



NORDIC AND BALTIC EPISCOPAL AREA
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

BISHOP CHRISTIAN ALSTED

Denmark
Estonia
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Latvia
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Norway
Sweden

The Area Group of the Council of the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference meeting on 29-30. March in Copenhagen has issued this statement to the church in the Nordic and Baltic episcopal area.

We greet you with words from Paul's letter to the Colossians:

And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people.

(Col.3:14-15)

During our time together we have engaged in worship, prayer and Christian conferencing to reflect on the implications of the decisions of the called session of General Conference and to discern our way into the future.

The Nordic and Baltic episcopal area is diverse in a number of different ways including our understanding of human sexuality and of how to be in ministry with all people. In spite of our diversities and differences, we have managed to be in a committed relationship in one church for more than 100 years. We have built relationships and friendships, we have shared and exchanged ministries, we have supported each other, and we have worshipped and prayed together.

The unity of the United Methodist Church has been under a great deal of stress for some time. The recent called session of the General Conference decided to support the Traditional Plan, however, the conference was not able to come to a broad based decision. While many had hoped the called session of General Conference would give us a stronger sense of unity, the reality after the conference is that we are even more divided and polarized.

The many reactions to the decisions of General Conference across the world indicate that it will be very difficult for us to remain together as one denomination in the future. Several responses and statements in the Nordic and Baltic countries point to a similar division.

In light of the current situation and as we quickly approach the General Conference 2020 and the 2021 Central Conference, we have discerned to move forward proactively and form a roundtable. The roundtable will bring together influencers and leaders from each annual conference in the episcopal area, with the purpose of seeking a foundation for the future of the Nordic and Baltic episcopal area that includes as much unity and as much missional strength as possible.



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Recognizing there are different processes going on in annual conferences and in the global church, the desired outcome of the roundtable is a consensus on one proposal for the future of the Nordic and Baltic area. The proposal should be brought to the Nordic and Baltic area group early in the fall of 2020, to enable the area group to recommend it to the 2021 Central Conference.

The roundtable will be composed of half of the number of delegates each annual conference is entitled to send to the Central Conference. It will be the responsibility of each annual conference council to ensure that their group of participants represents the theological positions present in the annual conference, and furthermore that their group of participants is as diverse as possible. Bishop Christian Alsted will facilitate the roundtable, and Kirsten Hastrup will act as secretary.

We would like to remind all of us that during a tense period with deep disagreement, we run the risk of ruining relationships that will be difficult to restore. We wish to encourage all of us to remember to care for each other and to be careful with one another. This is a time for prayer, fellowship and conversation, and we urge all us to think carefully before we make a comment or an update on social media, and to avoid saying anything that can be perceived as offensive or polarizing. Christ still calls us to love each other and to share His love with all people.

The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, many years ago created three simple rules, known as "The General Rules, and they are highly relevant in the current situation. They are first "Do no harm", second "Do good", and finally "remain in God's love by making use of the means of grace". We will continue to worship, to pray, to share communion and to be in conversation with each other. - This is how we put on Christ's love, which is the perfect bond of unity!

Unanimously decided on 29. March 2019 in Copenhagen by the Nordic and Baltic Area Group of the Council of the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference

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