

## Church Information Meeting September 18, 2022

What Is Happening in the UMC Now? And what is happening more directly in our Conference? And how is this impacting our local church? To understand this, it is necessary to understand our church structure.

### Brief Description of UMC General Conference

The United Methodist Church is a world-wide denomination comprised of annual and central conferences. Each conference in Africa, Eurasia, Europe, and the United States elects an equal number of clergy and laity to be among the 600 to 1,000 delegates to General Conference. The General Conference meets every 4 years to establish the laws and policies of our church. **The General Conference is the official legislative body of our church. It is from the General Conference that we get our Book of Discipline which sets the policies for the whole church.**

We also have a Judicial Council which gives oversight to the legality of issues and helps maintain the constitutionality of resolutions, petitions and decisions that come from the General Conference. It is a 9-member Council elected by General Conference.

### Statements in our Book of Discipline Regarding Sexuality

Since 1972 our Book of Discipline has included statements on homosexuality. The Book of Discipline states that **all people are of sacred worth and that the church is to be in ministry to all people.**

However, **the Discipline also states that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching (BOD Par 304). Prohibitions regarding homosexuality center on 2 key areas: the ordination of openly practicing homosexual clergy (BOD Par 304) and same sex unions (BOD Par 161) and same sex unions being presided over by UM clergy (BOD Par. 341.6)**

In the past few decades groups within our larger church have been in conflict over the statements in our Book of Discipline. These conflicts have become more intensified over the past decade, especially in the US. Despite concurrent votes to uphold the traditional wording in our Book of Discipline, many have decided to disregard the Book of Discipline in matters dealing with the prohibitions stated above.

**Most notably, in 2016 the Western Jurisdiction elected an openly lesbian bishop. (UM News July 15, 2016). The official church ruling by our Judicial Council was that her election was in violation of our church law. But only the Western Jurisdiction could change it. The Western Jurisdiction took no action to change it.** (ResourceUMC Decision 1341) This brought even more unrest and conflict in our larger church. So, our leadership was tasked to try and find a resolution.

This led up to a special called General Conference in 2019. To clarify again, our General Conference is made up of delegates from all over the world representing people from Africa, Philippines, Europe and the US. So, this was a special called General Conference to deal with the ongoing conflict and find a resolution. Different proposals were considered. There was a plan called the "One Church Plan" that was endorsed by most of our US bishops. This plan would remove the prohibitions in the BOD but would at the same time allow "traditional" churches to retain their positions in their areas or regions. This plan did not pass. **The plan that did pass in the General Conference was the "Traditional Plan" which upholds the prohibitions and kept the language that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. The Traditional Plan passed by a margin of 53% to 47% (UM News Feb 2019)**

**Immediately following the 2019 General Conference, several Annual Conferences and church leaders in different regions in the US especially, openly stated they would not abide by the Traditional Plan passed at General Conference.**

## The Protocol

In early 2020, because of the continuing division, a plan termed the “Protocol” was negotiated. The Protocol called for a “graceful separation” wherein the more “traditional” people in the UMC would separate out and form a new church. The “post separation UMC” would retain the United Methodist name and become a more progressive church by removing the prohibitions in the Book of Discipline (UM News Jan 3, 2020). It was greatly anticipated that the “Protocol” would come before the next General Conference (supposed to have happened in 2020) and would be approved because it was endorsed by most all the major groups representing the conflicting positions in the larger UMC. However, the Covid 19 Pandemic happened, and the General Conference has been delayed for the third time until 2024.

### In the delay of General Conference several things have happened:

**At least 1/3 of the groups who had endorsed the Protocol have now withdrawn their support. (The Christian Post June 10, 2022)**

**A group of the more “progressive” wing of the church announced the creation of a new denomination in November 2020, the Liberation Methodist Connexion (UM News Dec 2, 2020).**

**In addition, the “Global Methodist Church” was initiated in May 2022 which is comprised of pastors and churches who have disaffiliated from the UMC and hold a more “traditional” position.**

**This has created a lot of uncertainty about what will happen in the General Conference in 2024.**

### What does the future hold?

An article in UM Insight identified the status of the church after 2019 GC and the passage of the Traditional Plan. The article mentioned the rise of those who are taking positions against the Traditional Plan in the US especially. **It cited that 28 of 54 Conferences took action against the Traditional Plan passed at the 2019 General Conference (UM Insight June 28, 2019). So, this has created a real crisis in our church.**

Since the delay of General Conference to 2024 and the initiation of new churches on both sides, and the withdrawal of support for the Protocol, **what we see now is not a separation but a “splintering” of the UMC from churches and pastors leaving from both sides, but especially larger numbers of traditional churches, particularly in our region. This has created a greater struggle in our own Conference in decisions that churches are making about staying UMC or disaffiliating.**

Our church Council has been in conversation about this since May when Bishop Graves published a Q-A Video. He also had laity and clergy gathering in August. We held a Church Information Meeting on September 18<sup>th</sup>.

We are anticipating some initial decision to come from our Council in late November. I want to emphasize that this would potentially begin a greater process of discernment. Decisions regarding disaffiliation would come much later in the process of discernment and involve our church membership voting in a Church Conference. I have included another information document regarding the disaffiliation process. Our Conference website [www.awfumc.org](http://www.awfumc.org) has information regarding remaining UMC and created a link with information regarding disaffiliation. Please see the separate information sheet regarding the disaffiliation process here also.