

Loved and Liberated

A Proclamation from Our Movement Forward Summit
A PoC+Q+T centered Discussion of the future of The UMC
May 18, 2019 -- Minneapolis, Minnesota
#umcSetFree



“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’” (Revelation 21:1,5)

“Now as theologians of the church of Christ if we have difficulty telling the truth, then we ought to choose another profession.” (James H. Cone, “The Vocation of a Theologian”)

“Jesus Christ can be understood as the One who frees all who are enslaved to systemic oppressions, including heterosexism and homophobia... the Liberator Christ is an important model of the Queer Christ” (Patrick Cheng, From Sin to Amazing Grace Discovering the Queer Christ)

“God becomes the first casualty in theology if God becomes a puppet of heterosexual ideologies.” (Marcella Althaus-Reid, From Feminist to Indecent Theology)

Our Movement Forward - Preamble

We envision a vibrant church living the Gospel and uncompromising on Jesus’ love ethic of full inclusion and affirmation.

We proclaim the full liberation of Persons of Color + Queer + Trans (PoC+Q+T) People in The United Methodist Church.

We pursue an intersectional and anti-colonial framework to social justice and the dismantling of white supremacy, cisgender-heteronormativity, and patriarchy. We declare that there can be no compromising of full inclusion in any way.

We are Easter people, and during these Great Fifty Days, we are committed to God’s liberated future. We have experienced the death of a denomination that was crucified by the special General Conference. United Methodism as we once knew is dead. Bathed in tears yet soaked in grace, for weeks we wondered and waited in the in-between space of Holy Saturday. Still, we clung to our faith that Resurrection comes and life bursts forth again and again.

Today we rejoice because the spirit of resurrection is upon us as we anticipate Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is moving, illumining our hearts, and revealing a new expression of Methodism. It is to this fresh, dynamic expression that we are called. We must do ourselves what neither the Judicial Council, nor Council of Bishops, nor any part of the institution would do: **We declare the full liberation of PoC+Q+T Christians as the only way forward.**

The Holy Spirit has been unleashed, and we are no longer captive to unjust systems in our denomination that oppress and crucify marginalized bodies. Time and again, these systems fail to live out the rules of the Wesleyan way. In fact, they have repeatedly broken the first rule to do no harm. This betrayal of Methodism catalyzes the unraveling of the UMC. **As the connection crumbles, we no longer settle for crumbs.**

The Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be compromised. Jesus of Nazareth—the poor, brown itinerant preacher of first-century, Roman-occupied Palestine—embodied unconditional love and radical solidarity with the marginalized. His public ministry manifested Isaiah’s prophetic commitment to the poor, broken-hearted, and oppressed. Standing in this tradition, we declare the “year of the Liberator’s favor”: **the emergent church celebrates, and not merely tolerates, PoC+Q+T people as beloved of God.**

PoC+Q+T persons are created in the *Imago Dei*, the image of a loving God who declared the creation “good.” PoC+Q+T Christians are God’s good gifts to the Church. **There can be no concession of any kind to those who oppose the full inclusion of PoC+Q+T Christians in the life of The United Methodist Church.**

The greatest threat to queer liberation is centrism, not conservatism. Though not a separatist or anarchist, Jesus certainly was a radical—not a mainstream centrist. He demanded of his followers significant sacrifice (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30). Moderation is the process that conditions the marginalized to capitulate to the *status quo* and be content with crumbs. “Our great stumbling block” is the moderate who is more devoted to “church unity” than to justice (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”). As an emerging expression of church, faithful to the revelation of the church triumphant, we spit such lukewarm visions of moderation out of our mouths (Revelation 3:16).

As **liberationists**—those who strive for the collective liberation of PoC+Q+T—we reject gradualism and incrementalism. We declare “progressive” as an inadequate descriptor for this moment. Progress is relative; liberation is absolute. Mere progress participates in gradualism that whispers: “Be content that things are better today than yesterday.”

