



Commission on General Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

General Conference further postponed to 2024

Mar 03, 2022

Commission on the General Conference

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 3, 2022

Nashville, Tenn.: As the pandemic continues and the wait time for visas stretches to over two years in some countries, the Commission on the General Conference announced today that the 2020 General Conference cannot be held in 2022 due to COVID-related and governmental policies/constraints.

Commission members received a report based on conversations with multiple officials of the U. S. Department of State outlining the massive backlog of visa applications in some areas. This backlog has led to wait times up to 800+ days for scheduling an initial interview. In addition, commission members described an increasingly complex interview process in some areas requiring two or three interviews, which also creates a roadblock that would preclude participation by many delegates outside the United States of America.

Commission chairperson Kim Simpson said the decision to postpone once again was an exceedingly difficult one, with many factors to consider -- including visas and passports, the health and safety of delegates, volunteers and other attendees, vaccination rates, and the need for provisions for quarantine or medical care should any delegates contract COVID-19.

"We engaged in a fair, thorough, integrity-filled discussion of the alternatives," said Simpson. "The visa issue is a reality that is simply outside our control as we seek to achieve a reasonable threshold of delegate presence and participation. Ultimately our decision reflects the hope that 2024 will afford greater opportunity for global travel and a higher degree of protection for the health and safety of delegates and attendees."

The Book of Discipline 2016 requires the Commission to take necessary measures to assure full participation of all General Conference delegates. Consistent with that guidance, the Commission determined that the physical attendance of as many delegates as possible at the General Conference is critically necessary.

A significant advantage of further postponing the 2020 General Conference to 2024 is that the Commission has already secured a venue for what would have been the regularly scheduled quadrennial event. An announcement about the location will be forthcoming as soon as the required logistical planning is complete.

According to Sara Hotchkiss, Business Manager of the General Conference, moving the legislative gathering to 2023 was an option that was discussed, but was not found to be feasible due to a number of reasons, including but not necessarily limited to the logistical challenges of planning, the remaining backlog of visa applications and interviews, and the proximity to the 2024 General Conference.

A technology study team appointed by the Commission [reported](#) in February 2021 that it wasn't feasible to create a virtual alternative of the General Conference that would safeguard the integrity of the voting and credentialing process, meet legal requirements, and support the complexity of the legislative committees required by ¶507.11 including but not limited to interpretation in multiple languages, and meaningful participation across multiple time zones. While many churches and organizations have adapted technology for events that are based heavily on presenter/observer situations, that is not the type of gathering that embodies a General Conference. Full participation of delegates in Christian conferencing as a means of grace was not seen as possible under these circumstances.

Secretary of the General Conference, Gary Graves, said the further postponement raises a number of additional questions not specifically addressed in *The Book of Discipline 2016*. "As the postponed 2020 General Conference now enters the typical cycle of preparation for a General Conference that would have been held in 2024, we will need to look to the Judicial Council for clarity regarding which preparations and processes are based on the postponed 2020 General Conference and which would need to be enacted should this be seen as a new 2024 General Conference."

The Judicial Council recently [ruled](#) that, "the deadlines for petitions submission in ¶ 507 are based on the date of the postponed General Conference and reset with each postponement."

The Commission will meet again on March 28 to continue the work of preparing for the postponed 2020 General Conference and looking ahead for possible solutions that may help avoid delays in future meetings should unforeseen circumstances occur or persist.

Simpson expressed appreciation to all of those in the Dakotas-Minnesota Area who were involved in planning for hosting and providing volunteers for the Minneapolis event. "We want to recognize the efforts of everyone who has worked so hard over several years to provide a welcoming experience. We are grateful to James Haun for his leadership as Local Host Committee Chair and his service on the Commission on the General Conference," said Simpson.

Hotchkiss added, "We appreciate the patience and understanding of the Local Host Committee as we have gone back to the drawing board on multiple occasions. They have been more than gracious."

According to Graves, "It is always a monumental task to host the General Conference, but to prepare several times and still not be able to put those plans into action seems even more difficult. We look forward to ways that we will honor the efforts of the Dakotas-Minnesota Local Host Committee when we finally meet together."

"The Commission appreciates that many people are disappointed about the circumstances of the 2020 General Conference and shares in the disappointment that it has not been able to be held," said Simpson. "COVID-19 has tested the collective patience, understanding, compassion, resolve, and even faith of the world. Commission members remain hopeful and pray that the world's circumstances improve to help make the next General Conference not only possible, but a reminder of the witness of The United Methodist Church as a global representation of the body of Christ."

