

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Special Called General Conference of The United Methodist Church 2019

Prepared by the Holston Conference Delegation

Why are we having a special, called General Conference in 2019?

At the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon, it was clear to many of the delegates that our denomination has reached an impasse on the question of how to be in ministry to and with LGBTQ persons. By a vote of 428 to 405, the 2016 General Conference decided not to take up any legislation related to homosexuality and instead authorized the Council of Bishops to form a group that became known as the Commission on a Way Forward (“Commission”), whose task was to “develop a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in [the] Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality.” (<http://www.umc.org/decisions/76720>.) Their mission included the exploration of potential ways our denomination could remain intact.

Specifically, the Commission was guided by a “Mission, Vision and Scope” document that included several key elements:

MISSION The Commission will bring together persons deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church, with an openness to developing new relationships with each other and exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional and central conference actions.

VISION The Commission will design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible.

SCOPE We should be open to new ways of embodying unity that move us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality. Therefore, we should consider new ways of being in relationship across cultures and jurisdictions, in understandings of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences, and in the design and purpose of the apportionment.

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward>

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/archives-the-commission-on-a-way-forward>

<http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session>

How long has the role of LGBTQ persons in the United Methodist Church been an issue?

The General Conference first publicly debated the issue of homosexuality in 1972. It was there in Atlanta, Georgia, where delegates added the statement, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching" and "homosexual persons, no less than heterosexual persons are of sacred worth," to the Discipline.

In 1976, funding restrictions were put in place to prohibit church funds being used to promote homosexuality; also, language was added to the Discipline indicating we do not recognize relationships between persons of the same sex as 'marriage.'

In 1980, a specific reference to homosexual unions was removed from our Social Principles, and the statement that marriage is between a man and a woman was added.

In 1984, the statement that "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" could not be ordained or accepted as candidates for ministry was added to the Discipline, and "Fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" was explicitly identified as the standard for clergy. (§304.3 Qualifications for Ordination, fn 1, in The Book of Discipline. "Self-avowed practicing homosexual" is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry, or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual).

In 1988, statements intentionally affirming "God's grace is available to all," and we are to be in ministry to "all persons" were added.

In 1996, the prohibition against clergy performing same sex unions was approved.

In 2000, a statement was added to our Social Principles that we implore families and churches "NOT" to reject gay or lesbian members.

In 2004, 2008, & 2012 the debate continued. With each General Conference, talk of division and 'splitting' increased.

I don't understand why this is an issue. Isn't the Bible clear on the topic of homosexuality?

In the midst of our long-standing General Conference disagreements, one thing has been made abundantly clear to people on all sides of the issue: good, loving Christians disagree over the issue of how to interpret the Bible on the topic of human sexuality. Over the last decade, multiple Christian denominations have split over this topic. There are strong, biblically-based arguments to be made for and against ordination of LGBTQ persons and same-sex marriage.

So, the debate about The Way Forward for United Methodism is not a debate about the authority of the Bible?

No, all sides say that they recognize scripture as the primary authority for our life and faith.

<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/theological-guidelines-scripture>

Is the debate about the Way Forward a debate about the interpretation of scripture?

Yes, there is significant disagreement within United Methodism about how to interpret the scriptures with regard to LGBTQ inclusion. We encourage all persons in Holston Conference to explore the ideas put forth by those who disagree with your opinion on this topic. If you are a progressive, you should be able to understand and enunciate the theological and biblical views of those who are conservative. If you are a conservative, you should be able to understand and enunciate the theological and biblical views of those who are progressive. Unless you can do that, then you are not in a position to truly engage in loving Christian conversation. What the great majority of people find when they explore the ideas put forth on both sides of this issue is that their own views do not change. However, they also realize that persons who think differently than them are not necessarily immoral or ignoring the Bible. When we understand that it is possible to honestly disagree over this complex topic, then we begin to see that those “on the other side” are our Christian brothers and sisters, who are relying on God’s love, Jesus’ grace, and the Holy Spirit’s guidance, just like us.

