

Friday April 7, 2023

Dear Beloved PNCUCC Community,

Annual Meeting 2023 is coming up at the end of this month. During the business portion of the meeting on Saturday, delegates will be voting on the budget, nominations for governance, and resolutions to direct the Board, amend by-laws, or change policy.

A Community of Practice for Specialized Ministers, in collaboration with clergy and lay members across the PNC bring the attached resolution for your consideration. The PNCUCC Board of Directors (at their meeting on 4/4/23) approved this resolution to be added to the agenda as the first item of business for the 2023 Annual Meeting.

From the Summary: *This resolution calls on the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ to live more fully into God's call for radical inclusivity by affirming full participation in the life of the conference through remote communication and hybrid attendance and voting at Annual Meetings. By revising our by-laws to explicitly allow for remote communication voting, this resolution dismantles barriers to full participation by those who have been historically excluded from our conference work and takes steps towards equality and affirmation of all Pacific Northwest Conference members.*

It is a core value of Jesus and an aspiration of the United Church of Christ to work towards unity and to ensure equity, access and accessibility for all. In seeking to follow Christ, we proclaim that our table is open for all, but we notice that not everyone is affirmed or welcomed. In the words of the prophet Maya Angelou, "I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better." We believe we can do better. God has given us the means, the resources, and the creativity to increase access to the work of the conference through technology. We believe that we not only can, but must follow Jesus' example, as we affirmed in our AM 2022, begin to create a new table. This resolution is part of that process and helps to address the impacts of racism, ableism, classism, genderism, and other forms of multilayered marginalization at the conference level.

As we release this resolution, we are hopeful of your affirmation and support. We are in a pivotal moment in the life of our conference:

1. In order for us to do the work of our conference, come together *inclusively* for fellowship and encouragement, praise and prayer, this change in our bylaws is required.
2. In order for this *or any* resolution or business to pass, a quorum of *in person* delegates is required. Therefore, we encourage all who are able to, to attend in person. This is how we live into the inclusive reality we say we want.

If we are able to establish a quorum* of in person delegates who vote to affirm this bylaw change, we will be able to immediately open up our meeting to remote attendees. Online delegates will have the ability to share their questions and comments and to vote. We will be a more complete body, closer to whole.

To those who wish to register for the PNCUCC Annual Meeting, please follow the link below to the PNC website to find out more information and register. There is now both an ONLINE and IN-PERSON option. Please register by April 20th! :

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/561823c9e4b0448989bf7fcb/t/641de3437c469715affbf9ed/1679680323491/General+Information.pdf>

In a spirit of Grace and Hope,

The Rev. Jennifer Butner, on behalf of the authors and supporters of this Resolution
And The Rev. Esther Sanders BCC, on behalf of the PNCUCC Board of Directors

*A quorum is a minimum of 125 delegates, representing 25 churches.

Changing the By-Laws of the Pacific Northwest Conference to Allow for Remote Communication Voting

An urgent and emergency resolution

Submitted by a Community of Practice for Specialized Ministers

to the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference, April 28-29, 2023

SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ to live more fully into God's call for radical inclusivity by affirming full participation in the life of the conference through remote communication and hybrid attendance and voting at Annual Meetings. By revising our by-laws to explicitly allow for remote communication voting, this resolution dismantles barriers to full participation by those who have been historically excluded from our conference work and takes steps towards equality and affirmation of all Pacific Northwest Conference members.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

It is a core value of Jesus and an aspiration of the United Church of Christ to work towards unity and to ensure equity, access and accessibility for all. Romans 15:7 says, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." The Epistle of James calls for equitable treatment of all, saying "My siblings, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a person comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor person in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor one, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (NIV translation, updated for gender inclusivity).

Jesus practiced an open table – after one who was marginalized by him brought it to his attention. In Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 15:21-28, a non-Jewish woman asks Jesus to heal her young daughter. He tells her that his ministry is only for the Jewish people. Yet, when he is made aware of the impact of his marginalizing and exclusionary practices by this woman, he immediately opened his table to non-Jewish people as well, increasing access to his ministry, and healing the woman's daughter. He did this despite social and religious prohibitions against it.

In seeking to follow Christ, we proclaim that our table is open for all, but we notice that not everyone is invited, affirmed, or welcomed to the table. We notice that some have been historically excluded by circumstance, socio-economic status, health, race, and other marginalized identities. In the words of the prophet Maya Angelou, "I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better." We believe that as the Pacific Northwest Conference, we can do better. God has given us the means, the resources, and the creativity to increase access to the work of the conference through technology. We believe that we not only can, but must, follow Jesus' example and create this new table.

