up this mandate from the bishops and which group should be commissioned with this work.

### **Working Group Episcopacy**

6. The Executive Committee unanimously decides that the Procedure for Nomination and Election of a Bishop will be adjusted in terms of dates as follows: Nominations in the Annual Conferences will take place in the spring of 2022, the evaluation of nominations by the Working Group Episcopacy will take place in August 2022, and the election will take place at the November 2022 session of the Central Conference.

The Secretary: Markus Bach



# III. Report of the Office

## 1. Presence and Minutes

### 1. Meetings of the Central Conference Office

The Office met seven times since the 2020 Central Conference Executive Committee meeting in Vienna: on April 30, 2020; September 2, 2020; December 1, 2020; January 12, 2021; February 9, 2021; February 26, 2021 and March 4, 2021.

The meetings were all held online. The focus of the meetings was on the issues and decisions regarding the postponements of the General and Central Conferences and the assignments received from the 2020 Executive Committee.

### 2. Online Meeting of the Executive Committee CC CSE on March 12-13, 2021

The following meetings are planned. They will all be online:

March 10-11, 2021	noon to noon	Meeting of the Cabinet South
Thu, March 11, 2021	14.00 - 18.00	Meeting of active and designated Superintendents
Fri, March 12, 2021	10.00 - 11.30	Meeting of voting and non-voting members of the Executive Committee, GC Delegates and Sups.
	13.00 - 15.00	Meeting of voting and non-voting members of the Executive Committee, GC Delegates and Superintendents (+ the other three European Bishops)
	15.30 - 17.30	Meeting of voting and non-voting members of the Executive Committee, GC Delegates and Superintendents (+ Bishop Rückert and Stefan Kraft from the "Round Table" DE)
	19.00 - 20.00	Meeting of active and designated Superintendents and GC Delegates (optional for ExCo members)
Sat, 13 March 2021	08.00 - 12.00	Meeting of active and designated Superintendents and GC Delegates (optional for ExCo members)
	14.00 - 18.00	Meeting of voting and non-voting members of the Executive Committee

On Saturday afternoon, no voting member of the Executive Committee from Poland will be able to attend the meeting. Therefore, the Bishop has invited Superintendent Sławomir Rodaszyński to participate as a guest with an advisory vote.

### 3. Postponement of the General Conference 2020 to 2021.

In April 2020, the 2020 General Conference was postponed by one year to August 29 - September 10, 2021. The Office then decided to submit the following proposals in writing to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference:

- 1. The 19th session of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe will be postponed from March 11-14, 2021, to March 23-27, 2022. It will still take place in Basel (Switzerland). The decisions of the Executive Committee regarding delegates, gathering, topic, and election of a bishop remain valid but will be postponed by one year.*

2. *Since the active term of Bishop Patrick Streiff will be extended by one year, the Officers of the Central Conference will take care of all issues regarding vacation, representation and submissions on a worldwide level in cooperation with him.*
3. *The next meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe will take place from October 21 to 24, 2021. The meeting venue is planned to be Bratislava (Slovakia). There will be no extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee in November 2020.*
4. *The 2017-2020 budget of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe is extended by one year, with income and expenditure – with the exception of the expenditure for the meeting of the Central Conference – increasing linearly by a quarter of the four-year budget.*
5. *The validity of the elections made at the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe in March 2017 and of the by-elections made by the Executive Committee will be extended by one year until the 19th session of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe from March 23 to 27, 2022.*

The Executive Committee approved all the motions of the Office. The delegates to the Central Conference CSE were informed by the Secretary about the postponement of the Central Conference and the new dates.

The postponement of the Central Conference was only possible because Bishop Patrick Streiff agreed to postpone his retirement by one year. The Office is very grateful to him for his decision and is aware of the sacrifice this means for him, his wife and his family. Many thanks!

#### **4. Postponement of the General Conference 2020 to 2022**

In February 2021, the postponed General Conference 2020 had to be postponed again for one year to August 29 to September 6, 2022. The Office has been working with Bishop Streiff to find possible solutions as to how and when his succession can be arranged. The Office argued that the issue of the bishop's retirement must be considered separately from the scheduling issues of the conferences. No (additional) pressure shall be put on him in view of his personal decision. Based on his decision, the remaining appointments must then be found. After a period of reflection and consultation with the Working Group Episcopacy, which was convened at short notice, the bishop, together with his wife, agreed to postpone his long-deserved retirement by another year. We are sincerely grateful for his helpful cooperation. As a small compensation for the bishop's continued numerous absences during this additional year, the Office would like to make it possible for his wife to accompany him on some trips to parishes. For this purpose, a total of CHF 6,000.00 shall be included in the budget for this and next year.

**Motion to the Executive Committee: In the budget 2021 and 2022 a total of CHF 6,000.00 shall be included for the travels of Heidi Streiff.**

In addition, the Office propose that the 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Conference be postponed and be held in late autumn 2022 after the meeting of the postponed General Conference 2020. The meeting is scheduled for November 16-20, 2022 and shall be held in Basel (Switzerland). At this meeting the election of the new bishop will take place. The consecration will take place on Sunday, November 20, 2022, and the new bishop will take

his/her work on January 1, 2023. As planned, Bishop Streiff will attend the Annual Conferences of the Central Conference with the newly elected person until the summer of 2023, and will hand over the official duties at the end of each conference. After that, the newly elected person will have some time to meet leaders and/or visit parishes. The current planning of the conferences provides for them to take place in most cases every two weeks, so that there is sufficient time for both parties to get to know each other. It is anticipated that the transfer of all official duties will take place at the end of June, or at the latest, at the end of July 2023.

**Motion to the Executive Committee: The 19<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe will be postponed to November 16-20, 2022. It shall still be held in Basel (Switzerland). The decisions of the Executive Committee regarding delegates, meeting and topics taken in view of this meeting remain valid.**

**Motion to the Executive Committee: The consecration of the newly elected bishop will take place on Sunday, November 20, 2022. The date of the assumption of office will be January 1, 2023. The transfer of all official duties is expected to occur by the end of June, but no later than by the end of July 2023.**

#### **5. Revision of the Procedure for Nomination and Election Procedure of a Bishop**

The chair of the Working Group Episcopacy, Jörg Niederer, has revised the Procedure for Nomination and Election for a Bishop to fit the Central Conference, which was originally postponed until March 2022. The Office has approved the revision of the schedule. These revised documents are stored in the CC Dropbox (2021 March Online/Rules of Order). Due to the additional postponement of the General Conference 2020 and the setting of the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the Central Conference, the procedure needs to be revised again in terms of dates. The Office propose the following revisions:

- the nominations in the Annual Conferences will take place in spring 2022
- the evaluation of the nominations by the Working Group Episcopacy will take place in August 2022
- the election will take place at the Central Conference meeting in November 2022

**Motion to the Executive Committee: The Procedure for Nomination and Election of a Bishop will be adjusted in terms of dates as follows: Nominations in the Annual Conferences will take place in the spring of 2022, the evaluation of nominations by the Working Group Episcopacy will take place in August 2022, and the election will take place at the November 2022 session of the Central Conference.**

#### **6. On the question of Homosexuality in The United Methodist Church in Europe**

##### **6.1 European situation**

The active bishops of the UMC in Europe (Christian Alsted, Eduard Khegay, Harald Rückert and Patrick Streiff) have prepared three documents in which they point out the way forward:

- Towards the Future (2021 - 24) (Annex 1).
- Central Conferences in Europe after 2022 - A Task Force Mandate for a Post-separation UMC (Annex 2)
- Central Conferences in Europe after 2022 On Separation from the UMC (Annex 3)

The documents have been sent to the participants for the Friday afternoon discussion. It should be noted that these documents were sent exclusively for the Executive Committee meeting in Spring 2021 for review and feedback. They must not be shared beyond. Based on the feedback, the active bishops will develop a final version. The renewed postponement of General Conference is not yet reflected in the schedule and dates.

On Friday morning, the Executive Committee will have the opportunity to clarify questions of understanding on the documents of the European bishops. In the afternoon, the remaining three European bishops will join to discuss the way forward.

On Saturday afternoon, the Executive Committee will then have the opportunity to prepare a response to the documents.

## **6.2 Situation of the UMC in Germany**

The Church Council of the UMC in Germany has published three documents in which they show how the UMC in Germany wants to deal with the question on homosexuality:

- On the question of Homosexuality in the UMC in Germany (Annex 4)
- The Community Covenant of the UMC in Germany (Annex 5)
- The Round Table Report about the challenging journey (Annex 6)

The documents have been sent to the participants for the Friday afternoon discussion. On Friday afternoon, Bishop Harald Rückert and Stefan Kraft, member of the "Round Table", will share their experiences in regard to their way and decisions.

## **6.3 Situation of the UMC in Central and Southern Europe**

The attitudes towards homosexuality and the understanding of marriage are judged differently depending on the Annual Conference and partly also - within an Annual Conference - depending on the country. The still unclear future position of the General Conference adds to the uncertainty. The renewed postponement of the General Conference does not help to get clarity for the way forward very soon. Nevertheless, the Office propose to start a process of discussion and preparation as soon as possible for those Conferences that wish to remain in the post-UMC or at least do not want to exclude this way for themselves yet. It has prepared a document for this purpose (Annex 7), which has been sent to the members of the Executive Committee. This will be discussed on Saturday afternoon. The Office is in favor of sticking to the planned schedule of the CSE Post-UMC Study Group until October 2021, despite the renewed postponement of the General Conference. Depending on the result, the Study Group may have to revise the result of its work after the postponed General Conference 2020 in September 2022.

## **7. Finances**

### **7.1 Statement 2020 of the Central Conference**

The statement 2020 of the Central Conference has been closed by the Treasurer. Due to the short time available at the Executive Committee meeting in spring 2021, the Office has decided to present the 2020 statement at the Executive Committee meeting in October 2021.

### **7.2 Budget 2021**

The budget of the Central Conference was extended from a quadrennium (2017-2020) to a quinquennium (2017-2021) in April 2020. The revenues and expenditures to be budgeted for 2021 were increased on a straight-line basis by one quarter of the quadrennial budget. This budget of 2021 was approved in writing in April 2020 (Annex 8).

## **7.2 Budget 2022-2024**

The Central Conference Office will also present a proposal for the 2022 - 2024 budget at the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021

## **8. Information on a transfer request of Ukraine-Moldova AC**

Ukraine-Moldova AC decided at its meeting in 2020 to initiate a transfer from the Eurasia Episcopal Area to another European Episcopal Area and wrote a letter to Bishop Patrick Streiff on this matter. The bishop confirmed receipt of the written transfer request, but at the same time made very clear that this request must first be processed by the CC Northern Europe-Eurasia before the CC CSE can discuss its content.

## **9. Continuing our journey with trust in God**

At the last meeting of the Office, Bishop Streiff read from Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Trusting in this God of peace, future and hope, let us continue our journey.

*Markus Bach, Secretary*

### Annexes:

Documents of the European bishops:

- 1 Towards the Future (2021 - 24)
- 2 Central Conferences in Europe after 2022 - A Task Force Mandate for a Post-separation UMC
- 3 Central Conferences in Europe after 2022 On Separation from the UMC

Documents of the UMC in Germany:

- 4 On the question of Homosexuality in the UMC in Germany
- 5 The Community Covenant of the UMC in Germany
- 6 The Round Table Report about the challenging journey

Documents of the Central Conference CSE:

- 7 Proposal for a discussion and preparation process within the CC CSE
- 8 Budget of the Central Conference CSE 2017-2021

## **Additional Motion Haslebacher to the Executive Committee of the CC CSE, March 13<sup>th</sup> 2021**

This afternoon we have before us two motions / proposals how the UMC in Europa can work together:

### **1. Discussion and preparation process within the CC CSE:**

The Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe establishes a CSE Post-UMC Study Group with the task of preparing a document for the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021 on how the CSE Book of Discipline (including Social Principles) should be designed for the Post-UMC in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe so that the different convictions on homosexuality and marriage can be maintained and respected in a common post-UMC. The group may also propose a "covenant of mutual respect" or other helpful measures for moving forward together.

### **2. Task Force Mandate for post-separation CCs in Europe:**

We propose that each of the three Central Conferences in Europe, at their regular session in 2021/22, agree on a common mandate for a joint European-wide Task Force that will study and make proposals for the future of the post-separation UMC in all of Europe, its central conference structure and its episcopal supervision. Each annual conference that decides to remain in the United Methodist Church in 2022, shall elect their member(s) to the task force.

I agree that the abovementioned proposals are important. In Europe we will need to plan and decide about what should the common Book of Discipline look like and what will be the new structure of the UMC in Europe and how many bishops will there be.

But these are merely tasks, that need to be accomplished at some point. It is not enough that we merely talk about solutions for certain tasks and wait for General Conference to give us the one solution. General Conference will not be able to talk about and decide about the way for the church in Europe.

What is really needed, is a pro-active way for the UMC in Europe to envision a future for the Church in Europe after the Covid-19-Pandemic. A future that overcomes the topics that separate us. We need to envision a future with a new commitment to be UMC together in and for Europe. And we need to know our purpose and vision for the UMC in Europe. We need to go this way in Europe, listen to God and to each other. We need to know what the purpose of the UMC in Europe is, how we envision our common ministry for Europe and our national or AC ministry within this larger vision. We need to do this with respect for each other and our very different situations (political, financial, theological...).

The abovementioned tasks need to be afterwards worked on on the foundation of a common vision and purpose for a UMC in Europe.

I believe that we are at an important crossroad, and we should wisely consider what our way, our vision, our purpose, our common ground, our common commitment will be or could be.