We suggest reading Chapter 2 of the Rev. Wil Cantrell’s book, *Unafraid and Unashamed: Facing the Future of United Methodism*, to explore how different Christians can read scripture and come up with different conclusions.

<https://bit.ly/2ln3n5g>

(Wil Cantrell, *Unafraid and Unashamed: Facing the Future of United Methodism*, Market Square Publishing, Knoxville, TN, 2017.)

Is the purpose of the Way Forward process to settle all the questions related to Biblical interpretation and Christian ethics surrounding LGBTQ inclusion once and for all?

No, the purpose of the Way Forward process is to discern how the United Methodist Church can move faithfully into the future given that large segments of United Methodists disagree strongly about LGBTQ inclusion and are unlikely to reach agreement in the near future.

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-about-us>

Who are the members of the Commission on a Way Forward?

The Commission is a diverse body that represents the global United Methodist church with members coming from nine countries with a variety of theological perspectives, representing all sides of the issue on human sexuality; all of these persons were deeply committed to the future of The United Methodist Church. The Commission is made up of one-third laity, one-third clergy, and one-third bishops, and includes younger persons, LGBTQ persons, professors, administrators, pastors, youth ministers, campus ministers, lay leaders, large church pastors, and persons identified with renewal and advocacy groups.

The work of the Commission on a Way Forward reflects the fact that members of The United Methodist Church have different opinions on human sexuality and yet desire to find a way to live together, acknowledging these differences. In a worldwide denomination of over 12 million members, differences are to be expected. We also find that human sexuality is only one area of significance where faithful, Bible-believing Christians in The United Methodist Church hold strong and differing opinions. The commission worked with a defined mission, vision, and scope that guided its efforts to develop recommendations to maximize the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world while acknowledging our different global contexts for ministry and our differing understandings of Scripture. Rather than debating who is right or wrong in their opinions and convictions, the 2019 General Conference recommendations from the Commission will present three options for how we can live together.

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-members>

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-about-us>

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-5-things-you-need-to-know>

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-news-and-updates>

What was the result of the Commission's work? Where can I find the Commission's Report?

The Commission developed a report that includes three plans: One Church Plan, Connectional Conferences Plan, and Traditionalist Plan. See Holston Conference Delegation Video about the three plans: <http://holston.org/umc/gc-resources/>. Following is a brief summary of each:

The **One Church Plan** is built on the belief that local congregations and Annual Conferences around the world find themselves in very different contexts. Highlights of the One Church Plan include:

- removes current language in *The Book of Discipline* that states, "The

United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

- changes the definition of marriage to a monogamous relationship between two adults.
- gives pastors the authority to perform same gender weddings and congregations the right to determine whether same gender weddings can be held in their facilities.
- protects the right of pastors not to conduct same gender weddings.
- protects the right of bishops not to ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals, “The Jurisdictional College of Bishops shall provide for the ordination, commissioning, and licensing of all persons recommended by the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Clergy Session of the Annual Conference in the bounds of its jurisdiction.” (proposed Amendment to ¶415.6)
- allows the Clergy Session of the Annual Conference to vote on motions by the Board of Ordained Ministry regarding the certification, ordination and appointment of self-avowed homosexuals only once every 30 months, unless agreed to by the presiding bishop.
- requires churches leaving the denomination to contribute money equal to their share of the annual conference’s unfunded pension liability.

The **Connectional Conferences Plan** is built on the belief that, while United Methodists disagree on this issue on this issue of human sexuality, we agree on much. Highlights of the Connectional Conferences Plan include:

- maintains a common unified theological core consisting of the proposed *General Book of Discipline* that includes the Articles of Religion, Confession of Faith, the General Rules and other agreed upon items.
- utilizes shared services by the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, General Council on Finance and Administration, Archives and History, Publishing House and parts of the General Board of Global Ministries.
- creates three ‘Connectional Conferences’ (Progressive, Unity and Traditional) based on theological perspectives related to accountability, contextualization and justice perspectives.
- allows Central Conferences outside the United States to remain as geographical entities or align with a Connectional Conference.
- gives jurisdictional conferences the authority to determine which Connectional Conference with which to align.
- allows annual conferences, congregations, pastors and bishops to align with another Connectional Conference rather than the one

chosen by their jurisdiction or annual conference.

