

# General and Jurisdictional Conferences FAQ

Prepared by the SEJ College of Bishops

## What is General Conference?

General Conference is the top legislative body of The United Methodist Church. It meets once every four years. Clergy (pastors) and lay (local church members) delegates are elected from every Annual Conference around the world to worship, pray, debate and vote as one body. Bishops preside at the sessions of the General Conference but do not have the privilege of voice or vote in its deliberations.

The General Conference works through a legislative process to amend *The Book of Discipline*, elect leaders for general church ministries, adopt a budget, and affirm plans for the shared ministry of the global connection of The United Methodist Church. Delegates also revise *The Book of Resolutions* containing the social principle policies and resolutions that guide the church toward justice and social holiness.

## What is the Commission on the General Conference?

The Commission on the General Conference is elected by the General Conference and has responsibility for overseeing the preparation for the sessions of the General Conference including the following:

- Selecting the site and dates of General Conference;
- Planning the opening day schedule of the General Conference and other special events and orders of the day throughout the session;
- Working to assure full participation of all General Conference delegates including accommodation for languages and physical challenges of the delegates, and access to approved licensed childcare during the session for children of General Conference delegates;
- Working with the United Methodist Publishing House to produce the Advance Edition of the Daily Christian Advocate prior to the General Conference and the Daily Christian Advocate containing high-importance information during the session;
- Recommending the per diem allowance to be paid to the elected delegates for housing and meals;
- Setting the number of legislative committees and assignment of legislative materials to those committees in consultation with the secretary of the General Conference and the business manager of the General Conference.

The Commission on the General Conference consists of 25 members. Its membership represents each U.S. jurisdiction, each central conference plus one youth, the chairperson of the host committee, and 10 additional members. Its membership also reflects the diverse character of the UMC and a balance of clergymen and clergywomen, laywomen and laymen. Approximately half of the commission is elected by the General Conference each quadrennium.

## When is General Conference?

The 2020 General Conference was originally scheduled for May 5-15, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. On March 23, 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Commission on the General Conference announced the postponement of the worldwide gathering to August 29 - September 7, 2021. Because of continuing COVID-19 restrictions, in a meeting on Feb. 20, 2021, the Commission on the General Conference voted to postpone the 2020 General Conference a second time. The new dates will be sometime in 2022.

### **Who made the decision to postpone General Conference?**

The Commission on the General Conference made the decision to postpone and is handling the arrangements of the rescheduled meeting. According to *The Book of Discipline* Paragraphs 14 and 511.4a, in the absence of a convened General Conference, only the full Commission on the General Conference, as the duly authorized committee of the General Conference, can set the date of the quadrennial meeting.

### **What has happened to the delegations elected to the 2020 General Conference and the legislation they were supposed to discuss?**

Since the 2020 General Conference was postponed as opposed to being canceled, the original arrangements and deadlines move forward to the postponed session. This includes delegates, selection of legislative committees, agenda, nominations, theme and logo, and the extension of terms of office until lawful successors can be elected and installed. The delegates elected to the postponed 2020 General Conference will be the delegates to the rescheduled General Conference.

### **Will Annual Conferences elect a new delegation for General Conference since it did not meet in 2020?**

The same delegates who were elected in 2018 or 2019 to take part in the 2020 General Conference will compose each Annual Conference's delegation to the General Conference.

### **Can the General Conference use technology – like Annual Conferences did – so delegates don't have to travel from around the world to one place to be a part of the meeting?**

In October 2020 the Commission on the General Conference named a Technology Study Team to explore the implications of options for accommodating full participation at General Conference including, but not limited to, the possibility of utilizing technology and online voting. The Technology Study Team report was reviewed and discussed at the Commission on the General Conference meeting on Feb. 20, 2021. The Technology Study Team determined that due to internet connectivity and bandwidth and other technological challenges, including concern for the health and safety of all delegates from across the world, full participation of every General Conference delegate could not be assured as called for in *The Book of Discipline* Paragraph 511.4. This paragraph outlining the responsibilities of the Commission on General Conference has been a core value of these conversations.

### **Is there a way to submit new legislation to the postponed General Conference?**

The Commission affirmed the process for receiving petitions submitted after the original 230- and 45-day deadlines, noting that they will be treated and processed through the existing system of receiving petitions submitted after the deadline. The Committee on Reference is the appropriate body to determine whether to consider petitions submitted after the original 230- and

45-day deadlines, following the normal procedures and processes already contained within the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. Petitions contained in the Advance Daily Christian Advocate may be amended in legislative committee to address any necessary changes such as dates or other content items.

**Where can I read the legislation that is before the General Conference?**

The Advance Daily Christian Advocate (ADCA) contains the agenda, rules, delegate listings, petitions, reports from the general agencies/commissions and study committees, information for delegates, and codes of conduct for the General Conference. You can download this publication at [www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2020-advance-daily-christian-advocate](http://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2020-advance-daily-christian-advocate).