**Additional Motion to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference:**

- 1. The Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe establishes a round table group with the purpose to design a way for the UMC in CSE after the pandemic. It shall seek to envision a UMC in Europe with vision and mission. The round table is empowered by the Ex-Comm to talk with the other two CC in Europe. The aim shall be to find a renewal of commitment and a common vision for the UMC in CSE and in Europe.  
The round table starts it's work in summer 2021. It stays in close contact with the Study Group of the CC CSE (see above). It shall build a foundation for the CCs in Europe Task Force.**
- 2. It shall be moderated by two persons. One of those shall be a trusted leader of the southeastern part of the CC, the other from a more western perspective. The round table shall constitute itself and elect the moderators.**
- 3. It shall stay in close contact with the bishop but shall not be moderated by the bishop.**
- 4. Each District (CH-F-NA: each Country) may nominate one person as a member of the round table**
- 5. The round table may invite other persons to join and share their situation**

Author: Claudia Haslebacher (CH)

Seconded by: Stefan Schröckenfuchs (AT), Lea Hafner (CH)

## IV. Annexes of the report of the Office

### Documents of the European Bishops

#### **Towards the Future** (Version May 6, 2021)

**Authors: the active Bishops in Europe (Alsted, Khegay, Rückert, Streiff)**

#### **A) Timeline 2021 to 2024/25**

The Protocol and the GC2020 postponed to August 29 to September 6, 2022

**Here are some of the main decisions that may come out of the postponed General Conference in 2022:**

- The petition on the Protocol has a good chance to be adopted (with or without amendments), and it does not need constitutional amendments.
- There may be unknown adjustments to the Protocol, beyond changes in the timeline because of the postponement of General Conference to summer 2022; there is ongoing discussion about “re-negotiating” the Protocol, but as European bishops we see this as a dangerous play where there will not be a better solution in the end than the compromise of the Protocol.
- As no one can say what stance a “post-separation UMC” will take and how “centrist” or “progressive” it will be, it creates anxiety on what it means to remain in such a continuing UMC; the three of us who want to remain in a continuing UMC (Alsted, Rückert, Streiff) have issued a statement “Our Commitment” in February 2021 on how we want to lead the UMC into the future.
- Among other important petitions before GC: Some version of creating a US regional conference (petitions submitted by the Connectional Table and by the “Christmas Covenant”) may be adopted and with it might come consequences on the adaptation rights of CCs and/or on more regionalization; but such other petitions will need constitutional amendments.
- Other legislation (e.g. on tenure of bishops; provisional annual conferences; General BOD; apportionments, etc.) may be adopted that potentially affects central conferences in Europe.
- GC may bring financial changes in a new budget for the Episcopal Fund
  - Potentially less support from the episcopal fund – perhaps lower or no office allowance and less housing allowance

**This document “Towards the Future” is based on possible consequences of the adoption of the Protocol “Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring”. The last two paragraphs of the preamble of the Protocol say:**

*“We envision an amicable separation in The United Methodist Church that would provide a pathway to new denominations of the Methodist movement and a restructuring of The Methodist Church. These new denominations, though separate, will continue*



*the rich heritage of the Methodist movement, while being free to share their respective witnesses for Christ unhindered by those with whom they have been in conflict. We envision the post-separation United Methodist Church will strive to create a structure of regional conferences to facilitate ministry adaptable to regional contexts, and we further envision that the post-separation United Methodist Church will repeal the Traditional Plan and remove all other restrictive language related to LGBTQ persons. Not all traditional United Methodists may choose to separate from The United Methodist Church and join a New Methodist Denomination. We envision the Post-Separation United Methodist Church will strive to be a place where traditional United Methodists can continue to serve. As any separation occurs, we will release one another through the terms of this Protocol to joyful obedience to Christ's call on our lives." (Petition on a new ¶ 2556.1a)*

This document "**Towards the Future**" and those related to it (see next paragraph) uses our best guess as European bishops how the timeline in the published version of the Protocol will be adapted due to the postponement of General Conference. Instead of the term "post-separation UMC" used in the Protocol, we will hereafter use the term "continuing UMC".

### Between 2021 and the postponed Central Conferences 2022/23

The four active bishops will continue all over the time up to the postponed central conferences 2022/23 to meet regularly online for coordinating their work. Here are three important elements:

- Out of the feed-back from the Executive Committee meetings in March 2021, the four active bishops propose a preparatory working group for envisioning the future cooperation in Europe **prior** to the postponed General Conference (see part B below).
- Together, the four active bishops have prepared and updated a document with information and options for those who choose to leave the UMC (see part C below and the document "*On Separation from The UMC*").
- Together, the four active bishops have prepared and updated the motion of a Task Force to be established **after** General Conference on a continuing UMC in Europe. The mandate will be submitted to all three central conferences in 2022/23 (see part D below and the document "*Task Force Mandate*")

The four bishops reserve time for an online attendance at a session of each of the Executive Committee meetings. The dates of Executive Committee meetings up to the central conferences in 2022/23 are:

- CC-NE&EA: ExecCom March 24-25 2022
- CC-CSE: ExecCom Oct. 21-24, 2022, probably superintendents meeting in March 23-27, 2022,  
perhaps with additional online ExecCom;
- CC-Germany: ExecCom ("Kirchenvorstand") November 12-13, 2021; March 25-26, 2022

## Postponed Central Conferences 2022/23 - Dates and important issues

All four bishops plan to be present in person at each other's central conferences in 2022/23. The dates of the postponed central conferences are:

- CC-CSE: November 16-20, 2022 (with election of successor to Bp. Streiff);
- CC-Germany: Nov 22-26, 2022 (with re-election of Bp. Rückert);
- CC-NE&EA: March 15-19, 2023 (with episcopal elections)

Important issues at each central conference will be:

- Adaptations to the Book of Discipline
- Episcopal elections or re-elections
- Possible vote on separation from the UMC in a CC (needs a 2/3 majority according to the Protocol);
- Prepare and/or review the document with information and options for those who choose to leave the UMC (see part C below)
- Authorizing motion in each CC to establish a common task force for the continuing UMC (see part D below)

## Annual Conferences in 2023

- The document on separation (see part C below) highlights important issues to be dealt with in case of separation of an annual conference.
- In 2023, there may be a vote on denominational affiliation (if different from journey taken by CC); no AC has to vote, but each AC shall vote if at least 20% of AC-members ask for a vote for separating from the Central Conference (57% majority of AC-members required according to Protocol);
- Possibility, that at least 20% of AC-members at the regular session in 2023 ask for a vote, but that the AC calls for an extraordinary session for preparing, deliberating and deciding on the question.
- Whether at the regular session or at an extraordinary session, it is strongly recommended that each AC in Europe decides before end September 2023 whether it remains in a continuing UMC. Those who remain in a continuing UMC will have to elect their member(s) to the European wide "Task Force for the continuing UMC" (see part D below). Even if the Protocol may allow for a later voting in the ACs, the bishops strongly recommend that decisions be made by end September 2023, at the latest.

## **B) A preparatory Working Group to study the Future of Methodism in Europe prior to the postponed General Conference**

### Background

As there will be an additional year with the second postponement of General Conference to 2022, and most likely a very narrow time window between the postponed Central Conferences 2022/2023 and the following General Conference, we have found it timely and prudent to create a preparatory Working Group to envision how we would see the common future of Methodism in Europe.

### Mandate

The preparatory Working Group for the future of Methodism in Europe shall have the following mandate:

- a. The purpose of the preparatory Working Group is to prepare for the work that will need to happen in Europe following the General Conference in September 2022 with a perspective towards a common vision for all branches of Methodism in Europe.
- b. The Working Group will assume its work in the fall of 2021 and end its work before the opening of the General Conference in end August 2022.
- c. The Working Group will meet online.
- d. The Working Group shall study the petitions to General Conference that may significantly affect The UMC in Europe, including but not limited to "The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation and Restructuring" and "The Christmas Covenant", as well as other important developments in Methodist churches in Europe.
- e. The Working Group shall discuss and give recommendations on the three documents, prepared by the bishops and discussed at the Executive Committee meetings in March 2021: "Towards the Future", "A Task Force Mandate for the Continuing UMC" and "On Separation from the UMC."
- f. The Working Group may decide to study and discuss other matters that it deems relevant to its purpose.
- g. The Working Group will give an interim report to the executive committees of the three European central conferences-in the spring of 2022.
- h. The Working Group will deliver a final report of its findings and recommendations to the executive committees, the annual conferences and the General Conference delegates in Europe before August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

#### Composition and organization of the Working Group

- a. Two members from each of the three German annual conferences, elected by the annual conference or its church council.
- b. One member from each of the other annual or provisional annual conferences, elected by the annual conference or its church council.
- c. The four active bishops.
- d. One observer from the British Methodist Church and one observer from the Irish Methodist Church.
- e. It is recommended that members are elected from among the members of the executive committees.
- f. An annual conference can decide to leave the Working Group or to join the Working Group at any time in the process.
- g. A bishop, named by the active bishops, serves as facilitator.
- h. A secretary, without voice and vote, will be added to the Working Group.

### **C) On Separation from the UMC**

A document called "***On Separation from the UMC***", submitted to the Executive Committees for perfection, explains some generalities linked to the present *Book of Discipline* and to the Protocol. It will be sent as information to all three Executive Committees of the central conferences with the request to update it with the information that is additionally needed for the specific central conference. An updated and enlarged document with the specifics should be submitted to each central conference.

- Each central conference, through its executive committee or officers, is asked to prepare individually a documentation on what it means for an annual conference to remain in or to leave the “Post-separation UMC” according to the Protocol, with at least the following elements:
  - Regulations for transition period (including clergy, local churches, official roles in general level of the church, assets, etc.)
  - Episcopal oversight during transition
  - Administrative consequences of separation
  - Financial consequences of separation
  - Ecumenical consequences of separation (within Methodist family and larger ecumenical bodies)

## **D) On the continuing UMC and the creation of a Europe-wide Task Force**

A document called “**Task Force Mandate**”, submitted to the central conferences, is related to those annual conferences that will remain in a continuing UMC. After the decisions of the Central Conferences in 2022/23 and the Annual Conferences in 2023, a continuing UMC in Europe will look different from today. The separate document “Task Force Mandate” unfolds in more detail the common challenges for a continuing UMC in Europe and how to address them pro-actively. Among the important changes after the adoption of the Protocol at a General Conference in 2022 will be:

- Reduction in number of annual conferences
- Reduction in number of clergy
- A central conference may not be able to remain a central conference with the right of electing its own bishop
- All central conferences remaining in a continuing UMC should create a common Task Force for submitting a common plan for the continuing UMC, its central conferences and episcopal areas.

# Central Conferences in Europe after 2022/23

## A Task Force Mandate for a continuing UMC (Version May 6, 2021)

**Authors: the active Bishops in Europe (Alsted, Khegay, Rückert, Streiff)**

*Important remark: The active bishops will prepare a finalized version (with update from decisions of the postponed GC, including for the timelines mentioned) that will be sent to all central conferences at their sessions between November 2022 and March 2023.*

### 1 - Background

The postponed General Conference may decide in September 2022 on a plan for a separation into two or more churches (e.g. Protocol on *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring*). Decisions on departing from The UMC, may heavily affect the central conferences in Europe and their episcopal areas. For both traditionalists and continuing UMC, a separation will result in a reduction in the number of annual conferences, local churches, and clergy. Within the continuing UMC, it may also lead – **after** the regular central conferences in 2022/23 – to a situation that a central conference may become too small in the number of delegates to continue as a central conference. It then may become a provisional central conference without a right to elect (or re-elect) a bishop. Furthermore, it may be that the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters chooses to assess the situation of the continuing UMC in Europe after having done an assessment in Africa (in 2015) and in the Philippines (in 2019).

**Therefore, we ask the Executive Committees of the three Central Conferences in Europe that they agree on a common mandate for a joint European-wide Task Force that will study and make proposals for the future of the continuing UMC in all of Europe, its central conference structure, and its episcopal supervision. The Executive Committees shall submit the mandate to their respective central conference for affirmation. Each annual conference that decides to remain in the United Methodist Church in 2023, shall elect their member(s) to the Task Force.**

For information:

***Important regulations in the Book of Discipline 2016, related to central conferences:***

At present, the relevant parts in the Book of Discipline (edition 2016) related to central conferences and the number of their bishop(s) are the following:

Constitution: Section V. Central Conferences ¶¶ 28-31

Organization and Administration, Chapter Four The Conferences, Section III. Central Conferences ¶¶ 540-548, and Section IV. Provisional Central Conferences ¶¶ 560-567.

Furthermore:

- The number of central conferences requires a two-thirds vote by General Conference ¶ 540.1
- The minimum number for creating a central conference is 30 clergy and 30 lay delegates ¶ 540.2 with a ratio according to ¶ 541.1 (2+2 per AC or Provisional AC and 1+1 for a mission; but no additional delegates from ACs or Prov. ACs that would allow for more than one for every six clergy, with a last additional delegate for a number giving a majority of the fixed ratio); it means in practice: if a

central conference has more than 180 clergy (active or retired), it can certainly remain a central conference, below that number you need to make the exact calculation of both factors, number of ACs or missions and number of clergy.

- ¶ 540.2 allows General Conference to differ from these minimum numbers of 30+30 delegates (“except as the General Conference may fix a different number”);
- The number of bishops in a central conference is decided by General Conference ¶ 543.2, according to the criteria set out in ¶ 404.1 (related to an assessment by the Standing Committee on CC Matters);
- The central conference fixes the tenure of bishops ¶ 543.3, and the areas and residences of bishops ¶ 543.5;
- The central conference fixes the numbers and boundaries of annual conferences ¶ 40 and ¶ 540.8, according to the minimum numbers of clergy for annual conferences (¶ 540.8).
- To a provisional central conference may be granted all the rights of a central conference with the exception of electing its own bishop (¶ 562).

See also appendix on the present statistics in the central conferences in Europe (2019).

## **2 – Timeline and Process for the continuing UMC**

### 2.1 Provisional timeline in a continuing UMC if the Protocol is adopted by General Conference in late summer 2022

As any change in numbers of central conferences and numbers of eligible bishops is the authority of General Conference, a petition for such changes needs to be submitted to the continuing UMC General Conference which probably may be convened between 2024 and 2026. The submission deadline for a petition is 230 days prior to the opening of General Conference. However, annual conferences may submit petitions up to 45 days prior to the opening of General Conference. A petition related to a central conference will be forwarded to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters that will directly report to the General Conference. Therefore, there may be an extremely narrow time-window for the work of a Task Force and submitting a petition, depending on the date for a General Conference of the continuing UMC.