- assigns much of the authority currently given to the General Conference to the Connectional Conferences, including matters concerning the election, assignment, funding and accountability of bishops, ordination standards and the writing of the proposed *Connectional Conference Book of Discipline*.
- redefines and limits the roles of the General Conference, Council of Bishops and Judicial Council
- requires eight constitutional amendments for implementation.

The **Traditionalist Plan** is built on the belief that our denomination needs to strengthen its current policies, which, among other things, prohibit the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Highlights of the **Traditionalist Plan** include:

- maintains the United Methodist Church's current stance that states, "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching," the definition of marriage as between a woman and man, and the prohibition of self-avowed practicing homosexuals being certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve.
- requires active and retired bishops, annual conferences and Boards of Ordained Ministry to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain disciplinary standards regarding marriage and ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals.
- prohibits bishops from consecrating bishops and commissioning or ordaining individuals who are self-avowed practicing homosexuals.
- provides a number of measures, including mandatory actions, to ensure increased accountability by clergy and bishops.
- prohibits annual conferences that fail to certify their willingness to uphold disciplinary standards regarding marriage and ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals from using the United Methodist name and logo or receiving any funds from The United Methodist Church beginning in 2021.
- allows annual conferences or any group of 50 congregations to form a self-governing church if they are in "irreconcilable conflict for reasons of conscience with the doctrine or moral teachings and requirements of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* on the issues of human sexuality."
- allows local churches that disagree with their annual conference's decision to withdraw and unite with an "autonomous, affiliated, or concordat church."
- requires churches leaving the denomination to contribute money equal to their share of the annual conference's unfunded pension

liability.

The entire report can be found at: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/gc2019-advance-edition-daily-christian-advocate>. This edition of the Advance Daily Christian Advocate also includes all of the petitions that were submitted by persons and groups outside the Commission that were not ruled invalid by the Secretary of the General Conference on formatting and other technical grounds.

Other resources: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/the-commission-on-a-way-forward-report-what-you-should-know>; <https://www.facebook.com/umcforward/>.

The Traditionalist Plan refers to “autonomous, affiliated, or concordat” churches. What do those terms mean?

Paragraph 570 of The UMC Book of Discipline broadly describes Autonomous Methodist Churches, Affiliated Autonomous Methodist Churches, Affiliated United Churches, and Methodist Churches With Concordat Agreements as “[c]hurches located outside the boundaries of the jurisdictional conferences and which have entered into relationship with or have agreements with The United Methodist Church, including that of sending representatives to General Conference . . . ,” and then further defines the details of how each category relates to The United Methodist Church. Each of these types of relationships are essentially relationships based upon a common Wesleyan heritage, and are designed in a contractual way to provide for common or shared mission and ministry in prescribed locations and methods. The Traditionalist Plan proposes to amend Paragraph 570 to allow churches **inside** the United States, who have chosen to leave The United Methodist Church and form a self-governing church as provided for in the Traditionalist Plan, to enter into “autonomous, affiliated or concordat” relationships with The United Methodist Church.

Did the Commission recommend the adoption of any one Plan?

No. The Commission never took a vote regarding which members of the Commission supported which plan. At the end of the process, in order to place the plans in petition format, Commission members were asked to which plans they were willing to give public support. Several Commission members gave support to more than one plan, and others chose not to express a preference.

What action did the Council of Bishops take concerning the Commission on a Way Forward’s report?

