

## Message from the Executive Committee to the congregations of the United Methodist Church in Germany

**Just as I watched over them to dig up and pull down,  
so I will watch over them to build and plant, declares the Lord.**

Jeremiah 31.28 (CEB), Watchword for Saturday, 9 March 2019

The Special Session of the General Conference adopted at its meeting in St. Louis the Traditional Plan. This upholds the current stance of the Book of Discipline on homosexuality; moreover, it demands consistent application with stricter controls and penalties. This resolution by the General Conference explicitly demands a statement from the conferences. The "Kirchenvorstand" (executive committee of the UMC in Germany) has taken an intensive look at the resolution by the General Conference and its required implementation.

We respect democratic decisions, so that the Cabinets of the Central Conference and the "Kirchenvorstand" have spent several days struggling intensively, emotionally and honestly with this resolution and all its consequences. Regardless of our own content-related convictions, we have reached the unanimous opinion that the stipulations of the Traditional Plan are not acceptable for our church in Germany. The UMC in Germany will therefore not follow the chosen way of controlling people in their disposition and imposing stricter penalties.

Our content-related discussions revealed the painful fact that neither the "Kirchenvorstand" nor the UMC as a whole can reach agreement on how homosexuality should be assessed. In our church there are large groups of opposing 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 we manage to live in proximity and acknowledgement even without agreeing on important questions. We therefore want to be a church where people with homosexual sensibilities can be ordained and blessed in a marriage ceremony, and also where traditionally minded people can uphold their ideas and lifestyles. The "Kirchenvorstand" has reached agreement on this objective.

We see that many people in our church are disappointed, hurting and injured. We are aware that the endeavour 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 differing convictions. (For example, could there be congregations and supra-regional structures for people with certain theological 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. We therefore ask you to stay in our church and join us in our search for this way.

It is important for us to engage in discussions on various different levels to ascertain how we can stay together despite differing convictions. 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. We are therefore launching a "round table" discussion process throughout Germany that should begin before the 2019 Annual Conferences. People from different groups and directions in our church will be invited to shape the above mentioned way into a shared future. It is important that these discussions are also held in congregations and regions.

The "Kirchenvorstand" has asked the Bishop to be the spiritual leader and organiser of this process. The Bishop has therefore already convened a group to describe and initiate the process straightaway. The Central Conference in November 2020 will adopt trendsetting resolutions.

We don't know exactly what this way will look like in detail. Our experience in the "Kirchenvorstand" gives us hope that the process can succeed. This would also be an important sign in an increasingly torn and divided society. We need God's help, your prayers and your assistance to go this way.

Fulda, 9 March 2019  
For the "Kirchenvorstand":  
Bischof Harald Rückert

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