**As all annual conferences will have a chance to vote whether they remain in The UMC or depart from it, they shall be encouraged to make this decision following the regular central conference in 2022/23, but before end September 2023 (cf. document “On Separation”). It is planned that the Task Force for the continuing UMC will begin its work in October 2023. A petition to the next General Conference of the continuing UMC might need to be ready for submission in summer 2024 (if the next GC will be in May 2025), or – depending on the next GC – earlier or later. For the moment, we propose a timeline where a petition will be ready for submission in summer 2024. After the postponed General Conference 2022, the bishops will update the timeline.**

### 2.2 Process and timeline for a Task Force

The common mandate for the European-wide task force shall be enacted by each of the three central conferences in 2022/23. However, the membership of the task force shall

only be composed of those annual conferences who want to remain in the continuing UMC. Annual conferences that remain in the continuing UMC shall elect their member to the Task Force prior to September 2023. It is recommended that these members are part of the executive committee and/or an other key leadership body of the respective annual conference.

Furthermore, the reporting and final agreement on a petition cannot be handled by the regular central conferences of the continuing UMC, as they will only meet after General Conference. Therefore, the central conferences will have to give authority to their executive bodies for approving a petition at a meeting briefly before the deadline for submission.

For cost-effectiveness, it is recommended that all meetings of the Task Force will be held online, but that the chairperson and the secretary of the Task Force will have a budget for traveling to executive meetings of each central conference for reporting in March 2024 and the final meeting in summer 2024 (tentative date: June 28-29, 2024).

Following the meeting of the executive committees of the central conferences in March 2024, the task force will design a hearing of its draft report among the church councils / executive bodies of the annual conferences of the continuing UMC, between April and May 2024. The executive committees of the central conferences will be asked to organize the implementation of the hearing in their annual conferences, collect the responses and report back to the task force by end May 2024.

For finalizing the petition, all executive committees shall meet in person, in summer 2024, together with the chairperson and secretary of the Task Force (tentative date: June 28-29, 2024). Such a European-wide meeting of the executive committees will be important for generating a common agreement on the petition that will be submitted to the General Conference of the continuing UMC. The vote will take place separately for each executive committee and a majority vote is needed in each of the executive committees for submitting the petition to the General Conference.

### **3 – Mandate for a Task Force for a continuing UMC**

Each of the three central conferences authorizes the creation of a European wide Task Force on the future of the central conferences of the continuing UMC in Europe with a common mandate.

#### **3.1 Task Force Mandate**

The Task Force shall have the following mandate and provisional timeline:

- a. The task force shall begin its work in October 2023. The language of all sessions and reports will be in English only.
- b. The task force shall study the effect of the decisions of General Conference on bishops, clergy and annual conferences concerning their decision to depart or remain in The UMC. It shall make proposals for organizing the work of the continuing UMC in Europe.
- c. The task force shall bring an interim report to each of the executive committee meetings of the central conferences in March 2024 which shall give an initial feed-back to the task force.
- d. In April, the task force shall send out a revised interim report with a questionnaire. Through the episcopal offices, it shall be sent out to the church councils (or

respective executives) of each annual conference remaining in the continuing UMC, for consultation. The feed-back from AC church councils shall be collected by the episcopal offices and sent to the task force no later than May 15, 2024.

- e. In June, the task force shall draft a final report, including a petition to General Conference, for the future organization of the work of the continuing UMC in Europe concerning the number and borders of central conference(s) and the number and areas of their bishops. The task force shall submit its final report to a joint in-person meeting of the executive committees of the three central conferences for approval.
- f. At the joint in-person meeting of all three executive committee meetings in July, the final vote on the petition to General Conference will be made by each executive committee individually. A majority vote in favour of the finalized petition is needed in each executive committee in order to submit the petition to General Conference. The chairperson and secretary of the Task Force will be responsible for submission of the finalized petition to General Conference.
- g. All meetings of the Task Force shall be held online; the chairperson and the secretary shall have a budget for travel to each of the executive committee meetings of the central conferences in March 2024 (accommodation paid by the hosting executive committee) and to the joint in-person meeting in July 2024. The costs are evenly split among all three central conferences. Each central conference pays the costs of the meetings of their own executive committee.

### 3.2 Task Force Composition

The Task Force shall have the following composition:

- a. A bishop as the chairperson, named by the active bishops in Europe; the chairperson may be one of the active or retired bishops in of the continuing UMC in Europe;
- b. All active bishops of the continuing UMC in Europe;
- c. Among those remaining in the continuing UMC, each annual conference elects two members and each provisional annual conference elects one member to the Task Force prior to end September 2023. A member of the Task Force shall have past or present experience on the level of the central conference and/or European Methodism and be part of the leadership in the respective annual conference. Annual conferences who can send two members, shall balance their membership between clergy and lay, man and woman.
- d. The European Methodist Council is invited to delegate two persons with voice but not vote from two different of its non-UMC member churches, at the expense of its sending church and/or subsidized by the EMC.
- e. The Task Force organizes itself its work, including the election of a secretary.

Cost estimate:

- 2 persons x 3 executive committees in spring and 1 in-person meeting in summer = 8 travels at an average of € 300 each: € 2'400;
- Miscellaneous: € 600;
- Total: € 3'000 or € 1'000 per central conference.



## **4. – Useful criteria and outline of options**

### 4.1 Criteria for scenarios for European Central conferences after 2022/23 in a continuing UMC

The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters published a paper on central conferences as an appendix to its report to General Conference 2016 (see ADCA GC 2016). It gives guidelines and criteria for evaluating requests for changes in numbers and boundaries of central conferences, beyond the minimum requirements set in the Book of Discipline. In addition, we want to name for the European situation:

- The CC (one or several) must each be financially sustainable for its own structuring and meetings
- Episcopal areas in Europe need to be geographical areas that help to maintain and/or create connections between the countries
- Language and cultural similarities are helpful to connect different countries in an episcopal area
- Episcopal offices may change in location, but should not depend on the country where the bishop comes from, if its office has an important role in strengthening the connection among its annual conferences and countries

### 4.2 Imaginable options if one or two of the three central conferences are no more sustainable and one of the four bishops will not be part of a continuing UMC

Compared to the number of membership (criteria in the US), Europe has a too high number of bishops. Compared to the workload of a bishop (criteria for central conferences according to BOD ¶ 404.1) the number of bishops in Europe can be justified. However, the present situation would not give strong arguments for any rise in the number of bishops, but might give reasons for a reduction in a continuing UMC. On that background are offered the following options – and others may be added:

- a) A no more sustainable central conference will become a provisional central conference with episcopal oversight decided by the Council of Bishops; and sustainable central conference(s) remain as at present.
- b) Reordering into one Central Conference with three episcopal areas
- c) Reordering into one Central Conference with two episcopal areas
- d) Reordering into two Central Conferences with one bishop each
- e) Reordering into two Central Conferences, one with one, the other with two bishops
- f) Rethinking episcopacy and have one or several "Part-time bishop(s)"

# Central Conferences in Europe after 2022/23

## On Separation from the UMC (Version May 6, 2021)

**Authors: the active Bishops in Europe (Alsted, Khegay, Rückert, Streiff)**

*Important remarks: This document will be sent to all Executive Committees of the central conferences for adding and enlarging the specifics and for forwarding it to the central conferences. The European bishops will take contact with the Wesleyan Covenant Association to understand how WCA thinks such a process of separation should take place and what role bishops remaining in the UMC will have.*

### 1 - Background

The postponed 2020 General Conference may decide in September 2022 on a plan for a separation into two or more churches (e.g. Protocol on *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring*). As a consequence of its adoption at the postponed GC, the central conferences in the late fall of 2022 or spring 2023 will have the possibility to depart from The UMC. Following the central conferences, each annual conference and provisional annual conference will have the same possibility of choice, as also local churches afterwards. We call on all central conference delegates to work for the best possible outcome for all annual and provisional annual conferences and to bless each other as we continue our walk with God.

Decisions on departing from The UMC, may heavily affect the central conferences in Europe and their episcopal areas. For both traditionalists and the continuing UMC, a separation will result in a reduction in the number of annual conferences, local churches, and clergy.

#### **Annual Conferences:**

ACs wanting to separate from the United Methodist Church, will decide if they wish to join the new traditionalist Methodist denomination, or if they will choose other possibilities in agreement with the decisions of the postponed General Conference meeting in 2022. Their bishop will assist them in this transition. Those working towards forming a new traditionalist Methodist denomination have launched a website "Global Methodist Church" and plan to call a first convening General Conference within 12 to 24 months after the postponed General Conference in 2022. Furthermore, in December 2020, the "Liberation Methodist Connexion (LMX)" was launched. Other denominations may be formed based on the Protocol. However, we have no specific information about this.

#### **Clergy and local churches.**

For every clergyperson and every local church, the Protocol offers the possibility to join a different Methodist denomination than their respective annual conference. The timeline for decisions by clergypersons and by local churches is longer than for annual conferences.

**At present, as bishops and as central conferences, we are part of The UMC and we cannot plan or prepare a mandate for those who leave The UMC. Therefore, this document does not create a mandate for a task force, but – more modestly – shares some important regulations and steps for those who want to leave The**

**UMC and not remain in a “Post-separation UMC”. It is based on the proposed Protocol and will be revised after the decisions by the postponed 2020 General Conference.**

## **2 – Regulations on Separating from the UMC**

### 2.1 Proposed regulations for separating according to the Protocol

The following explanations are based on the petition submitted to the postponed General Conference, now scheduled for late summer 2022, for a new ¶ 2556 – *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring*.

The UMC shall continue as the denomination for all central conferences, annual conferences, and local churches that do not choose to separate and form or join a New Methodist Denomination. New Methodist Denominations may be formed, including any Traditionalist Methodist Denomination that maintains the current stance of the *Book of Discipline* regarding the definition of marriage and ordination standards. (cf. ¶ 2556.2 Intro).

Forming a new Methodist Denomination according to the Protocol requires among others also the following criteria (cf. ¶ 2556.2a):

- To follow doctrinal standards consistent with the Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and the General Rules of the Methodist Church, as set out in ¶ 104 of the *Book of Discipline*.
- To propose a definite and distinct ecclesiastical governance structure.
- To align a minimum of 100 United Methodist local churches, regardless of geography.

Any proposed New Methodist Denomination that has registered its intent shall be allowed to share information about the proposed New Methodist Denomination with central conference and annual conference members, as well as local church leaders, prior to any vote by such conferences or churches on whether to separate from The UMC to join a New Methodist Denomination. (cf. ¶ 2556.2b)

Annual conferences or local churches that separate from The UMC to form or join a New Methodist Denomination must relinquish all ecumenical relationships with other denominations that were acquired during their affiliation with The UMC, but may re-establish such relationships following separation through their own dialogues. (cf. ¶ 2556.2c(8))

Process of alignment outside the United States (cf. ¶ 2556.3):

- Central conferences may by two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at a regular or called session choose to form or join a New Methodist Denomination. The CC shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor supported by one-fifth of its members, or through its normal processes. If the CC does not vote, it shall by default remain with the continuing UMC. – For Europe, the bishops strongly recommend that a decision (or by default) be taken at the regular session in 2022/23 and not postponed to a called session.
- Annual conferences that disagree with the decision of their central conference may by a vote of 57% of the members present and voting at a regular or called session choose the reverse of their central conference. The AC shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor supported by one fifth of its members, or through its normal processes. If the AC does not vote, it shall by default remain with its central

conference. – For Europe, the bishops strongly recommend that a decision (or by default) be taken at the regular session in 2023 or a called session no later than end September 2023. (see below point 3)

- Clergy in CC's that disagree with the alignment decision (by vote or default) of their AC, may decide to transfer to a different Methodist denomination, whether the post UMC or one created under the provisions of the Protocol. (see below point 4)
- Local churches in CC's that disagree with the alignment decision (by vote or default) of their AC, may by a vote of those professing members present and voting at a regular or called church conference choose the reverse of their AC. The church council shall determine whether to require a simple majority or two-thirds for such a decision. Local churches may decide to join a different Methodist denomination, whether the post UMC or one created under the provisions of the Protocol. (see below point 5).

Transitional operations following a vote to form or join a New Methodist Denomination (cf. ¶ 2556.5):

- The Separation Agreements for a CC, AC, or Local Church shall provide that the releases and indemnities are effective as of the Separation Date (but the separation date shall not be more than six months after the vote cf. ¶ 2556.7b(3)f)
- There shall be a grace period of six months to remove signage and other uses of the United Methodist name and insignia;
- Clergy or lay persons who choose to separate from The UMC shall immediately, upon the recordation of the vote, resign membership on CC or general agency boards remaining part of the continuing UMC.
- Clergy shall by default remain members of their AC, unless they choose otherwise (and allowing for transitional appointments till a transfer can be made).

A CC or an AC that vote to separate from The UMC and join a New Methodist Denomination, shall retain all of their property, assets, and liabilities (cf. ¶ 2556.7). The Wespath's Central Conference Pension program will continue (cf. ¶ 2556.8b), but its administration may change from a central conference approach (as in the CC-CSE) to an AC or country approach.

New Methodist Denominations, as well as their entities, are not required to participate in any program of The UMC and do not have a right to participate in them (except Wespath CCPI), unless through mutual agreement made (cf. ¶ 2556.11a)

## 2.2 Regulations in the present BOD for leaving the UMC without joining a new Methodist Denomination according to the Protocol

In principle, all assets belong to The UMC. An individual member may leave the church at any moment, but without any rights to assets of the church. Thus, if all members of a local church wanted to leave the denomination, they could leave individually but without any rights to the assets (and perhaps liabilities) of their local church. This "Trust Clause" (see also BOD, Part VI, chapter 6, Church Property) has been in the *Discipline* since its beginning, even if the UMC in some European countries has been working under civil legal

situations that do not safeguard this “Trust Clause” and/or where the UMC has not paid attention to safeguarding it.

Similar to the discussions at the called session of the General Conference 2019, the Protocol now adds one sub-paragraph on local churches disaffiliating and not joining a New Methodist Denomination (cf. ¶ 2556.12). The sub-paragraph only addresses local churches, not districts or annual conferences. Local churches may disaffiliate without joining a New Methodist Denomination with a 2/3 majority, and the AC may require certain payments of apportionments to the AC and the AC needs to approve the final agreement. Then the local churches may withdraw with its assets and liabilities. This sub-paragraph in the Protocol only concerns local churches and gives certain rights to them exceeding what the *Book of Discipline* allows.