The Council of Bishops was involved in an ongoing feedback process with the Commission that involved prayer, conversation and informal straw polls. The Council, however, formally voted only once. This vote occurred at the May 2018 meeting when the following three-part motion was adopted by an overwhelming majority of active bishops:

***Motion:** Having received and considered the extensive work of the Commission on a Way Forward, the Council of Bishops will submit a report to*

the special session of the General Conference in 2019 that includes:

- *All three plans (The Traditionalist Plan, The One Church Plan and The Connectional Conference Plan) for a way forward considered by the Commission and the Council.*
- *The Council's recommendation of The One Church Plan.*
- *An historical narrative of the Council's discernment process regarding all three plans.*

Rationale: *In order to invite the church to go deeper into the journey the Council and Commission has been on, the Council makes all the information considered by the Commission and the Council of Bishops available to the delegates of the General Conference and acknowledges there is support for each of the three plans within the Council. The values of our global church are reflected in all three plans. The majority of the Council recommends The One Church Plan as the best way forward for The United Methodist Church.*

Did all the bishops who voted for the motion support the One Church Plan?

No. While the One Church Plan received a majority, a significant number of bishops supported one of the two other plans. Many of those who did not support the One Church Plan voted for the final motion because it ensured that all three plans would be available for consideration by the 2019 General Conference.

Why is the Commission on a Way Forward, and not the Council of Bishops, submitting the report to GC 2019?

Judicial Council Decision No. 1360, issued in late May of this year, includes a footnote that clarifies the Council's understanding of the relationship between the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops. Footnote 6 reads:

The undertaking of a 'complete examination' of the subject of human sexuality presupposes that there will be some kind of report, document or study which supports the 'possible revision of every paragraph in our Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality,' which, in turn, presupposes that the Commission (not the Council of Bishops) will put forth legislation to fix the problem. The special General Conference is to consider 'their work,' i.e., whatever the Commission desires to put before General Conference in terms of its 'complete examination.'

In response to this important footnote, the Council of Bishops and the Commission agreed that the Commission would present the report.

Once the Commission on a Way Forward report was completed, why did it take so long to publish?

The Council of Bishops and Commission on the General Conference believed it was important to release the report simultaneously in all four official languages of the General Conference: English, French, Portuguese and Swahili. The translation process took longer than expected to complete.

What is the proposed timeline for the implementation of each of the three plans?

The timeline depends upon which plan is adopted, although revisions changing the timeline could be made by the 2019 Special Session of General Conference or the Judicial Council.

The **One Church Plan** could take effect as early as January 1, 2020 (See ¶508 – Legislation Effective Date). However, in order to give the church time to prepare for the changes, it is recommended the plan not fully go into effect until December 31, 2020.

The **Connectional Conferences Plan** would be implemented in the following stages:

- Annual Conferences vote on constitutional amendments in 2019 and early 2020.
- Jurisdictions and Central Conferences align with a Connectional Conference in 2020.
- Bishops align with a Connectional Conference by August 1, 2021.
- Annual Conferences not in agreement with their Jurisdictional Conference decision align with a different Connectional Conference by August 1, 2021.
- Local Churches not in agreement with their Annual Conference decision align with a Connectional Conference by July 1, 2022.
- Clergy align with a Connectional Conference by July 1, 2022.
- Organizational conferences of Connectional Conferences occur in fall 2022.
- First General Conference occurs in 2025.

The **Traditionalist Plan** would be implemented in the following stages:

- Annual Conferences certify that they will “uphold, enforce, and maintain *The Discipline’s* standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination” by February 2020.
- Local congregations and clergy decide whether to remain in the denomination during March-April, 2020.
- 2020 General Conference addresses unfinished or deferred work flowing from the 2019 Special Session of General Conference.
- Annual Conferences discern their leadership for 2020-2024 in May-June 2020.
- Residential Bishops must approve one of the two statements in ¶2801.7 in May-June 2020.

- Jurisdictional Conferences meet in July 2020 to elect new bishops based on previous decisions of annual conferences, local churches, bishops, clergy and need.
- General Council on Finance and Administration no longer will receive funds from, or send funds to, annual conferences that have not certified they will “uphold, enforce and maintain the Discipline’s standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination” as of January 1, 2021.

What will the delegates to GC 2019 address?

