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Bishop Dyck's Column: "Road to Reconciliation"

The story of Esau and Jacob's "reconciliation" may be a prescient one for this moment in United Methodism (see Genesis 32-33). I'm sure you remember the story. Esau was pretty mad—homicidally mad—at Jacob for stealing Esau's birthright and blessing. For decades, the two lived apart. But the time came for Jacob to return to the land of Canaan and in order to do that, he had to face Esau.

He spent the night beforehand praying and tossing and turning with the angel of the Lord (or whomever it was). When he awoke, he realized that he was wounded. But he persevered in spite of the report that Esau was coming with a mighty army of 400. Jacob was justifiably afraid about what would happen. He strategized about how to keep his loved ones safe, preparing for the worst but also for the best possible outcome. And he took gifts for his brother.

Much to Jacob's surprise, Esau came immediately to him and "hugged his neck," embracing him as the long lost relative that he was. There was some verbal and cultural dancing back and forth. Esau wanted them to go forward together; Jacob didn't want to do that. Jacob wanted to give Esau gifts, but Esau didn't see that as necessary. Finally, they parted ways. They were never best friends or very brotherly with each other. But there was just enough reconciliation that they were able to come together peaceably when their father died and, most importantly, not to live in animosity. There was just enough reconciliation for them to separate in peace.

This may be the moment in United Methodism when we have just enough reconciliation for us to separate in peace. By this time, I hope that you have had the opportunity to read the "[Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation](#)," which was a mediated agreement by factions within The United Methodist Church to end the harm we are inflicting upon each other regarding human sexuality. I encourage you to read it at unitedmethodistbishops.org First, let me say that I come to this place of potential separation with a great deal of sadness. I have for decades believed that we could find a way as the church to bridge, if not resolve, our differences about human sexuality and the underlying dynamics, such as interpretation of scripture.

We are not only divided, but are in a constant state of battle, strewing winners and losers along our way. The United Methodist Church itself was the greatest loser following the Special Session of General Conference in February 2019. I think all would agree that no one won and that our witness to the world for Christ was seriously damaged. A lot of plans have been proposed for General Conference 2020 since our special session in St. Louis in February. I think

it's safe to say that most of them involve some degree of separation, too, so the Protocol isn't unique. What's unique about it is that it is a mediated agreement by the factions within the church to put an end to the war. Part of that agreement is that the other plans will be pulled back so that General Conference 2020 can act on this one.

A few other points to keep in mind:

- The United Methodist Church has not separated or split, as many secular press have reported through sensational headlines. The General Conference is the only body that can act on the agreement and that won't be until May 2020, if it happens.
- The United Methodist Church remains intact; in essence, it wouldn't split but allows others to leave if they so desire. The Traditionalists are expected and have negotiated these terms in order to leave. Others such as progressives could also leave.
- The agreement allows The United Methodist Church to be a "Big Tent" church, not forcing anyone to officiate same-gender weddings but also not penalizing those who do. Likewise, LGBTQ+ persons who already serve among us are not penalized.
- No one is required to vote! This has been a cry across the church during the last year as proposals have been developed and discussed. No local church or annual conference needs to vote in order to stay in The UMC. Only if a local church or annual conference does not want to stay within The UMC, then they would vote to leave.
- The agreement called for a moratorium or abeyance on all complaints, charges and trials against LGBTQ+ clergy or clergy who perform same-gender weddings, beginning now. Admittedly this isn't the official law of the church, but it is a part of the cascade of my own conviction not to pursue complaints. The Northern Illinois Annual Conference's legislation in June 2019 also calls for the bishop not to pursue complaints to trial and not allow any money or personnel to be used for complaints and trials. The North Central Jurisdiction's delegation also issued a statement that there be no complaints and trials regarding human sexuality across our jurisdiction.
- \$25 million will be given to those who create the new Traditionalist denomination and \$2 million for any others who seek to leave The UMC.
- Pensions will continue to be held at Wespath for the UMC as well as any new expressions of Methodism so that there aren't huge liabilities or payments for those who leave.
- The trust clause will allow those who wish to leave to keep their property, as long as they join one of the new expressions of Methodism.
- A reparations fund will be created (\$39 million with \$26 million from the UMC and \$13 million from the Traditionalist denomination) to support ministries with people of color as well as Africa University.

- A regional U.S. conference, similar but not the same as a central conference, will allow the U.S. to meet and decide on ministry not related to the global church. However, the global church connection will continue.
- An agreement that the U.S. legal system won't be used to acquire additional assets. Frankly, if an agreement like this isn't passed at General Conference, most likely it will be lawyers who benefit and our financial resources as a denomination, annual conferences, and local churches will be seriously jeopardized.

Some people who have read the Protocol are encouraged by this development and others understandably have concerns. We need to understand the Protocol as it exists and also discern how it might be perfected without jeopardizing the agreement so as to bless those who wish to leave The UMC.

My reference to having enough reconciliation to separate in peace is important in our discernment about the future. A compromise (which is what this mediation protocol is) doesn't make everyone happy or comfortable. But if it is perfected and agreed upon, it will prevent a legal blood bath or the total coming apart of our church. My question is: what is the alternative to some form of this protocol going forward?

Therefore, I encourage people to attend our conversations in February across the conference (see below for dates). The agenda may have shifted slightly, but it's still important to understand what is going on in our church and to hear from and have the ear of our own delegation to General Conference. [Click here to register.](#)

Jacob wrestled with God before meeting Esau. He acknowledged that he was wounded. Coming to this painful but potentially reconciling moment in the life of our church is wounding. But the pain and sadness that has been increasing and ongoing are also debilitating to our mission and witness as a church. So Jacob went out and faced Esau whose face was that of God to him, and they had enough reconciliation to go their ways in peace. Maybe it be so for all of us in The United Methodist Church.

~Bishop Sally Dyck