

UMC Special General Conference 2019

Briefing by Dr. Bob Kaylor

General Conference Facts

- Only body that speaks for the global UMC
- 864 delegates representing the US, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Philippines
- Usually meets every four years
- Special General Conference was called for 2019 by bishops to address the report of the Commission on a Way Forward and to try and resolve the denomination's impasse over issues related to human sexuality



The Commission on a Way Forward

- 32 member task force assembled by Council of Bishops
- Representatives of progressives, centrists, and traditionalists
- Met several times over 18 months
- Formulated possible plans to be submitted to the Council of Bishops and General Conference for review and action

Plans Submitted by the Commission

- **The One Church Plan**

- Remove language on marriage and ordination of LGBTQ+ persons
- Allow annual conferences and local churches to set own standards for marriage and ordination

- **The Connectional Conference Plan**

- Create three distinct conferences within the UMC (progressive, centrist, traditional) while sharing some things in common

- **Traditional Plan**

- Maintain UMC stance while enhancing accountability measures

Other Petitions Submitted

- Simple Plan - remove all restrictions on sexual behavior
- Exit Petitions - provide a gracious exit for congregations that cannot abide by the UMC's rules for conscience sake
- Pension Plan revision - move from defined benefit to defined contribution plan
- Other petitions that did not receive much consideration

General Conference Schedule

- Saturday, Feb. 23 - a day of prayer and worship
- Sunday, Feb. 24 - Conference acted as one legislative committee to vote to prioritize plans
- Monday, Feb. 25 - Work on plans prioritized by legislative committee to submit to plenary
- Tuesday, Feb. 26 - Plenary session to vote on plans

Plans advanced to Plenary

- Pension Petition - change from a defined benefit to a defined contribution. Annual conference can levy additional fees to departing churches on top of paying unfunded pension liabilities
- Traditional Plan - except for petitions ruled unconstitutional
- Taylor Disaffiliation Petition - would have provided an equitable way for churches not in agreement with denominational stance to depart
- Boyette Disaffiliation Petition - similar to Taylor

One Church Plan

- Defeated in legislative committee
- Brought back as a minority report on Tuesday
- Defeated by plenary session

Traditional Plan

- Provides clarity around definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual”
- Bishops prohibited from consecrating bishops who are self-avowed practicing homosexuals
- Boards of Ordained ministry must certify that they will uphold Discipline
- Minimum penalties established for clergy who perform same-sex weddings
- Defines the just resolution process more clearly and involves more input from complainant

Parts of Traditional Plan ruled unconstitutional

- Primary piece: accountability for bishops
- Currently, bishops are accountable to the college of bishops in their jurisdiction
- Petition was to change that so that bishops would be accountable to the entire Council of Bishops
- Petition was ruled unconstitutional

Fallout from General Conference

- Progressives and LGBTQ advocates are understandably upset
- It's clear that the UMC is two very different churches trying to act like one church
- Passing the traditional plan was a recipe for continuing the conflict and even intensifying it
- The General Conference reflected a deep mistrust of denominational leadership
- Instead of solving the conflict, General Conference only intensified it

What does this mean for TLUMC?

- At the moment, nothing. Nothing substantial has changed in our polity and Discipline
- We have people on all sides who may be hurting and confused by the decision
- We will continue to love all the people who are connected to TLUMC and love all the people of our community
- We will continue to preach, teach, and live the transformational love and grace of Jesus Christ to all

A Pastoral Response

- We are not dealing with issues, we are dealing with people. Christ calls us to love one another despite our differences and to uphold the sacred worth of all people. We will practice our General Rules so that we do no harm, do all the good we can, and be a community that practices the ordinances of God.
- All of our orientations—sexual or otherwise—are disoriented, thus all of us need the transforming power of the gospel. We will continue to preach the gospel of Christ, always speaking the truth in love.
- LGBTQ persons, no less than anyone else, will be welcome and loved at any church I serve. We will love all the people who come to be part of TLUMC as well as the people of our community. We will extend a warm TLUMC welcome at all times to all people. This is what we do best!

A Pastoral Response

- That said, I do believe in the historic, biblical, and Christian doctrine around marriage and sexuality that the church has believed for 2,000 years. I believe that our rites of marriage and ordination should be conducted in accordance with that belief. That belief is in tension with the current culture, which will be the source of conflict and pain for some.
- I believe that the United Methodist Church needs to have some kind of negotiated separation. This conflict is damaging our witness to the world.
- I recognize that we have people in our congregation who disagree on these matters. Disagreement is always part of community life. The key will be to disagree in a way that honors one another without disparaging. We must always assume the best of one another.

A Pastoral Response

- We will continue to function with honor and integrity as a church body even when others may not. We will continue to fulfill our obligations and promises.
- I have scheduled a meeting with the Bishop and Cabinet this week to initiate a dialogue in the midst of this conflict. I want to model a Christian approach to conflict management.
- I will continue to lead this congregation to the best of my ability, recognizing our varying perspectives and common mission. I want us to stay together, work together, and move into the future together, whatever that future may be.