The Council of Bishops’ revised call for a Special Session of the General Conference issued July 9, 2018 states, “the purpose of this Special Session of the General Conference shall be limited to receiving and acting upon a report from the Commission on a Way Forward based upon the recommendations of the Council of Bishops.” This means the report of the Commission on a Way Forward, including the accompanying legislation, consisting of a total of 48 petitions, will be before GC 2019 for consideration.

Judicial Council Decision No. 1360, issued earlier this year, stated that other petitions may be submitted by organizations, and lay or clergy members, and the submitted petitions that are “in harmony with the call for the special General Conference” will be considered. See: <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/court-oks-submission-of-other-petitions-for-gc2019>; <http://www.umc.org/decisions/76720>.

A total of 85 petitions were submitted by a variety of individuals and organizations in addition to the 48 offered by the Commission. Of those, 34 were preliminarily ruled out of order based on format or other errors. The remaining 51 petitions were printed in *The Advance Daily Christian Advocate*, the official journal of the General Conference, which has been distributed to all General Conference delegates, and is available on-line: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/gc2019-advance-edition-daily-christian-advocate>.

The General Conference Committee on Reference met January 11-12 to decide which petitions can be considered at GC 2019. The Committee decided that in order to be “in harmony with the call,” at least one of the following criteria must be met: (i) the petition was submitted by the Way Forward Commission, (ii) the content of the petition directly addresses inclusion or exclusion of LGBTQ persons, (iii) or the content of the petition seeks to correct or perfect Way Forward Commission plans for the continuing existence of The United Methodist Church.

The Committee quickly determined that all 48 petitions included in The Way Forward Report are “in harmony” with the Bishops’ call for GC 2019, and agreed with the determination of the Secretary of the General Conference that 34 petitions were invalid due to formatting and other issues. Of the remaining 51 petitions, the Committee determined that one additional petition was invalid due to formatting or other issues, 30 petitions were “in harmony,” and 20 petitions were not.

General Conference delegates have the right to debate, amend, substitute, and take other parliamentary action with regard to, any item that is properly before them for consideration.

Additionally, by two-thirds vote of the delegates, GC 2019 can consider an item of legislation that is not in harmony with the call.

For additional information see:

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/panel-clarifies-options-for-special-general-conference>

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/seventy-eight-legislative-petitions-headed-for-st.-louis>
http://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/who-we-are/documents/COR_Report.pdf

How will the legislative process work at GC 2019?

The standing rules that governed the 2016 General Conference will also govern how the 2019 Special Session of General Conference conducts its business, unless the 2019 Special Session delegates vote to change them.

Saturday, February 23, 2019, will be a day of prayer and preparation. On Sunday, February 24, the first official day of GC 2019, delegates will receive a presentation from the Way Forward Commission, and in plenary will seek to discern which of the plans that have been submitted the delegates, by majority vote, the delegates choose to refine.

On Monday, February 25, the delegates will meet as a single legislative committee to refine and perfect the selected plan. (The Discipline does require, however, that every petition properly submitted to the General Conference, including GC 2019, receive a vote of a legislative committee, and that every petition approved by a legislative committee receive a vote by the plenary session of the conference. See ¶507, Book of Discipline.)

The delegates will convene on Tuesday, February 26, in full plenary to take final votes on the work of the legislative committee.

For more information see:

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/looking-at-ways-to-make-gc2019-efficient>.

Can the results from GC 2019 be changed by the 2020 General Conference?

Yes. A future General Conference could change anything done in the 2019 General Conference by a simple majority - 50 percent of the delegates plus one, unless the change is a constitutional amendment. Whether it is to change something or change it back, the constitutional amendment process - once it begins - will take approximately three years to complete and would require a two-thirds majority vote from the General Conference delegates as well as a combined two-thirds majority from all the clergy and lay members of all U.S. annual conferences and central conferences.

When and where will the 2019 General Conference take place?

The 2019 General Conference of The United Methodist Church will take place in The Dome, part of the America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis, Missouri, on February 23-26, 2019. Interestingly, the General Conference will save money by sharing the convention center with a high school and middle school volleyball tournament.