In the present BOD, central conferences and annual conferences outside the US may have a possibility to become an autonomous Methodist, affiliated autonomous Methodist, or affiliated united church, according to ¶ 572). There is a specific voting process with 2/3-majorities required according to this paragraph. The paragraph offers a possibility only for AC’s outside the US. Within the US, an AC has no similar possibility.

### **3 – Consequences for an annual conference in 2023 that decides to depart from the UMC according to the Protocol**

#### **3.1 Generalities**

If a CC remains in the continuing UMC, but one of its AC’s decides to depart from the UMC for joining one of the New Methodist Denominations according to the Protocol, then the following aspects should be addressed and clearly understood by all members of the AC who have to vote.

Before voting:

- Clearly identify which New Methodist Denomination to join
- Be informed on the relationship and support that will end with the effective date of separation from the central conference and the continuing UMC
- Administrative consequences of separation related to the episcopal area office and the central conference
- Financial implications of separation
- Ecumenical consequences of separation (within Methodist family and larger ecumenical bodies)
- Set effective date of separation and timeline for transition;
- Plan for official information to the Bishop(s) and Central Conference on the result of the vote;
- Plan for official information on immediate resignation of clergy and lay from official roles on the general level of the church, including the possibility of a subsequent, opposite choice for clergy and for local churches to remain in a continuing UMC

In the interim between voting and effective date of separation:

- Negotiations with new denomination
- Possible transitional episcopal leadership
- Clarify opposite choice of clergy and/or local churches within the AC
- Official information of ending ecumenical agreements and membership as UMC to the respective ecumenical partners
- Establish new organizational relationship
- Prepare organizing according to new denomination
- Revision of bylaws

The four active bishops in Europe affirm their willingness to do all which is in their authority to assist annual conferences in this transition, according to the *Book of Discipline*. According to the Protocol, local churches will have a longer period of time to make their decision than annual conferences. Superintendents will be responsible for ensuring that any voting in church conferences is conducted in a fair and transparent manner.

### 3.2 Specifics for annual conferences in their respective central conference

The executive committee or officers of the central conference will need to prepare the specific information related to the respective central conference and/or any additional information needed prior to decisions of annual conferences, clergy and local churches.

## **4. Process for clergypersons who do not want to stay with their annual conference**

In the Protocol, ¶ 2556.6 specifies the regulations for clergy who wish to join a different denomination than their respective annual conference is following.

- If the central conference, annual conference or local church decides to separate from the United Methodist Church and the clergyperson wants to remain in it, the clergyperson has to give notice of remaining in the continuing UMC to his/her superintendent **prior to the official separation date**. There may be transitional appointments up to the final transfer.
- If the central conference, annual conference or local church remains in the continuing UMC, but the clergyperson wants to join a new Methodist denomination according to the Protocol, notice shall be given to the superintendent **prior to the final date set in the Protocol** (With a GC in May 2020, the final date was set for July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022; with a postponement of GC to late summer 2022, the final date will probably move to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 or even to the end of year 2024).

## 5. Process for local churches who do not want to stay with their annual conference

In the Protocol, ¶ 2556.3d specifies for local churches:

*Local churches in the central conferences that disagree with the alignment decision (by vote or default) of their annual conference, may, by a vote of those professing members present and voting at a regular or called church conference, choose, as applicable, to remain in The United Methodist Church, or to separate and form or join a New Methodist Denomination. The church council or equivalent body of each local church shall determine in advance whether to require a simple majority or two-thirds vote for such a decision. A vote on any such motion shall occur in a church conference held not more than 60 days after the request for such a vote is made by the church council or the pastor to the district superintendent. Notwithstanding other provisions in the Book of Discipline, such church conferences shall be held in consultation with the district superintendent, who shall without exercising discretion authorize such church conferences according to the process laid out in ¶ 246. Local churches not taking a vote by December 31, 2024, shall by default remain in the denomination of their annual conference.*

As all timelines in the Protocol, the date of December 31, 2024 may be postponed by about two additional years, which would mean about end December 2026.

## 6. Disaffiliation according to decisions of the 2019 General Conference

The 2019 General Conference has approved the following new paragraph on disaffiliation of local churches. This paragraph is not related to the Protocol. Decisions of the Protocol – when adopted by the postponed General Conference, scheduled for late summer 2022 – may have priority over this disaffiliation paragraph.

**NEW ¶ 2553, page 776.**

**[This new paragraph became effective at the close of the 2019 General Conference.]**

Section VIII. Disaffiliation of Local Churches Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality

¶ 2553. *Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality*—1. *Basis*—Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the *Book of Discipline* related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.

2. *Time Limits*—The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church under this paragraph shall be made in sufficient time for the process for exiting the

denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023. The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date.

3. *Decision Making Process*—The church conference shall be conducted in accordance with ¶ 248 and shall be held within one hundred twenty (120) days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. In addition to the provisions of ¶ 246.8, special attention shall be made to give broad notice to the full professing membership of the local church regarding the time and place of a church conference called for this purpose and to use all means necessary, including electronic communication where possible, to communicate. The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference.

4. *Process Following Decision to Disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church*—If the church conference votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation shall be established by the board of trustees of the applicable annual conference, with the advice of the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor. The terms and conditions, including the effective date of disaffiliation, shall be memorialized in a binding Disaffiliation Agreement between the annual conference and the trustees of the local church, acting on behalf of the members. That agreement must be consistent with the following provisions:

a) Standard Terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement. The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth in ¶ 807.9. The agreement shall include a recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶ 2501, notwithstanding the release of property therefrom. Annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.



## Appendix – Statistics of Annual Conferences in Europe 2019

	Membership (Professing members)	Clergy (active and retired)
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>52'334</b>	<b>1'052</b>
<b>CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE CENTRAL CONFERENCE</b>	<b>13'764</b>	<b>302</b>
Austria Provisional	746	9
Bulgaria-Romania Provisional	1'195	25
Czech and Slovak Republics	1'179	33
Hungary Provisional	509	19
Poland	1'925	30
Switzerland-France-North Africa	6'407	165
Serbia-Macedonia Provisional	1'803	21
<b>GERMANY CENTRAL CONFERENCE</b>	<b>27'904</b>	<b>448</b>
East Germany	7'414	86
North Germany	5'890	98
South Germany	14'600	264
<b>NORTHERN EUROPE AND EURASIA CENTRAL CONFERENCE</b>	<b>10'666</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Nordic and Baltic (without Sweden!)</b>	<b>9'270</b>	<b>221</b>
Denmark	1'210	25
Estonia	1'461	51
Latvia (District)	557	13
Lithuania (District)	449	4
Finland-Finnish Provisional	773	17
Finland-Swedish Provisional	731	22
Norway	4'089	89
<b>Eurasia</b>	<b>1396</b>	<b>81</b>
Central Russia (Provisional?)	232	18
East Russia-Central Asia Provisional	633	28
North West Russia and Belarus Provisional	142	9
Southern Russia Provisional	141	13
Ukraine-Moldova Provisional	248	13

# On the question of homosexuality in The United Methodist Church in Germany

Resolutions of the Executive Committee of the UMC in Germany  
Video conference November 21, 2020

## Introduction

*“The question of how to deal with homosexuality should not separate us in our joint witness and in our joint mission, even if for some individuals this question leads to the center of their faith. We want to live up to our special mission as the UMC, to live together with personal piety and openness to the world, evangelical freedom and binding obedience, because the world needs this connection. We are aware that different choices of conscience lead to different results.*

*We consider it a spiritual mandate of Jesus to cling to unity and not to split his body but try to listen to one another, what we need in order to stay together. Jesus prays: ‘I’m not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.’ (John 17:20, 21 CEB)*

*With humility, we have to realize that our knowledge and ability to communicate are too weak to find a common position on the questions of homosexuality. That is why we want The Book of Discipline not to comment on the content and neither condemn nor approve homosexuality. This means that The United Methodist Church in Germany does not become one-sidedly liberal, but be non-committal on the question of homosexuality so that different views can be lived. With this cautious change, The United Methodist Church in Germany tries to keep open the conversation with the other annual conferences in The United Methodist Church around the world, which keep these sentences in effect.”*

(Quote from: Final report of the round table, January 11, 2020)

The decision of the Executive Committee to set up the Round Table (March 2019) had expressly in mind that probably it would be necessary to strike completely new paths in order to solve the almost unsolvable task. With the Round Table proposal for a common way forward despite differing convictions, this is exactly what happens.

The establishment of a “Community Covenant” within the United Methodist Church in Germany and its structures is a novelty. A lot was considered, negotiated and balanced. However, some aspects and developments can only be assessed to a limited extent in advance. The Community Covenant must be able to begin. Then, if necessary, readjustments can follow.

With the compromise that has been found, a way forward opens up on which we as the UMC in Germany want to go into the future together. It is an experimental journey to find a way that fits our context and specific missional needs. Only waiting for expected or unexpected decisions of the coming General Conference seems not to be helpful. The connectivity to a worldwide United Methodist Church of whatever kind is preserved.

The Round Table is convinced that a resolution by the Executive Committee on the proposed solution is necessary now in order to send a clear, reassuring signal to our local churches more than one and a half years after the 2019 special called session of the General Conference. Of course, these resolutions are subject for final discussion and decision by the Germany Central Conference, which follows the three Annual Conferences with the possibility of broad discussion.

## Resolutions

Based on the proposal of the Round Table, the Germany Central Conference's Executive Committee decides as follows:

### Resolution 1

The Executive Committee confirms the substantive necessity and urgency on which the following resolutions are based. It acts in accordance with ¶ 721.5 VLO (Verfassung, Lehre und Ordnung i.e. German version of the BOD), Chapter Five, Section II.

### Resolution 2

The Executive Committee provisionally suspends the following sentences of the VLO/BOD until the final decision will be taken by the Germany Central Conference (suspended passages in italics and in square brackets):

- ¶ 341 (VLO/BOD) – Unauthorized Conduct No. 6  
*[6. Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.]*

In the Social Principles:

- ¶ 161 G (VLO/BOD) – Human sexuality  
We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.  
*[Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.]*  
We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. (...) All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. *[The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.]* We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. *[We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.]*  
We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

### Resolution 3

The Executive Committee encourages the local churches and agencies to engage in further discussions and deeper reflections on biblical insights and God's acting in creation in order to enable a better mutual and common understanding and suggests concrete ways to do this.

### Resolution 4

The Executive Committee affirms: No clergy shall be obliged to bless married couples against his or her own conscience on the occasion of a wedding. In such a case, he or she can refer the couple to a colleague. Likewise, no clergy shall be obliged to refuse married couples a desired blessing on the occasion of a wedding against his or her own conscience.

A blessing on the occasion of a wedding can possibly take place in a neighboring church if it would lead to strong contradictions in the own local church.

### Resolution 5

The local church's church council can decide on the possibility of blessings for same-sex couples on the occasion of a wedding in their own church building.

**Resolution 6**

The Executive Committee decides on the establishment and organization of the Community Covenant in accordance with the Community Covenant's Theological Foundations and Organization presented by the Round Table. This will take place provisionally until the Germany Central Conference has taken a final decision. Until then, the Community Covenant's Theological Foundations and Organization will be reviewed and further developed.

**Resolution 7**

The district superintendents inform in the local churches and charges about the establishment of the Community Covenant and the possibility for churches and charges to join the Community Covenant.

**Resolution 8**

The Executive Committee asks the Round Table to continue to support the implementation of the resolutions until the Germany Central Conference will take place.

**Resolution 9**

The Germany Central Conference's Commission on the Discipline and Legal Issues is requested to submit proposals as to whether and in what way other disciplinary passages as ¶ 161 C (marriage) or regulations as cf. DHB par. VIII 231.4, need revision. Such revisions shall be coordinated with the Round Table. Such revisions shall be coordinated with the Round Table.

Adopted by the Germany Central Conference's Executive Committee chaired by Bishop Harald Rückert on November 21, 2020.

Final edition as of November 24, 2020  
Provisional translation. The German original is authoritative for the wording.

# The Community Covenant of the UMC in Germany

Resolution of the Executive Committee of the UMC in Germany  
Video conference November 21, 2020

## I. Theological Foundations

### Preliminary remark

Much of the content of these Theological Foundations describes common convictions in our church and can be found in "The Book of Discipline" (BOD) of The United Methodist Church. The aim of the following remarks is to focus on the statements of the BOD that are central to us and to contour them through statements going beyond this, in particular on "human sexuality and marriage" from the point of view of the Community Covenant. The Theological Foundations are not to be understood as a confessional text within the UMC in Germany, but as an expression of our beliefs.

### 1. Word of God

We believe that the Word of God is the basis, source and norm of all Christian life and faith. The Word is revealed once and for all in Jesus Christ, who is therefore the Word of God par excellence (John 1:1-14; Heb 1:1f.), and is testified by the apostles and the other biblical authors (Rom 1:2; Heb 1:1). On this basis, the Word of God continues in the proclamation and the witness of the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### 2. The Bible

We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God's Word—before and independently of all human hearing of this word. As such, it is written by persons inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16). It is thus God's word in human words (cf. Luke 1:1-4). With the Reformers and with the fathers and the mothers of the Methodist movement, we therefore believe that the Bible must and wants to be interpreted primarily by itself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20f.). The inclusion of tradition, experience and reason is a valuable aid to understanding, as long as the primacy of scripture is preserved.

### 3. God the Father

We believe that the God of the Bible is the one and only God (Deut 6:4; Ps 86:10; Isa 45:5; 1 Cor 8:4, 6). He is the almighty Creator and Perfector of the visible and the

invisible world (cf. Nicani creed) and in Jesus Christ our merciful heavenly Father (Matt 6:6-9; Rom 8:15). The "gods", of whose reality the Bible speaks alongside God (Ps 86:8; 135:5; 1 Cor 8:5; 1 Thess 1:9), are, according to our conviction, beings of the invisible world, and differ fundamentally from the one and only true God and not be equal to him (Rom 8:38f.; 1 Cor 8:4-6; 10:20f.; Eph 6:12). The main criterion for speaking of God's being-God is his self-revelation in Jesus Christ.

### 4. Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God and as such is true God and true man (John 1:1, 14). God bound salvation for all people to his person (John 3:16; 14:16; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16). Through his vicarious atoning death and bodily resurrection, Jesus obtained the forgiveness and disempowerment of sin and death and opened up new, eternal life in fellowship with God (Rom 4:24f.; 8:1-4; 1 Cor 15:54f.; 2 Cor 5:14-15, 21). This is the core of the salvation that God created through him. According to the Gospel, Jesus Christ is the person who truly lives according to God's word and will. His justice benefits us human beings and is a lasting role model and power for our way of life following him.