Bishop Carter's Pastoral Response to the General Conference Announcement

Saturday, March 5, 2022

NEWS



March 3, 2022

We learned today of the [postponement of the General Conference](#) of the United Methodist Church until 2024. The decision was made with deliberation by the Commission on the General Conference, which is a global body composed of laity and clergy. I note here that bishops do not serve as voting members of the commission.

This postponement, a response to the global pandemic and consequent complexities related to global health and the supply chain of visas allowing for travel, was particularly shaped by the presence of delegates to the General Conference who live in forty nations. For this reason, it is not comparable to a large cultural or sporting event that might happen in the United States. We are a global church.

There are understandable disappointments related to the postponement of the General Conference. While some will choose to blame or disparage others for this decision, I urge us to take a higher ground. I write pastorally, with genuine respect and love for all of our people, and with a focus on a particular question:

How will we live and serve together in the interim?

I can minister in a church that is divided with a *spirit of grace and reconciliation*. I can minimize the caustic tone of the conversation. I refer you to the [Protocol](#), which is a destination, but also a resource for the journey.

I lift up the [Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church](#), overwhelmingly endorsed by the Council of Bishops, and the invitation to [#BeUMC](#). I affirm the foundational statement of the #BeUMC initiative:

“The United Methodist Church is founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace, anchored in Scripture, and based in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit.”

The recent Judicial Council decisions have reaffirmed paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline as a clear and fair process for churches who wish to depart from the denomination. Paragraph 2553 is rooted in the deep value of our connectionalism. My calling and hope is that you will remain. In the two conferences I serve, a small number of churches will disaffiliate this year. I lament this. We are better together.

I reaffirm the abeyance that I signed with the Protocol, to cease the legal complaint processes related to LGBTQ persons in our church. For me, this is a fulfillment of our General Rule to do no harm.

And in our local churches, I am committed to resourcing pastors and laity in emerging from a two-year pandemic, finding new energies and new ways to share the gospel, to make disciples, and to love our neighbors, as a people on a journey to personal and social holiness.

I am serving in my tenth year in Florida, and in my first year in Western North Carolina. I feel called to this work, and to a church that does extraordinary mission on behalf of God’s kingdom across this planet.

I plan to meet with both delegations to the General Conference over the next few days. I lift all of the people of our church in prayer today and ask that you pray for me. Through it all, God is with us, and God is using us in an extraordinary way, *“to serve the present age, our callings to fulfill.”*

+Ken Carter

Resident Bishop, Florida and Western North Carolina Conferences
The United Methodist Church



A Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church

United Methodists all over the globe are liturgical, contemporary, charismatic, social activists, urban, suburban, small town, rural and much more. We are children, youth, young adults, senior adults, new Christians, and mature Christians. We are present on four continents, in more than 45 countries, and we comprise an unknown number of cultures and languages. We are a holy communion of different races, ethnicities, cultures, and perspectives united by the Holy Spirit, driven by the mission of Christ, and bearing the good news of an unmerited grace that changes lives and transforms communities.

Christ's prayer for our unity and command to gather all to the table, to make space for one another, appreciate one another, and look for Christ in each other, prohibit us from creating individual tables only for those who think, act, look, and perceive the world like we do. We cannot be a church that fractures its identity and commitment to Christ by aligning itself with political parties. We cannot be a traditional church or a progressive church or a centrist church. We cannot be a gay or straight church. Our churches must be more than echo chambers made in our own image arguing with each other while neglecting our central purpose. This is the way of the world.

Instead, we must be one people, rooted in scripture, centered in Christ, serving in love and united in the essentials. It is hard work. It is sacred work. It is the ministry of reconciliation that Christ gave to each of us. Our best witness is to love each other as Christ loves us, to show the world the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to bind us together despite our differences. This is living out the gospel.

We are a church:

- Confident in what God has done in Christ Jesus for all humankind
- Committed to personal and social salvation/transformation
- Courageous in dismantling the powers of racism, tribalism, and colonialism

All of our members, clergy, local churches, and annual conferences will continue to have a home in the future United Methodist Church, whether they consider themselves liberal, evangelical, progressive, traditionalist, middle of the road, conservative, centrist, or something else. We hold on to our Wesleyan heritage that “the living core of the Christian faith is revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason”.