Who are the delegates attending GC 2019, and how were they selected?

Each annual conference is apportioned a number of delegates that are roughly representative of the size of the conference's laity and clergy membership. An equal number of clergy and laity are elected in each annual conference, so if an annual conference is apportioned a total of ten delegates, it will elect five laity and five clergy.

In the rare event that a special, called General Conference is convened, such as the one in St. Louis next February, the delegates elected to serve at the last General Conference are entitled to attend. However, if an annual conference would like to hold a special election for a new slate of delegates, it may do so. Most annual conferences send the delegates they elected for the previous General Conference.

There are 864 delegates to GC 2019, all but 10 of whom were elected in their annual conferences to participate in the regularly-scheduled quadrennial 2016 General Conference held in Portland, Oregon.

Annual Conferences from the United States will send 504 delegates. Conferences from outside the United States, called Central Conferences, will send the following numbers: Africa - 260, Europe and Eurasia - 40, and the Philippines - 50. Ten delegates from what are called Concordat churches (i.e., the Methodist Church of the Americas and the Caribbean, the Methodist Church in Britain, the Methodist Church of Mexico, and the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico) also attend the conference. Although these delegates are not members of The United Methodist Church they are accorded the right of voice and vote at General Conferences.

Who can attend the 2019 General Conference?

GC 2019 is open to the general public, although the Commission on the General Conference has the power to restrict admission. Everyone in attendance will be required to register and to wear a name tag issued by the General Conference. Registration will be held at The Dome at America's Center Broadway Central Entry, and begins at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, February 22, 2018, and will be available throughout GC 2019.

As in the past, there will be a suggested (optional) badge charge of \$7 in advance and \$10 at the site of the conference to help offset the expenses of the credentialing process. Delegates, reserves, official monitors required in the rules of the General Conference, Judicial Council members, hospitality volunteers, and General Conference staff will not be requested to pay this amount. The suggested amount for the badge is not new, dating back as far as 2008. However, all attendees will be required to be credentialed to enter the meeting spaces. Convention Center staff will be monitoring the

badges to direct attendees to proper seating areas based on their credentials. This decision was made by the Commission on the General Conference for the safety and well-being of all attendees. Also, there will be other events happening in parts of the America's Center during GC 2019.

Those planning to attend one or more days of GC 2019 should move quickly to secure lodging. In addition to the 864 delegates, numerous church officials, staff, and volunteers will also be in attendance. Many of the hotel rooms are already filled, and others nearby are likely to fill week before GC 2019 begins.

Also, proceedings of GC 2019 will be live-streamed. To access the live-stream see www.UMC.org or <http://www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2019-special-session>.

What happens if none of the three plans are approved?

The 2016 Book of Discipline, and its current stance related to homosexuality, will remain in effect. Of course, individual petitions can be adopted without the adoption of the entire plan of which they are a part.

What further actions have been taken regarding the Commission's Report?

The Council of Bishops formally requested that the Judicial Council review the constitutionality of the Plans submitted by the Commission in order to better ensure that GC 2019 does not act in a way that the Judicial Council later decides is in violation of *The Book of Discipline*. The Judicial Council received written submissions from the Council of Bishops and numerous individuals on the constitutionality issue, and then heard oral argument at its regularly scheduled October 23-26, 2018 meeting. The Judicial Council found constitutional issues in both the One Church Plan and the Traditionalist Plan. Efforts are underway by proponents of each of these Plans to prepare amendments for presentation on the floor of GC 2019 to address the constitutionality issues. Constitutionality issues were not involved with the Connectional Conferences Plan because the presentation of that Plan recognizes that its implementation will require constitutional amendments, and the proposed constitutional amendments are included in that Plan.

For the complete Judicial Council ruling, see:

[http://cdnfiles.umc.org/Website_Properties/JCD_1366_\(Docket_No._1018-12\).pdf](http://cdnfiles.umc.org/Website_Properties/JCD_1366_(Docket_No._1018-12).pdf).