To be PoC+Q+T —and to be in radical solidarity— is to be non-conforming and non-complicit with injustice. We claim queerness primarily as an evangelical, ethical —and not only a sexual— orientation. Queer is a relationship to the *status quo* that rejects the spiritual and moral normalization of harm to the most socially vulnerable people in our church and society. Queer Christian liberation nurtures global relationships of environmental justice, human flourishing, and dignity for those systematically denied it.

Queerness is rooted deeply in the biblical witness of the non-complicit, non-conforming, non-conventional, and non-compromising Jesus of Nazareth. To Queer is to overturn the tables of wrongdoing, just as an enraged Jesus confronted usury and toppled the tables of the loan sharks. As Wesleyan Christians, we pursue the queer Christian endeavor of spreading “scriptural holiness throughout the land.”

Our primary commitment, as baptized Christians, is to the fullness of the Gospel and liberative change, and *not* to denominational preservation. While we do not rejoice in schism, we will not sacrifice PoC+Q+T people on the idolatrous altar of “church unity.” Emerging expressions of Methodism cannot start with coalitions that preserve and institutionalize oppression under the guise of “conscience,” “big tent Methodism,” “contextual ministry,” “religious freedom,” and “tolerance of all viewpoints.” We need something entirely new.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, we seek to create an expression of Methodism that is Christ-full and centers PoC+Q+T voices and their lived experiences in a vibrant, emergent Church where full access and inclusion with regard to membership, leadership, ordination, and sacred unions is the mandate, not the exception.

During this season of uncertainty, we recognize the tension in our midst. There is great urgency to clearly define our shared commitments and vision. It is long past time for the Church to embody its baptismal vows to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. We are called to learn from the ancestral wisdom of our past so that we can move forward, discerning and creating a new, revitalized movement and Church.

Yes, we envision a vibrant church committed to the gospel and uncompromising on Jesus’s love ethic of full inclusion. We are liberationists who intentionally center PoC+T+Q voices and experiences. We actively resist white supremacy, heterosexism, sexism, patriarchy, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, colonialism, classism, and establishmentism. We choose not to support the institution of the Empire.

We have decided to follow Christ to/in the margins, and we’re not turning back.

Our Vision

God is Love. And Christ Jesus liberates the oppressed into life and love abundant. This is Good News. This is *the* Good News.

The Gospel is indeed Good News, and God's story brings the powerful down from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. God's story is our story—a story that is still being written—and we are writing this story together. In living out this Gospel, the Church that follows Jesus Christ is always called to the margins and to be committed to the marginalized. The Church is called to draw the center to its rightful home—at the margins with Christ.

Our Movement Forward is a collective of United Methodist Christians fiercely committed to advancing PoC+Q+T liberation through an intersectional, enfleshed, and anti-colonial framework. We dream of a just and loving church—one that is relevant, growing, and ignited by the life-giving and world-changing power of the Holy Spirit. Our passion for justice is only surpassed by our hope in Christ Jesus. And as people of faith, we proclaim that the Good News of Jesus Christ is for all.

PoC+Q+T (Persons of Color + Queer + Trans) people have always been at the margins of the world, and therefore foundational to the kin-dom of God. The past, present, and future of the Church unequivocally depend on PoC+Q+T leadership, whether or not worldly centers of power recognize that truth.

The current failure of the Church is not only a failure to affirm PoC+Q+T people; it is a systemic denial of Jesus Christ, the brown peasant liberator. Moreover, the Church denies the lived reality that PoC+Q+T people are integral to the life of the Church through which God is working. It is up to the oppressors to decide whether they will join in the work of the kin-dom or sacrifice their souls in the name of false unity. As such, we call upon the Church to be transformed by the ministry and leadership of PoC+Q+T people.

As beloved of God, created holy and sacred in God's image, freedom is our birthright, and flourishing is our God-given gift. Divinity dwells in our flesh and our bones, and divinity delights in that which is other, different, strange, deemed illegal, incompatible, unworthy. Thanks be to God that Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate Word of God, showers on us grace upon grace.

