

Dr. Scott Hagan: Bishop Bryan, it seems just the other day that we were in St. Louis wrapping up General Conference, still admiring each other's haircuts. I haven't cleaned anything up and you look as good as ever. But General Conference 2020 is now just around the corner. We've finished one, the other one seems really close. Tell us how we've gotten to this place and where we are today - not just in the South Georgia Conference but in The United Methodist Church as a denomination.

Bishop Bryan: Scott, you're exactly right. It does seem to me like just the other day we were recording videos from St. Louis. And I'm very grateful for your work in that, and to the whole Annual Conference for receiving those, as we sent them on a daily basis. And it does seem to me like it's come around mighty quickly. We've had two General Conferences now, one coming up, back to back. And that is unusual. It feels unusual to me. General Conference usually happens once every four years. So when you have two major global events that are back to back, it does feel a little bit like I'm experiencing General Conference fatigue, even though these will be quite different. The 2019 meeting in St. Louis in February was a special called session of General Conference, not the every four year regular session. So it was focused on issues around human sexuality in the Book of Discipline.

Bishop Bryan: This coming year in May of 2020 that will be the regular session of General Conference that occurs once every four years, when all the legislative committees that normally meet, will be meeting. Last year there was such a focus that it was always on those disciplinary passages related to human sexuality. But in May of 2020, this will be full blown General Conference, where we'll be dealing with those matters, but also everything else that is in the Book of Discipline that is amendable or that can be changed.

Speaker 2: So what, for the local church, do they need to know now, this fall, and how can they be getting ready for what is to come? While we don't know with great certainty, we know a little more of how General Conference will be operating in.

Bishop Bryan: We absolutely do Scott. Because there was an outcome of the 2019 Special Session. That outcome was the approval of what is known as the Traditional Plan, which has us operating under the current Book of Discipline with some additional things that were added at General Conference. But it's the traditional way we've been operating. Yet, we're also aware as you and I said and noted in the video at the end of the 2019 Special Session, there are persons in every Annual Conference who will find that it may not be the best alignment for them.

Bishop Bryan: So at this next General Conference we'll see petitions from persons who would like to see other options for other plans in which they might move and under which they might operate. That will be one set of legislative pieces that will be coming forth that we'll all be studying. And then there will be various proposals for different parts of the Book of Discipline. And the legislative committees will entertain that and then bring it to the floor the second week to the main body

that meets. So it will be far more of a robust discussion about many, many issues, but it will include what was approved at 2019, and any additional plans that others would like to propose.

Dr. Scott Hagan: So the 2019 General Conference had an outcome. It's not an outcome that everyone was thrilled about. And yet it is the rule of the Church starting in -

Bishop Bryan: January 2020.

Dr. Scott Hagan: Yes, 2020.

Bishop Bryan: So beginning January 1, 2020, The United Methodist Church will be operating under what was approved at the Special Session in 2019, known as the Traditional Plan. Our churches, our individual church members who have been accustomed to the current Book of Discipline will not notice any changes, because the Traditional Plan is in sync with how we have been operating. And so we also noted at the end of 2019 session that there will be those who find that very comfortable, who find that that fits them biblically and theologically. And they will continue ministering in the ways that they have been.

Bishop Bryan: We're also very much aware that in all of our local churches and across all of Methodism, there can be those who have a different understanding of those same scriptures, a different theological understanding. And they are the ones who will be paying close attention, especially to the General Conference of 2020 as to what options it might open up for them and for their future.

Dr. Scott Hagan: When we wrapped up in St. Louis, you gave the folks listening, pastors and lay people in local churches, two or three clear next steps. We've been talking about them, care for one another, be in worship. What would you say to us this fall?

Bishop Bryan: One of the fascinating things to me as I reflect on that very conversation you and I had as we got back from this General Conference is to remind us all that the very spiritual disciplines we practice in the local the church all the time really adds up to something. There's a reason we gather in community and bear each other's burdens. There's value in studying the scriptures together. The Word has a lot to say to us. Worship itself is healing and energizing; mission and outreach. All of the disciplines that we practice personally and in our local churches are precisely there because they are what will hold us together in all of life's seasons we learned and practiced growing up as children, youth, adults. But we need to remember that they are the connectional system, the practices of this connectional system. This is the part that gives us strength. And so what we need to do going forward before General Conference, after General Conference is rely on what we already know has gotten us to where we are.

Bishop Bryan: John and Charles Wesley did not make this up. They were living in the Christian faith. They took prayer seriously. They took worship seriously. They took Bible

study seriously. They took ministry in the community seriously. And amazingly when we do that, we have a kind of strength in us that can sustain us and also other people who are looking for strength. So we already know as local churches what to do if we'll simply remember. There's a reason we gather to bear each other's burden, to care for one another, to pay attention to each other, to journey together. There's a reason we have Bibles, go to Bible study, read and study the Word. Worship is what energizes us week after week when we come together. Whether we come together as sorrow, sadness or confusion, God will meet us in that service in worship. And then there's the going forward in the mission and ministry, making a difference in the community. Few things can do more for all of us than that sense that we're rooted and grounded in the Christian faith.

Bishop Bryan: That's what we need to do. We need to be the church and do what we've been practicing. And do it with greater intentionality; because it is the answer, finally. And it is the key.

Dr. Scott Hagan: If we will be the Church, our witness to the world will be how they will know us, by our love for each other.

Bishop Bryan: Precisely.

Dr. Scott Hagan: And for every person.

Bishop Bryan: And so that witness, in a time of perhaps uncertainty or concern, this could be our moment to say, "We know how to handle that. We know how to deal with that because we have the resources that the Christian faith has given to us." That is our witness, I think, to a world that is always living with uncertainty. We're not the only ones who are, plenty of people around our churches and in our neighborhoods have their own kinds of uncertainty, their own kinds of concerns. Why don't we step forward and live the Christian faith in such a manner that they say, "Where do you get the strength?" And then we tell them about Jesus Christ and about The United Methodist Church.