We are longing for a United Methodist Church that will move towards new forms of being a connectional church, a General Conference focused on global essentials, and an empowerment of regions for contextually relevant forms of living our common mission mandate. Deeply rooted in the Doctrinal Standards of the UMC, we pledge to exercise our episcopal role in ways that enable as many United Methodists, lay and clergy, as are willing to remain in the UMC and – together – to continue in

making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And, because we are part of the Church Universal, we seek to be united visibly and in ministries with other parts of the Body of Christ in God's mission for the human family and creation.

We are committed to strengthening every local church, where the word is preached and Christ is offered, and where the table is set before all who hunger and thirst for righteousness, confident in the prayer we have learned to say and share:

- Make us one with Christ—this is faithfulness.
- Make us one with each other—this is unity.
- Make us one in ministry to all the world—this is fruitfulness.

This is the United Methodist Church we love and serve!

Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church
November 4, 2021

A Vision of Hope for the Future of United Methodists in Western North Carolina

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

NEWS

By: The WNC Delegates to the General and Jurisdictional Conferences

The Western North Carolina General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation has been meeting almost monthly since our election in 2019. Since the postponement of the 2020 General Conference, conversations have focused significantly on issues related to inclusion, equity, and justice. As a part of that work, the delegation wrote a statement of hope for the future of The United Methodist Church and the Western North Carolina Conference. As the announcement has been made for further postponement of the General Conference, we remain hopeful about God's dream for the future. The delegation is committed to fulfilling the dream of a church that *goes into the world to love all our neighbors and share the Good News of the Gospel.*

Dream UMC: A vision of the future for United Methodists in Western North Carolina.

Moving forward, what will The United Methodist Church look like for us in Western North Carolina? What is God's dream for us?

We will grieve the departure of people and congregations we've loved and with whom we've treasured working; they will always be our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We will celebrate our friendships and collegiality that remain, which is the greatest virtue of our connectionalism. We will love and support our fellow laity and clergy, and join hands to work together to grow God's Church and its impact in the world.

We will be passionate followers of Jesus Christ, with Scripture as our solid foundation, striving for holiness and compassion in the way we live and how we act together. We will worship and serve God as three-in-one, we will affirm the traditional creeds of Christendom, and we will be nourished by the Sacraments and other means of grace.

We will be global and local as a conference, as churches, and as followers of Christ, responding to God's call in our neighborhood and with an eye to the larger work of God across the conference and world.

We will be, and we just *are* diverse, as a reflection of God's beautiful tapestry in creation. Our hospitality will extend to all people. We will affirm the full participation of all people in the church, and the extension of the blessings of God's church to all people. We will be better together. In our "big tent" church, we will celebrate differences in viewpoints and callings, united by our passion for Christ and his way of compassion, justice, and holiness in the world.

We will fulfill our baptismal vows by being a church with a bias toward the vulnerable and the marginalized, and those who have been hurt, excluded, or judged by the Church, as we fulfill our baptismal vows. Welcome isn't just a nice idea or a word pasted outside the building. It's an active way of being church, in church, and out in the world. It's not about merely avoiding discrimination; it's about love and the full welcome of all people. While we may seem to be "anti-whatever the evil of the day might be", we will be pro-people seeking the beauty of an inclusive church, where welcome becomes belonging.

We will be a conference, which for John Wesley was a "means of grace." We will gather, not for administrative busyness or the administration of policies, but to encourage one another, and to make a missional difference. We will have a Book of Discipline, but with the recovery of its original intent: to organize and to guide us out of the church and into the world to love all our neighbors and share the Good News of the Gospel.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be and strive to make disciples of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God, and for the transformation of the world.



Western North Carolina Conference

The United Methodist Church

Frequently Asked Questions on the Further Postponement of General Conference

Follow Jesus, Make Disciples, Transform The World

The answers below are based upon information we know as of March 8, 2022. The delay in General Conference has proven that we are in unprecedented times and answers could change depending on various circumstances.

Q: Why was the General Conference postponed again?

A: The Commission on the General Conference made the decision to postpone General Conference 2020 until 2024 due to the ongoing pandemic and long processing time of obtaining visas for delegates from outside of the United States. A virtual option had been considered previously but was rejected due to the 16-hour span of time zones, unreliable internet, and challenges to safeguarding the voting. You can read more from the Commission on the General Conference [here](#).

Q: Why would the Commission on General Conference not schedule a General Conference session before 2024?