HISTORICAL GROUNDING

Washington's Nonprofit Corporations Act came into effect in 2022 to modernize laws governing non-profit corporations. The language in the Act concerning annual membership meetings has been interpreted as both allowing meetings and voting by members through remote communication by default if not mentioned in an organization's bylaws and as prohibiting annual meetings and voting through remote communication unless provided for in the articles or bylaws. (See RCW.24.03A.390 (5), .485). A broader interpretation of allowing remote communication for annual meetings and voting would be consistent with language in the Act allowing directors to participate and vote in regular or special meetings through remote communication *unless* prohibited by the bylaws and similarly allowing members to participate and vote in special meetings (See RCW 24.03A.550 (2), .395(6)). A broader interpretation would also be consistent with the intent of the Act. The drafters of the Act specifically note the need to have a more efficient process for meeting procedures, to modernize the use of electronic communication in the law, and to 'improve the relations' between a board and members. Nonprofits are seen as 'vital to our communities and to fighting the COVID 19 pandemic.' Highlighted provisions of the Act include applying principles of equity and a new provision for religious doctrine, such as the radical inclusion noted in the theological section above, to control if inconsistent with wording in the Act. (See RCW 24.03A.050, .045, and 5034-S House Bill Report, Civil Rights and Judiciary Committee, March 2021).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, decisions were made to hold the annual meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference online through remote communication in 2021 and 2022, to support both the business needs of the Conference and the safety of all conference members. What we noticed when we met online was an increase in accessibility to the work of the conference. Barriers to participation such as the cost of travel, time constraints, inflexible work schedules, access to childcare, disability, and discomfort with dominant culture attitudes, were significantly mitigated. Due to historical marginalization, those barriers are more likely to be felt by folks in our conference who are Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous. It is not surprising that 2021 and 2022 were our most racially diverse annual meetings. Many who had not felt fully welcome or comfortable attending in-person meetings were present. A remote communication option, such as online, helps us live into the PNC board priority, as specified in our constitution, as the "moral prerogative" of "dismantling racism and expanding our understanding and awareness of the impact racism has had and continues to have on our churches, our Conference and our world" as well as "other intersectional oppressions." The pandemic forced us to make changes for reasons of safety, but the outcome was increased access to the mission and ministry of the Pacific Northwest Conference.

A conservative reading of our by-laws – which neither specifically allow for nor forbid meetings through remote communication - caused the 2021 and 2022 PNC Annual Meetings not to be ratified. Changing the by-laws to specifically allow online and hybrid meetings, with participation and voting through remote communication, will ensure that the obstacle of legal ambiguity is removed, and that a hybrid, inclusive format can be put into effect immediately.

Further, our constitution states that a priority of the conference to “support the clergy and lay leadership that strengthens our communities and enhance the collegial relationships of clergy and laity.” Requiring our ministers to attend Annual Meeting without providing accommodation for those who face obstacles to travel and attendance due to personal finances, disability, illness, childcare concerns, or other barriers results in exclusion by exemption, rather than inclusion and access to this collegiality.

While access to the appropriate technology for hybrid participation has historically been an obstacle, we are informed that we currently have the technological and human resources to make it possible effective immediately, and that AM 2023 can be completed with full participation from both in-person and remote participants.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

WHEREAS, the Pacific Northwest Conference (PNC) of the United Church of Christ Board of Directors has voted to make antiracism a Conference priority, and

WHEREAS, the PNC requires ministers to attend Annual Meetings to be in good standing in the conference, and

WHEREAS, the PNC has the technological and human resources to implement a hybrid meeting format effective immediately, and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the PNC to find welcoming and affirming ways of being together, and

WHEREAS, we are called as followers of Jesus to work for equity, inclusion, and justice for those who are marginalized, and

WHEREAS, in the preamble to the PNC constitution, the Conference commits itself to “act as communities of nurture and care,” and “support the clergy and lay leadership that strengthens our communities,” and “administer our corporate life responsibly and ethically,”

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ amend the By-Laws to specify that participation and voting through remote communication is permitted and that Annual Meetings can be held online, in-person, or hybrid in order to increase accessibility for all attendees.

FUNDING: There is no funding needed. The equipment and operator skill needed to support remote communications are resources that it is believed that the PNC UCC and its member churches would be able to provide at no additional cost to the conference.

IMPLEMENTATION: The By-Laws will be amended and implemented immediately by the Executive Administrator or their designee in accordance with the resolution. If other implementation is needed, the Officers of the Conference, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

PROPOSED CHANGES:

ARTICLE 2 – MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

1. There shall be Annual Meetings of the Conference dedicated to providing for the transaction of business and election of officers. The date of each meeting shall be set by the Board of Directors and normally should occur in the spring of each year. Notice of the time and place will be given to all Members of the Conference by the Registrar at least three months prior to the meeting. Program materials will be distributed to delegates and churches at least one month prior to the meeting. **Meetings may be held online, in-person, or hybrid through remote communication to increase accessibility for all attendees.**

3. 125 voting Members, **either online through remote communication or in-person**, representing at least 25 churches of the Conference shall constitute a quorum. A quorum shall be required to conduct business.

ARTICLE 3 – VOTING MEMBERSHIP

4. **Voting may occur online through remote communication or in person, or via email under extenuating circumstances as specified by the Board of Directors and in accordance with Washington State law.**

ARTICLE 15 – INTERPRETATION AND AMENDMENTS

2. These Bylaws may be amended at any Annual Meeting or special meeting of the Conference by a two-thirds majority of the voting membership present **in person or online through remote communication** and voting, providing that a notice of the proposed amendment be stated in the call to the meeting.