

HOLY CONFERENCING IN OUR CHURCHES

GATHERING REFLECTION FOR BELOVED COMMUNITY

*“Power without love is reckless and abusive,
and love without power is sentimental and anemic.
Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice,
and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”*
--Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
--Isaiah 43.18-19, NIV*

CALL TO AGAPE LOVE IN HOLY CONFERENCING

‘Welcome’ --#3152 Worship & Song

**Let’s walk together for a while and ask where we begin
to build a world where love can grow and hope can enter in,
to be the hands of healing and to plant the seeds of peace,
singing welcome, welcome to this place.**

**You’re invited to come and know God’s grace.
All are welcome, the love of God to share,
‘cause all of us are welcome here; all are welcome in this place.**

**Let’s talk together of a time when we will share a feast,
where pride and power kneel to serve the lonely and the least,
and joy will set the table as we join our hands to pray,
singing welcome, welcome to this place.**

**You’re invited to come and know God’s grace.
All are welcome, the love of God to share,
‘cause all of us are welcome here; all are welcome in this place.**

**Let’s dream together of the day when earth and heaven are one,
a city built of love and light, the new Jerusalem,
where our mourning turns to dancing, every creature lifts its voice,
crying welcome, welcome to this place.**

**You’re invited to come and know God’s grace.
All are welcome, the love of God to share,
‘cause all of us are welcome here; all are welcome in this place.**

Presider: Dr. King’s *beloved community* exhibits agape love, which, as the love of God operating in the human heart, seeks to “preserve and create community.” Christ’s

mature followers love each other as well as those who persecute or do evil against them. Christians confront hate with love because agape love derives its essence from the cross of Christ, which brings redemptive power. This love does not accept injustice or evil as acceptable. Rather, it loves by way of justice, which ensures equity in access, participation, and flourishing for everyone....

God prompts us to remake our hostility-filled communities into those where justice and love reign true. This also applies to the Church. What would The United Methodist Church look like, feel like, and be like if the *beloved community* became real for us? What would your local church be like?

The beloved community manifests and protects agape love as its guiding principle and is expressed in the following ways:

Recorded voices from around the conference:

- 1. Offers radical hospitality to everyone; an inclusive family rather than exclusive club;**
- 2. Recognizes and honors the image of God in every human being;**
- 3. Exhibits personal authenticity, true respect, and validation of others;**
- 4. Recognizes and affirms, not eradicates, differences;**
- 5. Listens emotionally (i.e., with the heart) – fosters empathy and compassion for others;**
- 6. Tolerates ambiguity – realizes that sometimes a clear-cut answer is not readily available;**
- 7. Builds increasing levels of trust and works to avoid fear of difference and others;**
- 8. Acknowledges limitations, lack of knowledge, or understanding – and seeks to learn;**
- 9. Acknowledges conflict or pain in order to work on difficult issues;**
- 10. Speaks truth in love, always considering ways to be compassionate with one another;**
- 11. Avoids physical aggression and verbal abuse;**
- 12. Resolves conflicts peacefully, without violence, recognizing that peacefully doesn't always mean comfortably for everybody;**
- 13. Releases resentment and bitterness through self-purification (i.e., avoidance of internal violence through spiritual, physical, and psychological care);**
- 14. Focuses energy on removing evil forces (unjust systems), not destroying persons;**
- 15. Nurtures unyielding persistence and unwavering commitment to justice;**
- 16. Achieves friendship and understanding through negotiation, compromise, or consensus – considering each circumstance to discern which will be most helpful;**
- 17. Righteously opposes and takes direct action against poverty, hunger, and homelessness;**
- 18. Advocates thoroughgoing, extensive neighborhood revitalization without**

displacement (this also applies to the Church – working toward responsible and equitable growth, discipleship, and worship);

- 19. Blends faith and action to generate a commitment to defeating injustice (not forgetting that injustice can also be found *within* the Church);**
- 20. Encourages and embraces artistic expressions of faith from diverse perspectives;**
- 21. Fosters dynamic and active spirituality – recognizes that we serve a dynamic God who is not left behind by a changing world or people, and that a passive approach will not work;**
- 22. Gathers together regularly for table fellowship, and meets the needs of everyone in the community;**
- 23. Relies on scripture reading, prayer, & corporate worship for inner strength;**
- 24. Promotes human rights and works to create a non-racist society;**
- 25. Shares power and acknowledges the inescapable network of mutuality among the human family.**

Presider: In the spirit of beloved community, I hereby call the Church Conference of [church name] into session and ask for your response.

