

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General Conference of the United Methodist Church



Members of BSUMC,

Thank you to our pastors for their thoughtful crafting of these frequently asked questions (FAQ) about the United Methodist Church, its General Conference 2022, and the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” one of the proposals to be considered at this upcoming General Conference. This summary document supports the efforts of the BSUMC Way Forward Task Force to identify, organize, and communicate information about the connectional structure of the United Methodist Church, its processes, and the issues to be considered at General Conference 2022. Offering this resource in the spirit of shared faith and Christian love, we hope you will use them in your own conversations about the future of the United Methodist Church.

-The BSUMC Way Forward Task Force

What is the General Conference?

The General Conference is the decision-making body of the United Methodist denomination and is made up of clergy and laity (non-clergy) delegates from all the conference areas around the world, including the US, Africa, Europe, and Asia. General Conference is scheduled to meet every four years, and the last regularly scheduled session was in 2016. In 2019, a special General Conference was called to discuss the issue of sexuality as it relates to same-sex marriages, weddings, and ordinations. The next regularly scheduled General Conference was supposed to be May 2020, but it was postponed due to the pandemic. South Carolina Annual Conference is sending 8 clergy and 8 laity delegates to the next General Conference. Read more here: <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/structure/general-conference>

When will the next General Conference take place?

General Conference was postponed due to the pandemic and the subsequent restrictions on large gatherings and international travel. Although a 2021 date was proposed, the Commission on General Conference finally rescheduled it for August 29 – September 6, 2022 in Minneapolis. Read more here: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/general-conference-postponed-until-2022>

Why can't we have General Conference virtually?

During the pandemic, since many people and institutions have adapted to virtual platforms, why hasn't the UMC pursued a virtual option so that General Conference can resume without delay? This General Conference has 862 voting delegates who live in different time zones across the world, who need language interpreters, whose voting credentials need to be certified, and who have varying accessibility to technology. Only 55.9% of the delegates come from the U.S. and some delegates live in areas that do not have reliable electricity, let alone internet access. To hold a conference that limits or denies participation to delegates in determining the future of the denomination where voting delegates could not participate would be inequitable and unjust. Read more here:

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/general-conference-postponed-until-2022>

What decision will be made at General Conference in 2022?

In addition to the regular business of General Conference, proposals are expected that will allow groups to separate from the United Methodist Church to create new Methodist denominations. Over 13 proposals were submitted and previewed by delegates before the General Conference was postponed. Sending legislation to General Conference is very similar to sending a bill through Congress in that legislative committees can review and edit proposals and the body can make amendments before it is voted on. If General Conference passes legislation for separation, a sequence of events will follow, including decisions by conference areas, congregations, and clergy. They will decide to remain with the United Methodist denomination or leave to create new Methodist denominations. Currently, these possibilities are just proposals and do not determine any course of action from anyone at this time.

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What is *The Protocol* that is expected to come to General Conference?

Although 13 proposals were submitted to General Conference regarding sexuality and separation, one proposal was favored across the theological spectrum. It is “The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” more commonly known as “The Protocol.” This proposal was drafted by a group representing traditionalists, centrists, and progressives with a mediator’s help. If The Protocol is received with no amendments and is adopted by General Conference 2022, there will be a plan for groups to leave the UMC to start new Methodist denominations including whole conference areas. If a local church or conference area wishes to remain within the UMC, there are no actions required. Read more: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/protocol-of-reconciliation-and-grace-through-separation-faq>

Why is there potential for separation in the UMC?

Although the conversation about separation centers on human sexuality as it relates to same-sex weddings, marriages, and ordination, other related concerns will influence decision-making, including but not limited to 1) scriptural interpretation, 2) the work and authority of bishops, 3) global connectional ministry with differing cultural contexts, and 4) the process for appointing clergy to churches. What the separation will look like is difficult to predict because the plans are just proposals at this time. However, the United Methodist Church will persist after General Conference and will remain a denomination with congregations, clergy, conference areas, and agencies. At least one group called the Global Methodist Church has already announced its intention to leave the United Methodist denomination after General Conference 2022. Currently, it has not been legally formed and is not operating as a church at this time¹. After a decision is made in 2022, conference areas, congregations, and clergy will have the opportunity to align with their choice of denomination.

What do we do in the meantime?

BSUMC Church Council has created the Way Forward Task Force, a small committee of members, joined by Rev. Gilmer from our staff, to provide information to the congregation as we move towards 2022 General Conference. We ask that everyone continue to be patient, prayerful, and persistent in the good work of the Kingdom of God. Every church member and clergy person is a child of God, and every congregation and conference area exists for the ministry of Jesus Christ. As a church, we must continue to be faithful to the call to be and make disciples for the transformation of the world as best we can. In the words of John Wesley, founder of the Wesleyan movement, “Though we can’t think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.”²

Written by Rev. Brian Gilmer, Rev. Karen Jones, Rev. Grover Putnam and Dr. Justin Gilreath
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¹ <https://globalmethodist.org/launch-information/>

²Quotation is taken from John Wesley’s sermon “Catholic Spirit,” which can be read in full here: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-39-catholic-spirit/>