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February 6, 2019
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Uniting Methodists Leaders Call for Referral of Exit Proposals

(February 6) The leaders of the Uniting Methodists movement have urged delegates to the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference in St. Louis to refer all petitions providing a process for congregations or annual conferences to leave The United Methodist Church to the 2020 General Conference.

Speaking on behalf of the movement's Coordinating Team, The Rev. Dr. James A. Harnish gave three reasons for referral.

First, Harnish said, "It's biblical." He pointed to Paul's call "to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together" (Ephesians 4:3) as the central motivation for the Uniting Methodists movement which has drawn the support of over 5,000 clergy and lay persons. Harnish added, "It's clear that the first priority for the Body of Christ is always to search for unity rather than division."

Harnish, a retired pastor who served as a delegate to nine General Conferences, also said that action on exit plans are not consistent with the primary purpose for establishing the Commission on a Way Forward or the Council of Bishops' call for a special session of the General Conference. "The action of the 2016 General Conference was clearly to find a way to build unity in the church rather than division. If delegates begin with plans for dissolution or separation, it will draw attention away from the mandate and vision for our vibrant global witness that brings us to St. Louis."

Finally, the leaders of the Uniting Methodists movement underscore the brevity of this General Conference session. "Delegates will not have adequate time to gather all of the facts, understand the consequences, and participate in thoughtful debate. In the meantime, there are already clear processes for separation provided in the current Book of Discipline that have been effectively used for some churches in the last two years." Referring exit proposals to the 2020 General Conference will enable the global church to discuss them in light of all actions of the 2019 General Conference. "Let's take this one step at a time and watch how the Spirit leads us," said Harnish.

About Uniting Methodists

Uniting Methodists is a movement of Christ-centered, hope-filled United Methodists that bears witness to the unifying love of Christ in a deeply polarized church and culture. (www.unitingmethodists.com).

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