People: **We are here as a United Methodist community of God to account for our ministries, to order our life together, and to resolve that in the year ahead we will answer the call of Jesus Christ to his disciples, leading this church into active ministries of love, truth, and justice.**

Presider: Knowing that we are all called to ministry of beloved community together, lay and clergy alike, let us enter into the business of your Church Conference.

WORK FOR GOD’S BELOVED COMMUNITY

1. Vote to authorize virtual meeting (when applicable)
We move that those who are authorized to participate in the [church/charge] conference of [church name] on [date] hereby agree that we consent to proceed with a virtual meeting using remote technology, and consent that all our decisions are in accordance with the Constitution of The United Methodist Church (Division Two, Section VI, Article II (§ 33) and with the laws of the church, and are therefore legal and binding actions of the conference.
2. Election of Secretary
3. Recording attendance
4. Approval of Minutes of 2019 Church Conference
5. Approval of Audit/Fund Balance Report from 2019
6. Trustee Report

- a. Has the congregation received any bequests from a will? Bequests from wills that have been received since the last Church Conference must be accepted by vote.
 - b. Has the congregation used any capital/principle from investments/endowments for operating expenses this year? If so, for what purposes and how much?
 - c. Has the congregation spent any funds realized from the sale of a parsonage? If so, for what purpose and how much? Was this done with permission from the DS?
7. Staff / Pastor Parish Relations Report
Approval of Compensation for Pastor and Other Staff Appointed by the Bishop
 8. Finance Report
Update on Year-to-Date Finances
Approval of 2021 Budget if prepared
 9. Lay Leadership / Nominations Report
Election of Church Leaders and Trustees
 10. Lay Servants / Lay Speakers / Certified Lay Ministers Reports
Approval and reaffirmation of any in these categories
 11. Candidates Reports
 - a. Reaffirmation of Candidates for Ministry
 - b. Examination and Paper Ballot Vote for any New Candidate for Ministry
 - c. Examination and Recommendation of Candidates for Church Related Vocations
 12. Clergy Reports
 - a. Retired Minister(s) Report
 - b. Extension Minister(s) Report
 - c. Pastor(s) Report
 13. Membership Report and Remembering our Saints
 14. Other business and prayers for the people

TABLE FELLOWSHIP IN BELOVED COMMUNITY

‘For Everyone Born/A Place at the Table’ --#3149 *Worship & Song*
**For everyone born, a place at the table,
 for everyone born, clean water and bread,
 a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
 for everyone born, a star overhead.**

**And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
 yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice, and joy!**

Presider: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Presider: Lift up your hearts.
People: **We lift them up to the Lord.**
Presider: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Presider: Black lives matter to you, and always have.
Black lives matter.
Black male lives matter.
Black female lives matter.
Black LGBTQIA+ lives matter.
Black trafficked lives matter.
Black uneducated as well as educated lives matter.
Black poor as well as rich lives matter.
Black homeless lives matter.
Black Christians and non-Christians matter.
Black lives with disabilities matter.
Black immigrants and refugees matter.
Black children matter.
Black teens matter.

Their lives are sacred.
Their lives are valuable.
Their lives are precious.
Their lives are important.
Their lives are necessary.
Their lives are integral to your magnificent beloved family.

So we join with them and all the others who are just as sacred, valuable, precious, important, necessary and integral to your plan of salvation to sing your praises.

We join with all the angels and archangels, the great choir of saints before your throne, from every nation, from every culture, who speak every language, worshiping endlessly before your throne of grace saying:

People: **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Presider: You are holy, and so is your presence with us in Jesus Christ.
Jesus was not white.
Jesus did not speak English.

Jesus was not a Christian.
Jesus lived as the citizen of an occupied nation.
Jesus was part of an oppressed people.
Jesus was a refugee who found protection on the continent of Africa.
Jesus experienced mob violence.
Jesus experienced police brutality.
Jesus was lynched.