### 5. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is God himself in his spiritual presence and powerful effectiveness in the world and especially in humankind. As such, the Holy Spirit primarily reveals Jesus Christ as the one word of God that creates salvation (1 Cor 2:10f.; 12:3; Eph 1:17ff. and 3:4f.) and awakens faith in Jesus (Acts 10:44ff.; Rom 15:18f.). He enables to follow Jesus and to testify of him in word and deed (Acts 1:8) and with his gifts equips the believers even today building the Church and serving the world (1 Cor 12-14). He works the life in us in the inner connection with Jesus and in harmony with the word and will of God (Rom 8). His work can therefore never contradict the word of God.



## 6. Salvation of man

We believe that the salvation of man lies in his new relationship with God believing in Jesus Christ (John 20:31; Rom 5:1f.; 6:3-11; 1 John 5:11f.). It is life before and with the living God in being filled with the wealth of his spiritual gifts (especially peace, joy, certainty of salvation, charisms), in forgiveness and freedom from the power of sin (as man's self-assertion against God with all their evil effects) and death (Acts 26:18; Rom 8:1f.) as well as in the salvation of the soul and body life (Mark 1:34; 3:14f.; Rom 15:18f.). In this world, salvation is a reality tied to faith. It is therefore exposed to temptation and endangered by human inadequacy and weakness (1 Cor 10:6-12). Its security lies solely in the gracious work of God, to which we must therefore turn and expose ourselves again and again (Phil 2:12f.; Col 2:6f.).

## 7. Salvation and sanctification

We believe that salvation of man is based on God's justifying love (Rom 3:23f.), which is unconditional for us as sinners (Rom 5:8ff.). Through his Spirit, God awakens in us faith in Jesus Christ as repentance (1 Thess 1:9f.) and renewal of the heart (Rom 5:5), so that we become new creatures (2 Cor 5:17) or born again people (John 3:3-8; Tit 3:4-7; 1 Pet 1:3). In our life, this occurs as a conversion or a decision to live with and for Jesus from now on—that includes the ever-new turning to him. In baptism, which is either received in faith or later accepted in faith, this salvation is symbolically awarded to us (Rom 6:3-11) and we are incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

Our sanctification consists in the ability through the Holy Spirit to live in harmony with God's word and will (Rom 8:4; Col 1:30) so that the new life takes a concrete form in our way of life (Rom 12:1f.; Gal 5:25; Eph 2:10; 1 Thess 4:3-7). On the path of sanctification we grow in faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13) with the goal of being completely connected to Christ and being shaped by his love (Eph 4:13-15).

## 8. Prayer

We believe that—according to salvation as a living relationship with God—prayer to the Triune God is the most important source of strength and inspiration for a Christian life. In prayer, we experience the reality of being adopted as his children (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6) and the work of the Holy Spirit, who pleads our case with unexpressed groans into praying consistent with God's will (Rom 8:26f.). Jesus' prayer serves as a model for our prayers: his prayer life (Mark 1:35; 14:35f.) in adoration (Matt 11:25f.), thanksgiving (John 11:41), petition (Mark 14:36), and intercession (Luke 22:32) as well as the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt 6:9-13) and its instructions on invocation (Matt 6:7f.; 7:7-11) and prayer for the enemies (Matt 5:44f.).

## 9. Human sexuality, marriage

We believe that God created human beings in the mutual assignment of the two genders, male and female (Gen 1:27f.) and, as Creator, located the sexual community in the holistic, lifelong connection of man and woman (Gen 2:24; Mark 10:6-9). This is why sexual relations "are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage" (Social Principles ¶ 161 G, BOD). Therefore, we do not believe that homosexuality is a "good gift" from the Creator and we cannot agree to the blessing or marriage of same-sex couples (¶ 341 BOD). Likewise, the often-intended reinterpretation of marriage as a union of two people does not find our approval, since here the relationship between man and woman given by the Creator is no longer constitutive for the understanding of marriage. We cannot approve the ordination of people who openly live their homosexuality either.

## 10. The Church and the local church

We believe that the Church is the community of saints who believe in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:1) and are connected to one another through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). As a spiritual dimension, the true Church is invisible. However, it appears visibly as a community of people who follow Jesus, stand in his mission (John 20:21; Acts 1:8) and fulfill his mission (Matt 28:19f.). The basic form of this community is the local church. It is part of the worldwide body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22f.), in which people experience the healing fullness of this body in mind, soul, and body (1 Cor 12:24-28; Eph 1:23 and 4:12-16) and allow themselves to be ruled gratefully by the peace of Jesus Christ and his word (Col 3:15-17). Here earthly-human differences are no longer valid (Gal 3:26-28), since everyone invokes the name of the Lord with one another (Rom 10:12f.). It is the mission of the Church to visibly and publicly realize the New Testament vision of community and reconciliation (Ephesians 2:14ff.) and thereby incorporate the contextual cultural life (1 Cor 9:19-22).

## 11. Religions

We believe that God as the Creator of the world wants the salvation of all humankind (Gen 12:3; Isa 49:6; 1 Tim 2:4)—regardless of their religion (1 Thess 1:9f.) and position towards him (Rom 5:8-10). As the one and only God (see above Art. 3), who revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ, he alone can give humankind salvation and life. Therefore there is no salvation beyond Jesus Christ (Joh 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 11:26f.; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Phil 2:10f.; Col 1:19f.) and religions are not diverse ways that each share in God's salvation for humankind. That is why we are called to a worldwide witness for Jesus (Matt 28:19f.; Acts 1:8)—in the hope that the Holy Spirit will awaken people to believe in him as the truth of the Gospel (1 Cor 12:2f.; 1 Thess 1:2-5). With Romans 9-11 we believe in God's promises for Israel, which have their beginning and their goal in Jesus Christ. As God's

beloved creatures, we treat people of other religions with respect and stand up for religious freedom—in the hope that God will complete his plan with the religions.

## 12. Mission and evangelism

We believe that the public witness of Jesus Christ in word and deed is an elementary characteristic of Christian life (Mt 5:13f.; 28:19f.; Acts 1:8; 4:20). The church is mission with the aim of fulfilling Jesus' call for global

mission—through active transmission of the Gospel, initiation into discipleship, integration into the Christian community, instruction in faith and in a life of wholistic love for God and people (Matt 22:37-40) in the horizon of the Kingdom of God. The call to repentance and the acceptance of the forgiveness of sins have a special status, since salvation of man primarily consists in his new relationship with God (see above Art. 6).

## II. Organization

### 1. Name "Community Covenant"

The word "community" describes something connexional, which applies both within the covenant as well as to the whole connexion which is our church. It is a community of local churches, charges and individual members of our church. In many areas of Germany, the name "Community Covenant" also has a positive traditional (conservative) connotation. This name, which is rather theologically neutral, does not polarize because it does not deny other people's beliefs. The word "covenant" describes the organizational form of this community. The addition "of the UMC in Germany" makes it clear that the covenant considers itself as part of the United Methodist Church in Germany.

### 2. Membership

- 2.1 The Community Covenant is open to all who wish to belong to it and who affirm its theological statement: Individuals (and thus local groups or circles), local churches and charges can become members of the Community Covenant. For participation within the Community Covenant, the regular rules of the United Methodist Church apply (e.g. voting rights).
- 2.2 It is recommended that local churches and charges discuss the possibility of joining the Community Covenant and the related issues. Local churches and charges are not forced to vote on whether or not to join the Community Covenant.  
A vote on the possible accession of a local church or charge takes place if at least 20 percent of the members of a local church or charge wish to vote on.  
A properly convened local church conference under the authority of the district superintendent decides on the accession of a local church to the Community Covenant.  
A properly convened charge conference under the authority of the district superintendent decides on the accession of a charge to the Community Covenant.  
Voting takes place in writing. A clear majority of the members who are present and entitled to vote is to be aimed for in order to join.

The result should be valid for at least four years. If a local church or charge wants to leave the Community Covenant, the same procedure applies.

### 3. Networking

The Community Covenant organizes its own events and retreats to meet the needs of the like-minded people. This also applies to meetings for groups by age or social background as well as for clergy. This means support and encouragement as well as networking with one another and with the whole Church. Such meetings can also take place at regional level to reach all members. Here the color of faith can be lived and developed. Through these meetings, through training, publications, Community Covenant letters and its own website, information from the Community Covenant can be passed on and feedback can be obtained. A prayer network serves for personal strengthening and to strengthen the Community Covenant.

### 4. Leadership

The Community Covenant forms a member conference. This can consist of representatives from local churches and charges and other groups within the Community Covenant as well as individuals. The member conference elects a board and a chair. The board prays and, in cooperation with the bishop's cabinets, ensures appropriate spiritual support for the individual members and the churches. The Community Covenant can form management structures at regional level.

### 5. Operational work

The Community Covenant needs human resources in order to build up the network, and furthermore a secretariat, a financial administration, and an office for communications for its own events and its content-related concerns.

### 6. Integration into the general Church

- 6.1 The Community Covenant stands for strengthening the unity of the Church by actively bringing its color of faith into the UMC in Germany.
- 6.2 The Community Covenant does not see itself as a separate church, but as part of the United Methodist Church in Germany.
- 6.3 The Community Covenant will participate at all levels of the life and ministry of the Church: central conference, annual conferences, districts, and

- possibly charges and local churches. Information on the events of the Community Covenant and of the general Church will be communicated mutually.
- 6.4 At least for the duration of the establishment of the Community Covenant, representation on the Central Conference's Executive Committee and permanently in the Commission on the Annual Conference should be guaranteed.
  - 6.5 The Community Covenant may use the media of the Church for publication in the same way as the other agencies of the Church do.
  - 6.6 The three Germany Annual Conferences support the establishment of the Community Covenant by helping to develop human resources. Once the Community Covenant is established, mixed financing (Community Covenant capital; support from Annual Conferences) will be discussed.
  - 6.7 The Community Covenant can offer its own events for children and young people that are connected with the children's and youth agencies of the Church. The Community Covenant can also take part in the events organized by the children's and youth agencies.
  - 6.8 All Germany Annual Conferences promote and ensure that conference members being members of the Community Covenant also run for membership in the Germany Central Conference. The Committees on Nominations of the Annual Conferences promote this and ensure that members of the Community Covenant also run for membership of the Germany Annual Conference's Boards of Ordained Ministry.
  - 6.9 The Community Covenant is obliged to report to the Germany Annual Conferences and to the Germany Central Conference.
  - 6.10 The Community Covenant can propose people for full-time ministry, especially in the area of the Community Covenant. In human resource matters, the vote of the board of the Community Covenant can be brought into the respective Conference Board of Ordained Ministry.
  - 6.11 Appointments are made by the bishop and the cabinet. The theological basis of the Community Covenant is taken into account. In the case of planned appointments to local churches in the Community Covenant, the board of the Community Covenant is involved.

### III. Epilogue

Almost all of our local churches are "mixed" churches in which people with different opinions and convictions live together. As a matter of principle, attention must be paid with the greatest sensitivity to those who are in

the minority on a particular issue—not just on the subject of "marriage and human sexuality". This applies in particular in the case that a local church or a charge takes or has made a decision to join or not to join the Community Covenant by voting.

Adopted by the Germany Central Conference's Executive Committee chaired by Bishop Harald Rückert on November 21, 2020.

Final edition as of November 24, 2020 with few additions as of January 26, 2021.  
Provisional translation. The German original is authoritative for the wording.



## The Round Table of the UMC in Germany

### Report about the challenging journey

In November 2020

## **Eighteen months on the road with God — “so that many people in our Church have a home”**

On May 1, 2019, the members of the “Round Table” of the United Methodist Church (UMC) in Germany, appointed by Bishop Harald Rückert, met for a first meeting in Frankfurt am Main (Germany). The initiation of the Round Table and the associated discussion process was based on a resolution of the Executive Committee of the Germany Central Conference following the special called General Conference held in St. Louis (Missouri, USA) in February 2019. The Round Table’s task was to search for a common path for a way forward for the UMC in Germany despite differing convictions and conclusions about human sexuality and different sexual orientation. In its meeting on March 10, 2019, the Executive Committee said:

*We have “revealed the painful fact that neither the Executive Committee nor the UMC as a whole can reach agreement on how homosexuality should be assessed. In our Church, there are large groups of opposite opinions on this question. We must expect the situation to remain like this for the foreseeable future. Even so, we want to stay together as a Church where people of differing opinions can live with each other. We don’t want to let go of each other and we don’t want to separate from each other, but we want to hold on to each other and to be there for each other. For we are convinced that Jesus wants to use us and our gifts jointly and together. But we can only stay together as a church if—even without being of one mind in important questions—we live in respectful contact with each other. We therefore want to be a Church where it is possible as well that persons with homosexual orientation can be ordained and blessed in a marriage ceremony, as well as that traditionally minded people can uphold their ideas and lifestyles. (...) We are aware that the endeavor to uphold community will make great demands of us all in future too. This way also includes transforming our Church so that it can offer a secure home to people of dif-*

*fering convictions. (...) We must all take on our own share of responsibility for each other and make every effort to find “vessels” where the others can be at home. (...) These discussions do not entail trying to convince the others of our own opinion. Rather it is far more a case of finding ways for our Church to be a home for as many people as possible.”*

In a total of four personal meetings and four video conferences, in small group work, in many conversations, in questioning people in local churches and charges, in joint prayer, in intercession, and sharing bread and wine in celebration of the Holy Communion, the members of the Round Table have shaped an intense, challenging journey together. This was anything but easy. Different basic convictions, different ideas and understandings of the Bible, of the local church, and of the general Church, different influences—fundamentally different paths of faith and life came together.

After the international debates and events, the Round Table in Germany was also faced from the start with the question of whether and how a common path in the Church is possible and can continue. The first sessions made it clear how difficult it is to find a common language, let alone a common basis of trust. This process was therefore often called into question. It took time—to listen to each other, to learn to understand each other, to build a basic trust, to face God together, to find a new home.