A: It takes the commission years to plan a General Conference. With the 2020 session being postponed again, the commission will start over with planning such as securing dates, location, hotel blocks, international visas, etc. International delegate pandemic/vaccination issues and the backlog of visas were a major hindrance to this process.

Q: When will a new date be announced?

A: The commission has already secured a venue for what would have been the regularly scheduled quadrennial event. An announcement about the location will be forthcoming as soon as the required logistical planning is complete. The event will be in 2024.

Q: Has the Global Methodist Church (GMC) decided to launch their new denomination on May 1, 2022?

A: Yes. In response to the third delay, the GMC has decided to launch their denomination early instead of waiting until after the General Conference Session in 2024.

Q: What if my church does not want to wait until 2024 to decide if we will remain with the UMC or explore other denominational options?

A: Any current UMC church has the option to explore disaffiliation pursuant to the 2019 legislation found in [paragraph 2553](#) of the Book of Discipline. WNCC has a very specific process to pursue disaffiliation and if you would like information about disaffiliation, please contact your district superintendent. The first step that triggers the process is for lay leadership from a church to communicate to the DS a desire for the church to have a conversation about disaffiliation. Disaffiliation is a several month process which includes the vote of the Annual Conference.

Q: Will our church need to conduct a vote?

A: Not at this time. All United Methodist Churches are still under the legislation that was approved at the 2019 Special General Conference session and the 2016 Book of Discipline. Bishop Carter is also living into the spirit of the [Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation](#), which is not only a way of separation, but the way we live together in the interim.

Q: I'm concerned about the uncertainty in the UMC and what the policies could be related to marriages in my local church. How do I know what the future UMC will look like?

A: Local church has autonomy on how church property is used as well as a clergy's authority to determine at what weddings he/she officiates has not changed. The Bishop and Cabinet have affirmed, as a general direction, an expanded profile that would serve the needs of traditional churches in our conference who want to remain connectional. District Superintendents have begun to have conversations regarding this additional information as a part of their consultations with churches and clergy.

Q: Will the Western North Carolina Conference elect new delegates for 2024?

A: Since the 2020 General Conference was postponed, it is our understanding that the delegates elected at the 2019 session of Annual Conference will continue to serve in this capacity. In the commission's press release, Rev. Gary Graves, chair, states, "We will need to look to the Judicial Council for clarity regarding which preparations and processes are based on the postponed 2020 General Conference and which would need to be enacted should this be seen as a new 2024 General Conference." We will communicate any updates we receive.

Q: Will we be able to have a Jurisdictional Conference before 2024 to elect new bishops?

A: There are ongoing discussions about this possibility, but that decision has not yet been made.

Q: How will this decision affect the meeting of our Western North Carolina Annual Conference?

A: This decision has no impact on the meeting of our Annual Conference, which is planned for June 17-19, 2022, at Lake Junaluska. We will continue to prioritize the mission and ministry of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Faithful Ways to Respond

1. **Holy Discernment** – With plans not working out the way some had hoped, there will be increased confusion, anxiety, and pressure to act. However, there is no need to give into this pressure. While it is frustrating, there is nothing that has changed in the UM denomination. Our current UM polity in the Book of Discipline agrees with the traditional theology of the GMC. There is currently an abeyance on charges related to LGBTQ clergy and same gender weddings, as one expression of our desire to live with the values of grace and reconciliation. Everything is still on pause, so there is no internal change causing churches to exit out of the denomination ahead of the General Conference. Despite the pressure of GMC, the wisest course of action may be to hold the course and let General Conference provide a path and process for churches to discern their best path

forward.

2. **Fair and Balanced Information Sessions** – Emails from representatives to GMC encouraging churches host informational sessions are being circulated. As you field questions at your churches, we request the following practices as we navigate the next several months and years. No meeting with GMC should happen without the pastor's knowledge. If there is a meeting to learn more about GMC, then there should be a meeting to learn more about the Continuing UMC. District Superintendents will be happy to offer those informational sessions upon request. On behalf of the Bishop and Cabinet, our desire is that there be fair and balanced information sharing as we proceed. For those churches who feel the need to explore the GMC, let's make sure that accurate information is shared so decisions can be made faithfully and truthfully.

3. **#BeUMC Campaign** – For those who would like more information about the continuing UMC, #BEUMC celebrates the core values and four foundations themes that connect the people of The United Methodist Church. It is built upon the stories of people living their faith around the world. Check out this [website](#) for more information. Our Conference has joined this campaign and your church(es) may choose to do so as well. Everything is customizable for your context.