**Where can I find out more about the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation legislation?**

You can read the legislation, FAQs and more at [www.gracethroughseparation.com](http://www.gracethroughseparation.com).

**How can I find out more about General Conference?**

The latest information, including news, legislation and other resources, is available at <http://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2020>.

**How is a Special Called Session different from a regular session of General Conference?**

According to paragraph 14 of *The Book of Discipline*, “A special session of the General Conference, possessing the authority and exercising all the powers of the General Conference, may be called by the Council of Bishops, or in such other manner as the General Conference may from time to time prescribe, to meet at such time and in such place as may be stated in the call. ... The purpose of such special session shall be stated in the call, and only such business shall be transacted as is in harmony with the purpose stated in such call unless the General Conference by a two-thirds vote shall determine that other business may be transacted.”

**What is the purpose of the Special Session called for Saturday, May 8, 2021, in a virtual format?**

The Special Called Session is for the purpose of gaining a quorum for:

1. Suspending the rules (2/3 vote) to allow for the utilization of paper ballots in acting upon twelve (12) disciplinary matters which will enable The United Methodist Church to function appropriately until the next in-person General Conference.
2. Explaining the voting procedures and deadlines for submitting paper ballots related to the matters stated within the call.
3. Adjourning the Special Called Session with the results of the balloting announced on Tuesday, July 13.

**Will the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation be considered in the Called Special Conference?** The only items that will be considered are 12 nonconflictual administrative matters that will allow us to function properly until the postponed 2020 General Conference convenes in 2022. Once voted upon, these results will be certified, counted, and announced.

The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and other legislation before the General Conference that have high potential for debate and amendments will be considered when we are able to meet in-person so as to allow full and equitable participation by delegates from around the globe. This aligns with the mandate of ¶511.4.d. of *The Book of Discipline*.

**Since we are again postponing the 2020 General Conference to allow for full participation, why would we have a virtual Special Called General Conference?** This will allow us to gain a quorum (50% + 1) so that the rules can be suspended to allow for mail-in paper ballots. These ballots will allow votes on 12 items that enable us to get unstuck as a church with nonconflictual matters such as meetings and quorums during times when General, Jurisdictional and Central Conferences cannot meet (i.e. a pandemic), allowing bishops scheduled to retire in 2020 to do so and process matters related to GCFA and the budget.

**Who will be the delegates to the special session of General Conference?**

The delegates for a special session in 2021 will be the same persons elected by the annual conferences as delegates to the 2020 General Conference.

**What is the Jurisdictional Conference?**

The United Methodist Church in the United States is divided into five regional jurisdictions. Every four years Jurisdictional Conferences meet to oversee the business in their regional area and to elect ordained elders to be bishops for the church. All five Jurisdictional Conferences meet at the same time determined by the Council of Bishops. Elected clergy (pastors) and lay (local church members) delegates from the Annual Conferences within the boundaries of the jurisdiction comprise the voting membership of the Jurisdictional Conference. The business of the Jurisdictional Conference includes promoting the evangelistic, educational, missionary, and benevolent interests of the Church and to provide for interests and institutions within their boundaries, establishing Jurisdictional committees and boards, and electing leadership within the jurisdiction, determining the boundaries of the annual conferences within the jurisdiction, and making rules and regulations for the administration of the work of the Church within the jurisdiction.

**Will bishops be elected to replace those retiring at the called Jurisdictional Conferences?**

This decision belongs to the delegates of each Jurisdiction.

The called jurisdictional meetings have been rescheduled from the original November 2021 dates to July 2021. These virtual meetings will retire bishops, announce any episcopal area re-alignments, hear from the College of Bishops who are responsible for providing coverage for the episcopal areas for the remainder of the quadrennium, determine if or how many bishops will be elected at the next in-person meeting, and pass budgets. Elections of new bishops will be delayed until it is determined that simultaneous in-person meetings can take place.

Note that in light of 5 of 13 Southeastern Jurisdiction (SEJ) bishops retiring, the SEJ College of Bishops is asking the jurisdictional episcopacy committee to make assignments in their stead. Bishops are elders who itinerate, in consultation with authorized leaders of the church, and in this way we model the process of being sent to ministries in our connection.

**Who decides where bishops are assigned?**

Voting members of the Jurisdictional Conference vote to elect ordained elders to be Bishops for the church. Once elected, a bishop is appointed to oversee an Episcopal Area within that jurisdiction. An Episcopal Area is made up of a part, a whole, or multiple Annual Conference areas. The Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy (standing committee on episcopacy) is made up of one clergy delegate and one lay delegate from each annual conference in the jurisdiction. This committee recommends the assignments of the bishops for final action by the jurisdictional conference. The Committee also reviews the work of the bishops, passes on their character and official administration, and reports to the jurisdictional conference its findings.

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