We yearn to be a grace-full church that embodies love and relentlessly and unapologetically pursues social justice and equity. Our role is to make a faithful future irresistible: Our Movement Forward is creating and shaping a way of collective flourishing, intersectional justice, transformative healing, and liberating love.

Our Core Values

- **Theologically-Prophetic Vision**—Embracing a theologically-prophetic vision means that we will not remain silent or complicit in the face of adversity and evil; rather we will call out the unholy so that we can live into a wholly sacred place.
- **Intersectional Justice**—We call attention to the interlocking nature of systemic oppression and the ways life at the intersections shapes the realities of the most marginalized among us. Going forward, we seek a new expression of Methodism that is with - not about - those at the margins.
- **Radical Solidarity**—We lift up radical solidarity as a way of being in communion with one another that represents our shared resurrected reality. Radical solidarity is a responsibility rooted in our mutual connection and interdependence. In the same way that Jesus laid down his life for ours, we are called to lay down our lives for our spiritual siblings. Radical solidarity calls for those who live at the privileged center to joyfully move to the margins.
- **Beloved Community**—We value a beloved community that strives for liberation in its vision, structures, and processes but most importantly in our relationships with each other. We acknowledge our own imperfections, and we know that we will fall short of these shared visions for the kin-dom of God we seek to co-create. Our vision is one of a “reality-based hope” rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our Non-Negotiables

- **We will not compromise queer liberation or the full inclusion and affirmation of PoC+Q+T people in any way.** This non-negotiable stance includes ceasing all bans, penalties, and church trials related to gender and sexual identity or expression, marriages, and sacred unions.
- **We will not abide by institutional policies protecting the ability to discriminate against PoC+Q+T people.** There cannot be pockets of injustice in the Church, and the Church must not discriminate against its own.
- **We implore the Movement Forward to acknowledge the hurt and harm done to PoC+Q+T people, indigenous persons, and women of colonized lands** — for the purpose of strengthening our faith and commitment to justice that is Wesleyan and liberative.
- **We will reject the pre-General Conference 2019 coalitions as the starting point for doing a new thing.** Coalitions that lack a clear set of liberation principles preserve the *status quo* and serve to protect the existing institutions that have heretofore failed us.

Our Commitments

- We commit to **dismantling the external and internalized oppression** that exists among our communion of PoC+Q+T and allies. We long for a unified, liberative, Wesleyan-inspired theology of inclusion that recognizes we are all spiritually gifted, divine creations who embody the fruit of the spirit. Truth-telling in love and action can foster a shared theology of inclusion and affirmation.
- We commit to **mutual accountability, radical solidarity, and the dismantling of hierarchical structures**. Organizational structure is important and necessary for the emergent Church. Regardless of clergy or laity status, we hold each other to our baptismal vows to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in all forms.
- We commit to **doctrinal standards and ministry tasks that truly embody a theology of liberation**. For almost fifty years, we have seen how “incompatibility” language has assaulted the spiritual and economic livelihood of many, resulting in deferred ordination, exclusion from congregational life, and the unwillingness to celebrate the sacred worth of all consenting, loving unions. We envision an emergent church that upholds a theology of inclusion and resists theologies and doctrine that promote bigotry and exclusion.
- We commit to **intentional relationship-building that transforms traditional power hierarchies and builds radical networks of relational power**. We trust in the transformative authority of the Holy Spirit to lead us and boldly appear in our midst.

Next Steps

- **Share the Proclamation throughout your networks.** *This is movement work.*
- **Join UM-Forward.org as a way to advance the Our Movement Forward Proclamation and principles.** *Organizations are needed mechanisms to magnify the movement's voice.*
- **Share** the proclamation with your congregation and invite others to join you in reading, reflection, and action.
- **Attend a Webinar in 2 months.** *We are lifelong learners and change agents.*
- **Gather for OMF Summit in 2020.** *We must all be in the same room together as soon as possible.*