Not only the most recent debates on questions of human sexuality, but also having been questioned on theological convictions in the past, had left traces of hurt and disappointment among members of the Round Table in recent years and decades. Many—from very different convictions and backgrounds—have often been

asked whether the UMC can continue to be a home for them or not. The discussions and arguments at the Round Table itself became a path that not all appointed members could follow to the end.

Nevertheless, God enabled it: Trust was built up bit by bit, as we stood before God repeatedly and could honestly express our fears and reservations. The openness of the exchange, the shared spiritual process, and the capacity to bear with completely different convictions and suggestions shaped the character of the encounters at the Round Table. It became noticeable in the long term how important the ongoing mutual and respectful conversation and above all the common focus on God's guidance in intensive prayer and Holy Communion are. At the end of our two-day retreat in January 2020, we experienced that God gave us a unanimity that surprised us—and has become the basis for the proposals that have now arisen to the Executive Committee. This spiritual experience gave us the strength to continue patiently talking to one another on many de-

tailed questions in the months that followed—and always to listen to ideas and fears from the local churches.

The Round Table members humbly understand the proposal as a well-founded, hopeful invitation not to stand still and give up, but to continue along the path that has been chosen, together and before God. It is an invitation to continue the intensive and trusting conversations about questions of faith, to enable people in the local churches to find a new home, and to accept the living diversity as a gift from God.

The Round Table members are convinced that the prompt and immediate implementation of few changes in the German version of The Book of Discipline and the establishment of the Community Covenant of the Germany UMC opens up a common path furthermore. This serves the local churches to maintain their unity and strengthens them in their mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

On behalf of the round table of the UMC in Germany: Stephan von Twardowski and Steffen Klug  
In November 2020

Provisional translation. The German original is authoritative for the wording.

## Guidelines for the Round Table discussions

The continued series of discussions at the Round Table meetings were also made possible by the reassurance that the agreed "Guidelines for Cooperation" were clearly understood and constantly in focus. The members of the Round Table are convinced that these guidelines are of fundamental importance and reach far beyond the work and the proposals of the Round Table. Based on trust and a will to journey together, the guidelines are crucial for every aspect of church life:

- **We present each other's point of view as fairly as possible.**

*We refrain from generalizing judgments and oversimplified, prejudiced portrayals of each other, and we sincerely endeavor to understand the other person and to take them seriously.*

- **We endeavor to break the winner-loser model.**  
*We prioritize the question "What does the other person need?" over "What do I need?"*

- **We assume good things about one another.**  
*We agree to believe that we speak and act sincerely according to our respective beliefs. On this basis, any disagreements or questionable behavior must be clarified openly.*

- **We may argue with each other, but not in ways that lead to public polarization.**

*Even more: We pro-actively oppose all harmful attempts at polarization, and are quick to have a moderating effect on our environment.*

- **We approach the questions at hand with wisdom and theological sophistication.**

*The Methodist "Quadrilateral" (the scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) serves as a helpful framework for our communication. Simple black and white thinking does not help.*

- **We base our speeches and actions on the model of "convicted humility".**

*We share our deep convictions and stand up for our point of view. However, we combine this with humility, which knows that all knowledge remains piecemeal (1 Cor 13:9, 12, 13) and therefore needs to be supplemented and corrected.*

- **We believe each other's faith.**

*We acknowledge one another's love for Jesus Christ, for the Scripture, for our Church, and for our mission.*

Provisional translation. The German original is authoritative for the wording.

# **Documents of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe**

## **Proposal for a discussion and preparation process within the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe for those conferences that want to remain in the Post-UMC or at least do not yet want to exclude this way for themselves**

A process on how to proceed with those countries that wish to remain in the Post-UMC or at least do not yet want to exclude this path for themselves presupposes that the Mediation Protocol is accepted in principle at the Aug. 29-Sept. 10, 2021 General Conference.

### **Adopted starting point for the Post-UMC**

For Annual Conferences wishing to join the new traditional church, the European bishops have prepared a document outlining the procedure: "Central Conferences in Europe after 2022 On Separation from the UMC".

For those conferences remaining in the UMC (Post-UMC), the existing Book of Discipline (BOD) and the associated structures will continue to apply. The postponed 2020 General Conference will not (yet) be able to change the Book of Discipline in a way that statements on homosexuality are deleted from it or modified. It will, however, suspend condemnations based on the controversial texts until a later General Conference can amend the BOD accordingly.

### **Situation in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe**

Attitudes with regard to homosexuality and the understanding of marriage are judged differently depending on the Annual Conference and sometimes even - within an Annual Conference - depending on the country.

The study group set up at the 2019 Executive Committee meeting started from the premise of a traditional UMC, this according to the decisions of the 2019 Extraordinary General Conference. The result of the work of this study group can be found in the report to the Executive Committee meeting 2020, pages 101 - 115. For the further process it is proposed therein,

- a small writing team (about 4 people, balanced between different viewpoints) for preparing a document how the Book of Discipline of the central conference and the Social Principles would look like if all prohibitive/negative/restrictive sentences regarding homosexuality would be deleted; the same team could also prepare a «covenant of mutual respect» (safeguard) if deemed appropriate
- a bigger group with equal representatives of as much countries as possible and Working Group Women for refining these proposals and submission to the Executive Committee; (one meeting)

The Executive Committee was unable to consider the report of the study group at its meeting in March 2020 due to the Corona pandemic, but it authorized the Office to take further action. The further course of the pandemic has delayed and postponed the proposed dates and deadlines.

### **Proposal of the CC-Office for further action**

The CC-Office proposes that a larger CSE Post-UMC Study Group takes over the mandate of the above two groups: This group should consist of all the CC CSE countries that wish to collaborate on how to shape a common path in the Post-UMC. In addition, one representative each of the Working Groups Church Discipline and Legal Affairs, Theology and Ordained Ministry, Women's Work as well as Children and Youth are to be represented in it. A document is to be developed on how the CSE Book of Discipline (incl. Social Principles) for the Post-UMC in the Central Conference CSE should look like, so that the different convictions on homosexuality and marriage can be maintained and respected in a common Post-UMC. The group may also propose a "covenant of mutual respect" or other helpful measures for moving forward together.

The Office therefore makes the following motion:

### **Motion to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe on March 13, 2021:**

**The Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe establishes a CSE Post-UMC Study Group with the task of preparing a document for the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021 on how the CSE Book of Discipline (including Social Principles) should be designed for the Post-UMC in the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe so that the different convictions on homosexuality and marriage can be maintained and respected in a common Post-UMC. The group may also propose a "covenant of mutual respect" or other helpful measures for moving forward together.**

### **Composition of the CSE Post-UMC Study Group:**

- The CSE Post-UMC Study Group will be chaired by a person specifically appointed to do so. Proposal of the CC-Office: Claudia Haslebacher
- 1 person per country that can imagine remaining in a Post-UMC or that is willing to work on a common solution (Superintendent, member of the Executive Committee, or other leading person of the country according to the country's own choice). Membership in this group requires that at least the possibility of the country in question remaining in the Post-UMC be considered. Membership in this study group does not prejudice a country's final decision to remain in the Post-UMC. But it does provide an opportunity to bring one's concerns for possibly remaining in the Post-UMC into the process.
- 1 member of the WG Church Discipline and Legal Affairs
- Chairman of the WG Theology and Ordained Ministries: Stefan Zürcher
- 1 member from the WG Women's Work or the coordinator
- 1 person to be determined by the WG Children and Youth (young adult < 30 years, maximum 35 years old)
- in an advisory capacity: Bishop Patrick Streiff
- The assistant to the bishop serves as secretary: Urs Schweizer

The CSE Post-UMC Study Group will be English-speaking.

Proposed schedule:

March 13, 2021	Decision to establish a CSE Post-UMC Study Group by the CC CSE Executive Committee.
By end of April 2021	The Executive Committee members from each country clarify if and which person they want to send to this group and notify the Secretary of the Central Conference. Annual Conferences or countries that do not envision remaining in the Post-UMC at this time, or do not wish to collaborate on the basis for remaining in the Post-UMC, will not send a representative to this CSE Post-UMC Study Group.
June 2021	1st information and exchange meeting of the CSE Post-UMC Study Group.
Aug./Sept. 2021	<i>postponed 2020 General Conference.</i>
Sept.-Oct. 2021	Physical or online meeting(s) of CSE Post-UMC Study Group
By Oct. 12, 2021	Report of the CSE Post-UMC Study Group to the meeting of the Executive Committee.

**Further steps until the 2022 Central Conference**

The basis for the further steps is the document of the European bishops "Towards the Future (2021-24)". In it, the following mandate to the Central Conferences is formulated:

- Each Central Conference, through its Executive Committee or officers, is invited to prepare individually a documentation on what it means for an annual conference to remain in or to leave the "Post-UMC", with at least the following elements:
  - Regulations for transition
  - Episcopal oversight
  - Financial consequences
  - Ecumenical consequences (within Methodist family and larger ecumenical bodies)

**Motion to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of Central- and Southern Europe on March 13, 2021:**

**The CC-Office submits a proposal to the meeting of the Executive Committee in October 2021 on how to take up this mandate from the bishops and which group should be commissioned with this work.**

# Budget 2017 - 2021

Anpassung +1/4

<b>Einnahmen</b>	<b>Budget 2017 - 2020</b>		<b>Budget neu 2017 - 2021</b>	
Beiträge Jährliche Konferenzen				
Schweiz	180'000.00		225'000.00	
Frankreich	18'000.00		22'500.00	
Österreich	13'000.00		16'250.00	
Bulgarien	6'000.00		7'500.00	
Makedonien	3'000.00		3'750.00	
Serbien	3'000.00		3'750.00	
Ungarn	6'000.00		7'500.00	
Slowakei	3'000.00		3'750.00	
Tschechien	3'000.00		3'750.00	
Polen	6'000.00		7'500.00	
Nordafrika	0.00	241'000.00	0.00	301'250.00
Gaben und Zinseinnahmen		2'000.00		2'000.00
<b>Total Einnahmen</b>		<b>243'000.00</b>		<b>303'750.00</b>
<b>Ausgaben</b>				
Zentralkonferenz inkl. Protokoll	60'000.00		60'000.00	
Sitzungen Exekutive inkl. Protokoll	55'000.00	115'000.00	69'750.00	128'750.00
AG Theologie und Ordinierte Dienste	8'000.00		10'000.00	
AG Kirche und Gesellschaft	3'000.00		3'750.00	
AG Kinder und Jugend	3'000.00		3'750.00	
AG Liturgie	3'000.00		3'750.00	
AG Kirchenordnung und Rechtsfragen	3'000.00		3'750.00	
AG Frauendienst	0.00*		0.00	
AG Bischofsamt	1'000.00		1'250.00	
Reserve für a.o. Aufträge	2'000.00	23'000.00	2'500.00	28'750.00
Superintendententreffen	30'000.00		37'500.00	
Weitere Tagungen	0.00	30'000.00	0.00	37'500.00
Beiträge der Zentralkonferenz an:				
Weltrat	15'000.00		18'750.00	
Europäischer Rat	29'000.00		36'250.00	
Jugendrat (EMYC)	20'000.00	64'000.00	25'000.00	80'000.00
Verschiedenes				
Druckkosten	2'000.00		2'500.00	
Bibliothek / Archiv	30'000.00		37'500.00	
Übrige Kosten	2'000.00	34'000.00	2'500.00	42'500.00
<b>Total Ausgaben</b>		<b>266'000.00</b>		<b>317'500.00</b>
<b>Einnahmen</b>		<b>243'000.00</b>		<b>303'750.00</b>
<b>Ausgaben</b>		<b>266'000.00</b>		<b>317'500.00</b>
<b>Einnahmen-Überschuss</b>				
<b>Ausgaben-Überschuss</b>		<b>-23'000.00</b>		<b>-13'750.00</b>

# V. Institutions of Central Conference

## elected for 2017 - 2021

Office	Clergy:	Lay:
Bishop, Chair	Patrick Streiff	
Vice Chair		Helene Bindl (AT)
Secretary	Markus Bach (CH)	
Treasurer	Iris Bullinger (CH)	

### Executive Committee

#### **Members with vote:**

Bishop, Chair	Patrick Streiff	
Vice Chair		Helene Bindl
Secretary	Markus Bach	
Treasurer	Iris Bullinger	
AC Austria	Sup. Stefan Schröckenfuchs	Helene Bindl
AC Bulgaria-Rumania	Sup. Daniel Topalski	Desislava Todorova
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Sup. Claudia Haslebacher	Lea Hafner
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia	Sup. Štefan Rendoš	David Chlupáček
AC Hungary	Sup. László Khaled	Henrik Schaueremann
AC Poland	Sup. Andrzej Malicki	Olgierd Benedyktowicz
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Sup. Daniel Sjanta	Daniela Stoilkova
Chair WG Episcopacy	Jörg Niederer	

#### **With voice, but not vote:**

Bishop retired	Bishop Heinrich Bolleter	
France and Belgium	Sup. Etienne Rudolph	
Algeria and Tunisia	Freddy Nzambe	
Czech Republic-Slovakia	Sup. Petr Procházka	
North Macedonia	Sup. Marjan Dimov	
Albania	Sup. Wilfried Nausner	
Council on Finance and Administration		Adrian Wenziker (CH)
Judicial Court		Christa Tobler (CH)
WG Theology and Ordained Ministry	Stefan Zürcher (CH)	
WG Children and Youth		Boris Fazekas (RS) or Irena Stefanova (BG)
WG Church and Society	David Chlupáček (CZ)	
WG Women's Work		Monika Zuber (PL)
Coordinator		Barbara Bünger (CH)
WG Liturgy	Stefan Weller (CH)	
WG Discipline and Legal Affaires	Daniel Topalski (BG)	



## Council on Finance and Administration

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Chair	Adrian Wenziker (CH) Stefan Hafner (CH) Daniel Burkhalter (CH)
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## Pension Board

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	Bishop Patrick Streiff	Adrian Wenziker (CH) Stefan Hafner (CH) Daniel Burkhalter (CH)
Additional specialist:		Marcel Rügger (CH)
Pension Benefits Officer:		André Töngi (CH)

## Committee on Investigation

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AC Austria	Stefan Schröckenfuchs	Roland Siegrist
AC Bulgaria-Rumania	Mihail Stefanov	
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Hanna Wilhelm (Convener)	
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia	Petr Procházka	
AC Hungary	László Khaled	Grethe Jenei
AC Poland	Sławomir Rodaszyński	
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Ana Palik-Kunčak	

