



West Virginia Conference

The United Methodist Church

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What Happened at the 2019 Called Special Session of General Conference?

The General Conference passed the Traditional Plan by a margin of 54 votes. The vote count was 438 to 384. Now what does that mean for local congregations, clergy, and conferences?

Here is what did not change:

- We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. We affirm God's grace is available to all. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons. (¶ 161.G)
- All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human rights and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence.
- Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches. (¶ 341.6)
- Candidacy for ordination: The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. (¶ 304.3)
- Marriage is defined as a covenant between a man and a woman. (¶ 161.C)
- The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. (¶ 120)
- The function of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is to help people to accept and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God. (¶ 202)

The following are items that were affirmed either within the Traditional Plan or in addition to the plan. All these items are under review by the Judicial Council. If any of the following items are found not to be in alignment with the constitution of The United Methodist Church, then—even though they were affirmed by the General Conference—they will be ruled unconstitutional and the changes requested by the General Conference will be null and void and will not be added to the Book of Discipline. The Judicial Council will meet in April.

The following changes were passed by the General Conference but must be reviewed by Judicial Council:

1. Wespeth petitions passed. If a Church enters a process to exit the UMC, they must pay their fair share of pension liability. Clergy who exit the denomination retain their pension but pension funds must be converted to limit further liability to the conference.
2. The Traditional Plan passed except for the petition that was previously ruled unconstitutional which would have required certification by annual conferences and bishops that they will follow the Discipline. There is no method for annual conferences to leave the denomination.

3. A number of parts of the Traditional Plan passed that were previously ruled constitutional by the Judicial Council. These will be reviewed again in April by the Judicial Council. If ruled constitutional in April, these parts of the plan would add language to the current wording of the definition of a self-avowed practicing homosexual; instruct Bishops in regard to their actions in relationship to commissioning, ordination, and consecration; institute new instructions for membership selection and the work of Boards of Ordained Ministry; and institute minimum penalties for pastors who perform same gender weddings and are convicted by trial. Also included would be instruction for Bishops in the dismissal of complaints and how Just Resolutions must be processed and would make clear that the church can appeal a decision for egregious errors of law.
4. One additional part of the Traditional Plan passed by General Conference which may or may not be constitutional, awaits a decision from the Judicial Council. This part addresses the work and membership of the Board of Ordained Ministry.
5. An amended exit plan for churches passed that may or may not be constitutional. It would allow for local churches who disagree with the Church position on homosexuality to exit with their property and assets if 2/3 of the members vote to do so and they care for pension liabilities and one year of apportionments.

Now we wait for the results of the Judicial Council. Legislation is not official church law until 1/1/2020.

The General Conference is the highest legislative body in The United Methodist Church. Only the General Conference can make changes to the Book of Discipline and speak officially for the global denomination. The General Conference, half clergy and half laity, are from all over the world. Bishops have no vote in the General Conference.

Impact to Local Congregations and Annual Conferences:

The Legislation passed does not require any action or vote by local congregations or annual conferences.

Potential Impact to Clergy, Bishops, and Boards of Ordained Ministry:

Items with potential impact are named above and under Judicial Council review.

What do we do Now?

Now, our most important work continues and needs our focus and attention. Christ calls us to move on as The United Methodist Church in the West Virginia Conference and around the world to fulfill Christ's Mission and Commission.

The people of our Conference area need those of us who have accepted and know Christ to be a fresh wind of God's Spirit. God's transforming power is needed by the people in our communities and in our churches. People need God's healing power. People need the life only Christ can give.

There are people who need a cup of clean cold water, food to eat, clothes to wear, shelter, medical care, education, and a way to care for their families. There are people who need our protection from prejudice and hatred. There are people who need to know that someone, somewhere really does care about them. They need the love and care and blessing of Christ. This is something we are called to give. We have been blessed by Christ to be a blessing to others.

Christ continues to call us to love God and to love our neighbor! To that end, we also need to recognize the harm and hurt that these conversations have caused to our LGBTQ community and beyond. We need to pray, to confess, to forgive, to offer ourselves for Christ's transformation, we need to seek repentance and reconciliation, we need to grow more fully into the image in which each of us are made and seek the unity of Christ.