

## Important Terms to Know

### **The United Methodist Book of Discipline**

A book that defines the law, doctrine, administration, organization, policy and procedures of the United Methodist Church. Each General Conference amends The Book of Discipline and the actions of the General Conference are reflected in the quadrennial revisions. We currently operate under the 2016 Book of Discipline.

### **Annual Conference**

The regional, organizational unit of the United Methodist Church, as well as the yearly meeting of that unit, both of which are presided over by a bishop. The business session of the Annual Conference is comprised of an equal number of lay and clergy delegates, with at least one layperson from each pastoral charge. We are a part of the North Georgia Annual Conference.

### **The General Conference**

The highest legislative body in the United Methodist Church. The voting membership consists of an equal number of lay and clergy delegates elected by the annual conferences. The General Conference convenes every four years to deal with business matters of the Church and to determine the denomination's future direction. It is the only body that can speak for the denomination.

### **The Delegation**

The delegation consists of the voting delegates to General Conference. These delegates are chosen every four years at the business session of the Annual Conference and consist of an equal number of lay and clergy members. The North Georgia Delegation consists of 11 lay delegates and 11 clergy delegates. Alternate delegates are also chosen. The delegates voting in this special session of General Conference were elected at the 2015 Annual Conference.

### **The Commission on a Way Forward**

The Commission on a Way Forward consisted of 32 members who were named by the Council of Bishops. They included 8 bishops, 11 laypersons and 13 clergypersons. The Commission was responsible for conducting a thorough examination of all matters dealing with human sexuality and to report back to the Council of Bishops.

### **The Judicial Council:**

Nine people, both lay and clergy, elected by General Conference who rule on questions of constitutionality in church law and practice.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the Traditionalist Plan?**

This plan affirms current church restrictions related to LGBTQ individuals and adds more accountability for enforcement of those restrictions. Currently, The Book of Discipline states that the practice of homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian teaching” and lists officiating a same gender union or being a “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy member as chargeable offenses. Under this plan there would be specific minimum penalties and quicker expulsion after conviction of violations.

### **What is the One Church Plan?**

This plan removes the restrictive language from The Book of Discipline and allows more freedom for clergy, churches and annual conferences regarding same sex unions, LGBTQ inclusion and ordination.

Clergy can choose to perform or not perform same sex unions without fear of losing their credentials. Local churches can decide whether or not to allow their facilities to be used for same gender weddings, and whether or not to accept a gay clergy. Annual Conferences at their Executive Session would decide whether or not to ordain self-avowed gay persons.

Should General Conference adopt this plan as currently written, the default position for all churches is the present policy. Local churches would have to take action to change their policy.

### **What is the Connectional Conference Plan?**

This plan is grounded in a unified core that includes shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization and justice.

The five U.S. Jurisdictions would be replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology and conviction on LGBTQ ministry. Annual Conferences would decide which connectional conference to affiliate with; only a local church who chose a branch other than the one chosen by their annual conference would have the freedom to join another conference.

Under the United Methodist denominational roof, there would be a branch that wants to maintain the current stance (Traditionalist Approach), a branch that favors the more local approach (One Church Plan), and a branch that wants full inclusion of the LGBTQ community in all parts of their fellowship. Central Conferences (conferences outside of the United States) could choose one of these three branches or become their own branch under this plan.

### **Where can I see a side by side comparison of the plans?**

For a detailed comparison of the three plans, [click here](#).

### **Are these the only plans being considered?**

No. Delegates will vote on motions and petitions included in the three plans included in the report of the Commission on a Way Forward, as well as petitions from other individuals and groups of United Methodists. Fifty-one petitions, besides the three plans presented by the Commission on a Way Forward, were submitted before the deadline. It is also possible that the General Conference will make no changes in The Book of Discipline and we will continue to operate under the current policy.

### **How quickly will the plans take effect?**

Obviously, that will depend on the plan that is adopted. In some cases, it will require changes to the Constitution of the United Methodist Church. This would require 2/3 approval of the General Conference and 2/3 approval of the aggregate vote of all annual conferences. This could take several years. In other cases, if no changes need to be made in the Constitution, it could take effect sooner.

### **Can a church leave the denomination if it disagrees with the plan adopted?**

According to the 2016 Book of Discipline, all property is held in trust by the United Methodist Church and is not owned by the local church. It would require action of the General Conference for that policy to change. There has been conversation about a possible “gracious exit policy,” particularly if the Traditional Plan is accepted, but in any case, will require action for it to be permissible.

### **What can I do?**

Please spend time in prayer each day asking the Holy Spirit to work within the hearts of the entire Church and the delegates who will have to consider the plans and petitions and vote.

Please be careful about forming opinions based on rumor or sound-bites from news agencies. A congregational meeting will be held on March 3, following the General Conference in which our pastor will share what took place at General Conference and the implications for our Church.

Listen to Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 4:1 – 6, “I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God. Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience. Accept each other with love, and make an effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit with the peace that ties you together. You are one body and one spirit, just as God also called you in one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.”



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