### Alternate members:

AC Austria	Martin Siegrist	
AC Bulgaria-Rumania	Margarita Todorova	
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Gunnar Wichers	
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia	Pavel Procházka	
AC Hungary	Zoltán Kovács	
AC Poland		Olgierd Benedyktowicz
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Marjan Dimov	

## Committee on Appeals

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AC Austria	Wilfried Nausner (Convener)	Gerhard Weissenbrunner
AC Bulgaria-Rumania		Mariela Mihaylova
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Etienne Rudolph	
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia	Pavel Hradský	
AC Hungary		Henrik Schaueremann
AC Poland	Józef Bartos	
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania		Marija Parnicki
Localpfarrer - Local Pastor	Ruedi Stähli (CH)	

**Alternate members:**

AC Austria		Hayford Boateng
AC Bulgaria-Rumania	Margarita Todorova	
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Theo Rickenbacher	Marc Berger
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia		Josef Thal (CZ)
AC Hungary	Márton Hecker	
AC Poland		Bozena Daszuta
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Lila Balovski (RS)	
Local pastor	Ľuboš TWGaj (SK)	

**Judicial Court**


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Members:	Martin Streit (CH)	Christa Tobler (CH)
	István Csernák (HU)	Philipp Hadorn (CH)
	1 person vacant	

<b>Alternate members:</b>	Jean-Philippe Waechter (FR)	Bernhard Pöll (AT)
		Regula Dannecker (CH)

**Counsel for the church**


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Counsel:	Daniel Topalski (BG)
Reserve persons:	Markus Bach (CH)
	Petr Procházka (CZ)
	Gábor Szuhánszky (HU)
	Etienne Rudolph (FR)

**Working Group Episcopacy**


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AC Austria		Helene Bindl
AC Bulgaria-Rumania		Desislava Todorova
AC Switzerland-France-North Africa	Jörg Niederer (Chair)	
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia	Štefan Rendoš	
AC Hungary		Henrik Schaueremann
AC Poland	Andrzej Malicki	
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania	Daniel Sjanta	

**Working Group Theology and Ordained Ministry**


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Stefan Zürcher (CH - Chair)  
Michael Nausner (AT)  
Zoltán Kovács (HU)  
Daniel Sjanta (RS)  
Edward Puślecki (PL)  
Jana Daněčková (CZ)  
Vladimir Todorov (BG)  
(and 1 person of the Central Conference of Germany)

## **Working Group Church and Society**

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Marietjie Odendaal (CH)  
David Chlupáček (CZ - Chair)  
1 person vacant

## **Working Group Children and Youth**

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Irena Stefanova (BG - Co-Chair)  
Boris Fazekas (RS - Co-Chair)  
and the delegates of the countries to the EMYC

## **Working Group Women's Work**

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Monika Zuber (PL - Chair)  
Maria Đurovka-Petraš (RS)  
Gabriella Kopas (SK)  
Murielle Rietschi Wilhelm (CH)  
Coordinator Central Conference: Barbara Büniger (CH)

## **Working Group Liturgy**

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Stefan Weller (CH - Chair)  
Esther Handschin (AT)  
Sylvia Minder (CH)  
Peter Caley (CH)  
Jana Křížova (CZ)  
Erika Stalcup (CH)

## **Working Group Discipline and Legal Affairs**

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Daniel Topalski (BG - Chair)  
Petr Procházka (CZ)  
Serge Frutiger (CH)  
Wilfried Nausner (AT - MK/AL)

# Representatives beyond the Central Conference

## European level:

### European Methodist Council (EMC) and Joint Commission of UMC in Europe

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Bishop	Patrick Streiff	
	Margarita Todorova, (BG)	David Chlupáček (CZ)
	Andrzej Malicki (PL)	Emil Zaev (MK)

### European Commission on Mission (ECOM)

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Connexio Co-Chair		Daniel Hänni (CH)
Connexio General Secretary		Ulrich Bachmann (CH)

### Fund for Mission in Europe (FMIE)

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Bishop	Patrick Streiff	David Chlupáček (CZ)
Manager FMIE, with voice, but not vote		Andreas Stämpfli (CH)

### European Lay Seminar

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Bettina Weller (CH)

### Methodist e-Academy (Governing Board)

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Bishop	Patrick Streiff, Chair	
	Ivana Procházková (CZ)	
	Daniel Topalski (BG)	
Coordinator, with voice but not vote		David Field (CH)

### Community of Protestant Churches in Europe - CPCE (South-East Europe regional group)

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Martin Obermeir Siegrist (AT)  
Novica Brankov (RS)

### Community of Protestant Churches in Europe - CPCE (WG Church Community)

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Jana Křížova (CZ)

### Conference of European Churches (CEC)

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Proxy Governing Board	Sarah Bach (CH)
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### Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe (EYCE)

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Member Executive Committee	Boris Fazekas (RS)
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## **Weltweite Ebene:**

### **Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters**

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Bishop	Patrick Streiff Petr Procházka (CZ)	Christine Schneider-Oesch (CH)
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### **Connectional Table**

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Stefan Zürcher (CH)

### **General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM)**

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Andreas Stämpfli (CH)

### **In Mission Together (IMT)**

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AC Bulgaria-Rumania	Rares Calugar (RO) Tsvetan Iliev (BG)	
AC Czech Republic-Slovakia	Jana Křížová (CZ)	Lenka Procházková (SK)
AC Hungary		Kristóf Sztupkai
AC Poland	Monika Zuber	
AC Serbia-North Macedonia-Albania		Daniela Stoilkova (MK) Maria Đurovka-Petraš (RS)
Coordinator		Urs Schweizer

### **General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)**

---

vacant

### **Division on Ministries with Young People (DMYP)**

---

Young adults		Maria Sonnleithner (AT)
Youth		Stanislava Bako (RS)
Adult workers with young people	Donát Gyurko (HU)	

### **General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH)**

---

Judit Lakatos (HU)

## **World Methodist Council:**

### **World Methodist Historical Society – European Section**

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Vice-Chair	Judit Lakatos (HU)
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### **World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFMUCW)**

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Vice-Chair Europe Continental	Lilla Kardosné Lakatos (HU)
Editor «Tree of Life»	Ligia Istrate (RO)

### **World Evangelism**

---

Regional Secretary Central and Southern Europe	Lenka Procházková (SK)
--	------------------------

# VI. Adresses

Last update: March 2020

## Bishops:

**Streiff Patrick** Badenerstrasse 69, Postfach 2111, CH-8021 Zürich 1  
Bischof 0041-44-299 30 60, bischof@umc-cse.org

**Bolleter Heinrich** Grenzweg 9, CH-5036 Oberentfelden  
Bischof i.R. 0041-62-723 02 71, heinrich.bolleter@umc-cse.org

## People of the Central Conference:

**Absolon Pavol** Ul. Ludvika van Beethovenova 14, SK-917 08 Trnava  
00421-904-50 66 77, pablo.absolon11@gmail.com

**Ambrusz István** Új utcá 8, HU-4400 Nyíregyháza  
0036-30-416 91 40, ambruszi@t-online.hu

**Bach Marian** Bahnstrasse 31, CH-8610 Uster  
0041-44-940 12 43, marian.bach@bluewin.ch

**Bach Markus** Bahnstrasse 31, CH-8610 Uster  
0041-44-940 12 43, markus.bach@umc-cse.org

**Bach Sarah** Wellenried 2, CH-3150 Schwarzenburg  
0041-31-731 03 49, sarah.bach@emk-schweiz.ch

**Bachmann Ulrich** Postfach 1328, Badenerstrasse 69, CH-8021 Zürich 1  
0041-44-299 30 70, ulrich.bachmann@emk-schweiz.ch

**Bako Stanislava** Partizanska 14, RS-22300 Stara Pazova  
00381-62-77 99 36, stanislava.bako@umc-cse.org

**Balovski Lila** Lenjinova 12, RS-26202 Jabuka  
00389-64-123 77 49, lila.balovski@gmail.com

**Bartos Józef** ul. Długa 3, PL-31-147 Kraków  
0048-692-15 91 75, jozef.bartos@umc-cse.org

**Becher Nicole** Bahnhofstrasse 19, CH-8560 Märstetten  
0041-71-657 28 75, nicole.becher@emk-schweiz.ch

**Benedyktowicz Olgierd** ul. Hoża 54 m 3, PL-00-682 Warszawa  
0048-22-773 17 92, olgierd.benedyktowicz@umc-cse.org

**Berger Marc** 4, rue de Neuf-Brisach, FR-68180 Horbourg-Wihr  
0033-389-41 50 60, marc.berger@umc-cse.org

**Binder Peter** Binzhofstrasse 97, CH-8404 Winterthur  
0041-52-242 43 00, binder.peter@bluewin.ch

**Bindl Helene** Wienerstrasse 254, AT-4030 Linz  
0043-660-69 75 940, bindl.helene@gmail.com

**Bitterli Markus** Langhagstrasse 17, CH-4600 Olten  
0041-62-296 55 04, markus.bitterli@gmx.ch

**Bittner Jean-Marc** 16 Lotissement Le Clarant, Cidex 441B, FR-73390 Bourgneuf  
0033-952-95 61 79, jean-marc.bittner@umc-cse.org

**Boateng Hayford** Felix Slavik Strasse 4/4/19, AT-1210 Wien  
0043-2602-65 077, ybhayford@gmail.com

**Both Manuel** Bachtelstrasse 52, CH-8400 Winterthur  
0041-52-222 38 85, dlf.nordostschweiz@emk-schweiz.ch

**Brankov Novica** Lukijana Musičkog 7, RS-21000 Novi Sad  
00381-661 31 22, novica.brankov@umc-cse.org

**Brunner Andrea** Holbergstrasse 9, CH-8302 Kloten  
0041-44-814 37 20, andrea.brunner@emk-schweiz.ch

**Bullinger Iris** 111, Chemin des Verjus, CH-1228 Plan-les-Ouates  
0041-22-794 34 05, iris.bullinger@umc-cse.org

**Büchmeier Sven** Kirchstrasse 8, CH-4127 Birsfelden,  
0041-61-311 35 86, sven.buechmeier@emk-schweiz.ch

**Bünger Barbara** Dorfstrasse 9, CH-3633 Amsoldingen  
0041-32-622 99 36, barbara.buenger@umc-cse.org

**Burkhalter Daniel** Postfach 1328, Badenerstrasse 69, CH-8021 Zürich 1  
0041-44-299 30 83, daniel.burkhalter@umc-cse.org

**Buschenrieder Edith** 4, Rue Ampère, FR-68200 Mulhouse  
0033-389-57 21 45, busch.edith@orange.fr

**Caley Peter** Im Ehrmerk 3, CH-8360 Wallenwil  
0041-71-971 18 88, peter.caley@umc-cse.org

**Calugar Rares** Str. Porii Nr.148, Ap.48, Floresti, Cluj-Napoca / Romania  
0040-745-47 95 60, rares.calugar@umc-cse.org