Article from the United Methodist News Service about the Judicial Council Ruling: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/court-one-church-plan-largely-constitutional>.

Who makes up the Judicial Council and what do they do?

The Judicial Council determines the constitutionality of acts or proposed acts of the General, jurisdictional, central and annual conferences. It acts on these either on appeal of lower rulings or through requests for declaratory decisions. It also rules on whether acts of other official bodies of the denomination conform to The 2016 Book of

Discipline.

(<https://www.cokesbury.com/forms/DynamicContent.aspx?id=87&pageid=920#9568>).

This is done in accordance with procedures established in The 2016 Book of Discipline. To view the members of the Judicial Council, view their dockets and learn more: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/judicial-council>.

Where can I find the Constitution of The United Methodist Church?

The Constitution can be found in The 2016 Book of Discipline beginning on page 25 and concluding on page 44. The Constitution establishes the basic outline for the organization of the denomination as well as establishing the office and role of the bishop. The Constitution establishes the Judicial Council as the body to rule on matters of church law as passed by the General Conference.

Who from Holston Conference will be delegates to GC 2019?

The Holston Conference delegation consists of six clergy persons and six lay persons, with two alternates in each category. These are the same persons who were elected to the Holston Conference delegation for the 2016 General Conference:

Clergy: Kim Goddard (Delegation Chair), Sandra Johnson, Carol Wilson, Wil Cantrell, Randy Frye, Mark Flynn, Paul Seay (alternate), and Dennie Humphreys (alternate).

Lay: Del Holley, Emily Ballard, Becky Hall, John Tate, Bob Lockaby, Karen Wright, Joyce Moore (alternate), and John Eldridge (alternate).

For more information see: <http://holston.org/about/communications/the-call/volE18/num12/delegates-prepare-for-special-session-2019>.

How can I contact the Holston delegates to offer support, ask questions, or make a comment?

Send an email to the delegation: delegation@holston.org.

Write to the delegates c/o Holston Annual Conference, P.O. Box 850, Alcoa, TN 37701-0850.

Do our Holston delegates represent us like the electoral college members in a presidential election (they must vote as Holston has stated) or like members of Congress (they represent their area but vote their conscience on individual legislation)?

Each delegate votes according to her or his conscience. In Decision No. 592 (<http://www.umc.org/decisions/41486>), the Judicial Council explained:

In The United Methodist Church delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences are historically and traditionally elected without instruction.... Delegates to General Conference, just as members of an Annual Conference, are bound to do as their conscience dictates what is good for the Church of Jesus Christ, The United Methodist Church in particular, and that only.

Frankly, this is the only realistic solution because proposals submitted to the General Conference, in the form of petitions, resolutions, and reports, change throughout the legislative process. Very little legislation emerges from committees and floor debate without at least some modifications or amendments – sometimes significant. While a delegate (or an Annual Conference) might favor a particular petition or resolution as it is originally submitted, there is no way to know what the will of an Annual Conference would be on that same legislation – after it has been modified – when it is time to vote. During General Conference, delegates also receive additional information from presentations and arguments during debate on petitions that potentially influences their voting decisions.

How can I get involved in the process? What should our churches be doing?

First, you can encourage the General Conference delegates from Holston Conference as discussed above.

Second, you can become part of the “Praying Our Way Forward” initiative that has been launched by the Council of Bishops at: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/bishops-the-upper-room-launch-phase-3-of-praying-our-way-forward>. See also: <http://UMCPrays.org>.

One specific suggestion as we approach GC 2019 is to join UMC members across the world to pray each day from 2:23-2:26 (a.m. or p.m., or both!), numbers that correspond to the dates of February 23-26, 2019, the dates of GC 2019.

Third, you can keep up-to-date with everything by going to the Holston Conference website: <http://holston.org/umc/general-conference>.

Helpful Additional Resources:

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-news-and-updates>

<http://www.umcom.org/news/way-forward-commission-offers-video-resources-for-2019-general-conference>

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-offers-more-video-resources-for-2019-general-co>

<http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-releases-final-videos-for-2019-general-conferen>