Jesus gave up his own divine privilege,
and chose to live as a slave and to live a life of service.
This act defined his greatness,
and defines our discipleship.
Giving up his own divine privilege,
Jesus took the bread used as a call to compassion for the oppressed,
gave thanks for it, broke it and shared it with the whole community, saying:
“Take and eat, this is my body broken and given freely for you.”
Remember how this act defined his greatness and defines our discipleship.

Giving up his own divine privilege,
Jesus took the cup used as a call to hope for divine deliverance,
gave thanks for it, and shared it with the whole community, saying:
“Drink from my cup, each of you;
this is my blood that I shed to testify to God’s eternal covenant,
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
Remember how this act defined his greatness and defines our discipleship.

Christ’s life mattered.
Christ’s abuse by religious authorities mattered.
Christ’s murder mattered.
Christ’s resurrection mattered.
And so do our lives.
So we choose to follow Christ and to live according to this divine mystery
as we now declare:

People: **Christ has died;**
 Christ is risen;
 Christ will come again.

Presider: Life, Meaning, Giver of Sacred Worth,
 cause these gifts of bread and wine
 to become for us the body and blood of Christ,
 the reason our lives matter.

Life, Meaning, Giver of Sacred Worth,
touch the lives of any who feel that their lives don't matter;
who feel they are not valued,
who are treated with disrespect
and fear that their precious lives will be thrown away.
Change us, so others might have hope.
Change us, so other might be valued.
Change us, so that no one will have to stand before their oppressors alone.

Change us, so Christ's life will matter.
Change us, so the Holy Spirit's life will matter.
Change us, so our Creator's life will matter,
and that we might more fully give them the honor, glory, and praise,
due their holy name,
today, tomorrow, and always.

People: **Amen.**

Presider: Now as those who recognize the value of the oppressed and abused, let us pray
with Christ who walks this path with them and us.

People: **Our Father* in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom** come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom**, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

**or Parent **or kin-dom*

BREAKING BREAD AND SHARING CUP

‘For Everyone Born/A Place at the Table’ --#3149 *Worship & Song*
**For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free.**

**And God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice, and joy!**

Presider: Let us pray: **Thank you for sharing with us this holy mystery found in Jesus Christ. It has changed us: the way we think, the way we feel, what we understand, how we desire to live, and the value we see in the lives of others whom we have harmed through our sin of racism. Now send us out to demand that others be treated with the value they hold within your heart. May your love become more visible in us, that we not bring shame upon the name of Jesus, now or ever. Amen.**

GOING FORTH IN AGAPE LOVE

FORMAL MOTION TO ADJOURN THE CHURCH CONFERENCE

Presider: As our time together comes to an end, I declare this Church Conference adjourned.

BAPTISMAL PROMISE

People: **We accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. Thanks be to God! Amen.**

OUR WORSHIP IS OVER. OUR SERVICE BEGINS.

The Call is taken from the '25 Traits of the Beloved Community' page produced by the General Commission on Religion and Race and found at gcorr.org/25-traits-of-the-beloved-community-2/ and written by Dr. Arthuree Wright. The same quote by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is found on this page as well. It is taken from 'Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community' written in 1967.

The words for 'Welcome' are written by Mark Miller and Laurie Zelman, and the music is written by Mark Miller. 'Welcome' can be found in Worship and Song #3152. The words for 'For Everyone Born' are written by Shirley Erena Murray, and the music is written by Brian Mann. 'For Everyone Born' can be found in For Everyone Born: Global Songs for an Emerging Church by Global Praise of the General Board of Global Ministries, UMC, GBGMusik ©2008. CCLI license: 2645216 CCLI streaming license: CSPL030506

The Communion Liturgy is a Great Thanksgiving for Black Lives Matter written by Rev. Michael C. Johnson and adapted for our church conferences. This liturgy can be found at gcorr.org/communion-liturgy-black-lives-matter/.

The Lord's Prayer is the Ecumenical Text, adapted, that can be found in the United Methodist Hymnal #894.

The Baptismal Promise is part of the baptismal vow found in the United Methodist Hymnal and Book of Worship.

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This document was assembled by Rev. Jill Colley Robinson, Superintendent for the Green Mountain District and Dean of the Cabinet.