**Chlupáček David** Nad Splavem 4, CZ-586 01 Jihlava  
00420-777-32 27 58, david.chlupacek@umc-cse.org

**Csernák István** Kiláto utca 7, HU-2112 Veresegyház  
0036-28-38 40 13, istvan.csernak@umc-cse.org

**Daněčková Jana** Lýskova 15, CZ-635 00 Brno  
00420-732-49 14 94, brno@umc.cz

**Dannecker Regula** Fehrenstrasse 8, CH-8032 Zürich,  
0041-79-234 28 18, regula@dannecker-legal.com

**Daszuta Bozena** Zaborze, ul. Łakowa 1, PL-26-026 Morawica  
0048-604-15 56 08, bozenadaszuta@gmail.com

**Dimov Marjan** ul. Zagrebska br. 4, MK-2400 Strumica  
00389-34-51 16 70, marjan.dimov@umc-cse.org

**Đurovka-Petraš Maria** Generala Vjesta 10, RS-21469 Pivnica  
00381-21-75 61 28, maria.durovka-petras@umc-cse.org

**Eggert Waldemar** ul. Sienkiewicza 22, PL-14-100 Ostróda  
0048-501-021 06 93, waldemar.eggert@umc-cse.org

**Eschbach Daniel** Grundstrasse 12, CH-8134 Adliswil  
0041-44-710 62 51, daniel.eschbach@emk-schweiz.ch

**Fazekas Boris** Bosanska 1, RS-21460 Vrbas  
00381-643-19 17 44, boris.fazekas@umc-cse.org

**Field David** Augustinergasse 11, CH-4051 Basel  
0041-61-262 04 09, david.field@umc-cse.org

**Flemming Thomas** ul. Wroclawska 71c, PL-55 095 Domaszczyn  
0048-507-25 36 83, thomas.flemming@op.pl

**Frutiger Serge** Sunneraistrasse 36, CH-8634 Hombrechtikon  
0041-55-535 31 20, serge.frutiger@umc-cse.org

**Furrer Susanne** Langfurrenstrasse 36a, CH-8623 Wetzikon  
0041-44-930 58 18, furrer.susanne@bluewin.ch

**Fux Thomas** Prechtlerstrasse 25, AT-4030 Linz,  
0043-732-65 71 37, thomas.fux@emk.at

**Goia Samuel** Str. Horea Nr. 55, Ap. 7, Floresti, Cluj-Napoca / Romania  
0040-742-33 66 03, samuel.goia@yahoo.com

**Gyurko Donát** Munkácsy u. 1, HU-7100 Szekszárd  
0036-20-824 82 73, donsamu88@gmail.com

**Hadorn Philipp** Florastrasse 17, CH-4563 Gerlafingen  
0041-79-600 96 70, philipp.hadorn@umc-cse.org

**Hafner Lea** Schulgässli 17, CH-3812 Wilderswil;  
0041-33-822 06 14, lea.hafner@umc-cse.org

**Hafner Stefan** Pilatusstrasse 10, CH-8203 Schaffhausen  
0041-52-672 74 01, stefan.hafner@umc-cse.org

**Handschin Esther** Sechshauer Strasse 51/1/7+8, AT-1150 Wien  
0043-676-720 91 46, esther.handschin@umc-cse.org

**Hänni Daniel** Untere Scheugstrasse 1, CH-8707 Uetikon am See  
0041-44-790 11 52, daniel.haenni@umc-cse.org

**Haslebacher Claudia** Moosgärtenweg 20, CH-3177 Laupen  
0041-32-513 41 46, claudia.haslebacher@umc-cse.org

**Hecker Márton** Bezerédj u. 2/c, HU-7200 Dombóvár  
0036-74-46 60 67, hecker.marton@metodista.hu

**Hernández Scharito** Schleifenbergstrasse 46, CH-4058 Basel  
0041-61-641 30 60, scharito.hernandez@emk-schweiz.ch

**Herzog Daniel** Freihofstrasse 3, CH-8633 Wolfhausen  
0041-55-243 41 14, daniel.herzog@livenet.ch

**Hradský Pavel** Husova 14, CZ-301 24 Plzeň 3  
00420-776-14 19 18, pavel.hradsky@umc-cse.org



**Ilg Stefan** Schürbachstrasse 11, CH-8134 Adliswil  
0041-44-709 04 61, s.ilg@blueemail.ch

**Iliev Tsvetan** D. Konstantinov str. 35, ap. 1, BG-5800 Pleven  
00359-896-51 90 80, tsvetan.iliev@umc-cse.org

**Isenring Martine** Rotfluhstrasse 73, CH-8702 Zollikon  
0041-44-392 15 17, degen.isenring@bluewin.ch

**Istrate Ligia** Str. Nicolae Teclu nr. 10, Sibiu/Romania  
+40-740-48 41 60, ligia.istrate@umc-cse.org

**Jenei Grethe** Csendes u. 9, HU-4400 Nyíregyháza -Vajdabokor  
0036-70-778 04 92, grethe.jenei@umc-cse.org

**Keller Anna** Riedernstrasse 26, CH-9230 Flawil  
0041-71-393 53 18, keller@blueemail.ch

**Khaled László A.** Kiscelli u. 73, HU-1032 Budapest  
0036-1-250 15 36, laszlo.khaled@umc-cse.org

**Kleiner Markus** Hauptstrasse 27, CH- 8632 Tann  
0041-55-240 27 51, markus.kleiner@emk-schweiz.ch

**Kocev Pavle** Dlhá 2336, SK-92601 Sered'  
00421-944-36 45 58, pavlekocev@gmail.com

**Kopas Gabriella** Panenská 10, SK-811 03 Bratislava  
00421-948-15 07 08, gabriella.kopas@umc-cse.org

**Kovács Zoltán** Apáczai Csere J. u. 6, HU-3529 Miskolc  
0036-46-32 65 91, zoltan.kovacs@umc-cse.org

**Křížová Jana** Ječná 19, CZ-120 00 Praha 2  
00420-777-63 42 27, jana.krizova@umc-cse.org

**Lakatos Judit** Vizakna u. 38/B, HU-1141 Budapest  
0036-70-940 41 92, judit.lakatos@umc-cse.org

**Lakatos Lilla** Tulipán utca 18, HU-7200 Dombóvár,  
0036-70-625 84 84, lilla.lakatos@umc-cse.org

**Malicki Andrzej** ul. Mokotowska 12 m. 7, PL-00-561 Warszawa  
0048-22-628 53 28, andrzej.malicki@umc-cse.org

**Mathys Bertrand** 5, rue du Canal, FR-68500 Guebwiller,  
0033-786-10 62 04, bertrand.mathys@gmail.com

**Mihaylova Mariela** Gen Skobelev 48-2, BG-9010 Varna,  
00359-888-77 92 54, mariela\_mihailova@yahoo.com

**Minder Sylvia** Nordstrasse 1, CH-8180 Bülach  
0041-44-860 71 03, sylvia.minder@emk-schweiz.ch

**Moll Stefan** Seminarstrasse 21, CH-5400 Baden  
0041-56-221 66 67, stefan.moll@emk-schweiz.ch

**Moser Brigitte** Hauptstrasse 16, CH-8507 Hörhausen,  
0041-52-763 21 50, brigitte.moser@emk-schweiz.ch

**Nausner Wilfried** Rr. Vehbi Agolli Nd.31, AL-1017 Tiranë  
0043-664-7375 89 05, wilfried.nausner@umc-cse.org

**Niederer Jörg** Wassergasse 19, CH-9000 St. Gallen  
0041-71-222 42 12, joerg.niederer@umc-cse.org

**Nussbaumer Daniel** Route des Monnaires 36, CH-1660 Château-d'Oex  
0041-26-924 43 24, daniel.nussbaumer@umc-cse.org

**Nzambe Freddy** 39-41, av. Taha Hussein, TN-1089 Tunis-Montfleury  
00216-71-39 72 39, freddy.nzambe@umc-cse.org

**Obermeir-Siegrist Martin** Wiener Strasse 260a, AT-4030 Linz  
0043-650-779 90 08, martin.siegrist@umc-cse.org

**Odendaal Marietjie** Turnhallenstrasse 11, CH-4460 Gelterkinden  
0041-61-981 14 52, marietjie.odendaal@umc-cse.org

**Oppliger Barbara** Spengelgass 12, CH-9467 Frümsen  
0041-81-757 25 17, barbara.oppliger@lzsg.ch

**Palik-Kunčak Ana** Dr. Janka Gombara 22, RS-21211 Kisač  
00381-21-82 81 39, ana.palik-kuncak@umc-cse.org

**Parnicki Marija** Dr. Janka Gombara 65, RS-21211 Kisač  
00381-21-82 76 69, marija.parnicki@umc-cse.org

**Pöll Bernhard** Sechshauser Strasse 56/2/4, AT-1150 Wien  
0043-1-892 79 22, bernhard.poell@emk.at

**Pöll Lothar** Wiener Strasse 260/12, AT-4030 Linz  
0043-676-371 86 13, lothar.poell@umc-cse.org

**Procházka Pavel** Panenská 10, SK-811 03 Bratislava  
00421-908-77 94 59, pavel.prochazka@umc-cse.org

**Procházka Petr** Ječná 19, CZ-120 00 Praha 2  
00420-777-93 92 67, petr.prochazka@umc-cse.org

**Procházková Ivana** Ječná 19, CZ-120 00 Praha 2  
00420-777-86 44 61, ivana.prochazkova@umc-cse.org

**Procházková Lenka** Agátová 19, SK-900 45 Malinovo  
00421-905-75 48 12, lenka.prochazkova@umc-cse.org

**Puślecki Edward** ul. Mokotowska 12/9, PL-00 561 Warszawa  
0048-22-621 46 65, edward.puslecki@umc-cse.org

**Rendoš Štefan** Panenska 10, SK-811 03 Bratislava  
00421-948-25 21 53, stefan.rendos@umc-cse.org

**Rickenbacher Theo** Schwandenhübelstrasse 19b, CH-3098 Schliern  
0041-31-961 51 50, theo.rickenbacher@emk-schweiz.ch

**Rietschi Murielle** Colmarerstrasse 29, CH-4055 Basel  
0041-61-501 85 01, murielle.rietschi-wilhelm@umc-cse.org

**Rodaszyński Sławomir** ul. Winogrady 76, PL-61-659 Poznań,  
0048-784-03 11 94, slawomir.rodaszynski@umc-cse.org

**Rudolph Etienne** 21, quai Zorn, FR-67000 Strasbourg  
0033-388-23 10 93, etienne.rudolph@umc-cse.org

**Rüegger Marcel** Oberholzweg 34, CH-4852 Rothrist  
0041-62-794 05 37, marcel.rueegger@umc-cse.org

**Šálková Miluše** K Lomu 506, CZ-398 11 Protivin  
00420-608-51 99 29, pastelka@umc.cz

**Schauer mann Henrik** Bethlen G. u. 68/B, HU-2051 Biatorbágy  
0036-30-209 53 95, henrik.schauer mann@umc-cse.org

**Schmid Jürg** Ringstrasse 6, CH-3714 Frutigen,  
0041-33-671 45 31, jg.schmid@bluewin.ch

**Schneider-Oesch Christine** Dättlikerstrasse 37, CH-8427 Freienstein  
0041-44-865 39 56, christine.schneider@umc-cse.org

**Schröckenfuchs Stefan** Sechshauser Strasse 56/2/1, AT-1150 Wien  
0043-699-114 84 210, stefan.schroeckenfuchs@umc-cse.org

**Schweizer Urs** Postfach 2111, Badenerstrasse 69, CH-8021 Zürich 1  
0041-44-299 30 60, urs.schweizer@umc-cse.org

**Siegrist Roland** Prechtlerstrasse 25, AT-4030 Linz  
0043-732-65 71 37, ev@emk.at

**Sjanta Daniel** Ive Lole Ribara 55, PAK 308013, RS-26210 Kovačica  
00381-64-158 66 30, daniel.sjanta@umc-cse.org

**Sonnleithner Maria** Landgutgasse 39/4, AT-1100 Wien  
0043-699-815 102 31, maria.sonnleithner@umc-cse.org

**Stalcup Erika** Place de la Riponne 7, CH-1005 Lausanne  
0041-21-312 82 90, erika.stalcup@umc-cse.org

**Stähli Ruedi** Kapellenweg 8, CH-5210 Windisch  
0044-56-441 20 74, ruedi.staehli@emk-schweiz.org

**Stämpfli Andreas** Allmendstrasse 7, CH-4410 Liestal  
0041-61-641 60 21, andreas.staempfli@umc-cse.org

**Stefanov Mihail** Dr. Long UMC, Rakovski Str. 86, BG-1000 Sofia  
00359-897-89 17 88, mihail.stefanov@umc-cse.org

**Stefanova Irena** Mesta 2 str., BG-9300 Dobrich  
00359-899-83 94 00, live888bg@gmail.com

**Steiger Esther** Höhenweg 26, CH-5102 Rapperswil  
0041-62-897 17 09, e.st@bluewin.ch

**Steiner Andreas** Faulenbachweg 87A, CH-3700 Spiez,  
0041-33-654 45 20, andreas.steiner@emk-schweiz.ch

**Stoilkova Daniela** s. Monospitovo 172, MK-2400 Strumica  
00389-70-35 89 58, daniela.stoilkova@umc-cse.org

**Streit Martin** Bernstrasse 68, CH-3018 Bern  
0041-31-382 02 44, martin.streit@emk-schweiz.ch

- Szczepańczyk Anna** ul. Kosynierów Gdyńskich 9-11/3, PL-86-300 Grudziądz,  
0048-534-25 61 37, motylekanna@gmail.com
- Sztupkai Kristóf** Londoni krt. 30, HU-6722 Szeged  
0036-30-322 74 09, kristof.sztupkai@umc-cse.org
- Szuhánszky Gábor** Márta Mária Otthon, Rákóczi u. 2, HU-2092 Budakeszi  
0036-30-999 99 52, gabor.szuhanszky@umc-cse.org
- Tagai Lúboš** ECM Trnava, Bernolákova 6, SK-917 01 Trnava  
00421-905-26 60 11, luobosko@gmail.com
- Tankler Üllas** GBGM, 458 Ponce de Leon Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30308 /USA  
001-404-460 72 05, Utankler@umcmmission.org
- Thal Josef** Ul. Jar. Haška 1, CZ-586 01 Jihlava  
00420-777-11 03 45, josef.thal@seznam.cz
- Tobler Christa** In der Hub 19, CH-8057 Zürich  
0041-44-261 78 54, christa.tobler@umc-cse.org
- Todorova Desislava** Dr. Long UMC, Rakovski Str. 86, BG-1000 Sofia  
00359-894-48 07 16, desislava.todorova@umc-cse.org
- Todorova Margarita** PO Box 47, BG-5400 Sevlievo  
00359-898-67 25 74, margarita.todorova@umc-cse.org
- Töngi André** Postfach 2111, Badenerstrasse 69, CH-8021 Zürich 1  
0041-44-299 30 63, andre.toengi@umc-cse.org
- Topalski Daniel** P.O. Box 70, BG-9001 Varna  
00359-898-67 25 64, daniel.topalski@umc-cse.org
- Trachsel-Holmes Carla** Seilerwis 7, CH-8606 Greifensee  
0041-76-320 76 33, c.holmes@sunrise.ch
- Waechter Jean-Philippe** 27, rue Croix Rouge, FR-13200 Arles  
0033-695-31 46 82, jeanphilippe.waechter@umc-cse.org
- Weissenbrunner Gerhard** Gottschedgasse 28, AT-8042 Graz  
0043-316-42 81 63, gerhard.weissenbrunner@umc-cse.org
- Weller Bettina** Hechtweg 21, CH-4052 Basel  
0041-61-311 70 31, bettina.weller@umc-cse.org
- Weller Stefan** Hechtweg 21, CH-4052 Basel,  
0041-61-315 21 30, stefan.weller@umc-cse.org
- Wenziker Adrian** Dennlerstrasse 1, CH-8048 Zürich  
0041-44-972 30 72, adrian.wenziker@umc-cse.org
- Wichers Gunnar** Weiherstrasse 7, 4800 Zofingen,  
0041-62-751 14 33, gunnar.wichers@emk-schweiz.ch
- Wilhelm Hanna** Ahornstrasse 13, CH-4127 Birsfelden  
0041-61-311 76 56, hanna.wilhelm@umc-cse.org
- Wilhelm Hansruedi** Bettingerstrasse 20, CH-4127 Birsfelden  
0041-61-373 90 97, hansruedi.wilhelm@dalbeverwaltung.ch
- Zaev Emil** Ul. Venjamin Macukovski, bt. 28/2-12, MK-1000 Skopje  
00389-2-246 01 52, emil.zaev@umc-cse.org

**Zolliker Stefan** Trollstrasse 10, CH-8400 Winterthur  
0041-52-212 17 39, stefan.zolliker@emk-schweiz.ch

**Zuber Monika** ul. Słowackiego 26, PL-19-300 Ełk  
0048-695-61 12 06, monika.zuber@umc-cse.org

**Zueva Desislava** ul. Odrin 7, ap. 8, BG-8600 Yambol  
00359-898-43 27 72, dessieveskozuevi@yahoo.com

**Zürcher Simon** Rinderwaldstrasse 8, CH-3725 Achseten  
0041-33-673 17 14, simon.zuercher@emk-schweiz.ch

**Zürcher Stefan** Schwerzistrasse 9, CH-8606 Nänikon  
0041-43-366 52 43, stefan.zuercher@umc-cse.org





