



General Conference FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions about General Conference and the Legislation Coming to General Conference

Please note:

1. This document is a response to the survey sent to the clergy and lay members to the 2021 South Georgia Annual Conference Session, created August 2021 by the Leadership Forum Task Force, Delegation, & Cabinet;
2. All references to the General Conference Session refer to the postponed 2020 General Conference, which is currently planned for August 29 - September 6, 2022; and
3. All references to "the Protocol" refer to the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.

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Section 1: General Conference Overview

1. What is General Conference?

General Conference sets the rules and establishes procedures for virtually every aspect of the church’s life. It also communicates the denomination’s official position on a variety of issues and cultural challenges. Every four years, United Methodists from around the world assemble and connect in worship, prayer, Communion, fellowship — and do the legislative work that shapes our shared life.

2. How does the General Conference fit into the structure of The United Methodist Church?

The United Methodist Church does not have a central headquarters or a single executive leader. It is organized in a similar fashion to the US Government, with legislative, executive, and judicial branches, and an overarching document, the *Book of Discipline*, serving as a constitution. Duties are divided among three bodies - much like Congress - that include the General Conference, the Council of Bishops, and the Judicial Council. These entities are required by our Constitution to be part of our structure. While each plays a significant role in the life of the church, it is the mission, ministry and love of God through Jesus Christ and the ministry of the local church that are of primary importance.

3. What are the responsibilities of delegates to General Conference?

With “full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional” (The Book of Discipline 2016, ¶16, ¶501), General Conference delegates confer and vote on proposals for resourcing and regulating the life and work of The United Methodist Church.

4. How many delegates are there and where are they from?

There are 862 delegates elected from Africa, Eurasia, the Philippines, the United States, and autonomous churches with which The United Methodist Church has a concordat relationship. A formula, based on lay and clergy membership, determines the number of delegates from each conference. Every conference is guaranteed at least two delegates - one clergy and one lay. Around 44% of the delegates to the postponed 2020 General Conference come from outside the United States. Thirty-two percent of delegates come from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, and 4.5% from Europe. Fifty-six percent of the delegates are from the United States. The South Georgia Conference is allotted eight delegates - four laity and four clergy.

5. Will the same delegates who were elected in 2019 continue to serve?

Yes. Our current delegation was elected to the 2020 General Conference, which has been postponed. Even with the postponement, the delegation will still be in compliance with its four-year term limit (2019-2023).

6. What will the delegates to General Conference consider?

Delegates to General Conference consider all the legislative petitions that have been sent in by individuals, churches, conferences, boards, and agencies. The Advance Daily Christian Advocate (ADCA) contains all legislation submitted for consideration by the delegates at the upcoming 2020 General Conference. The ADCA can be found at: www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2020-advance-daily-christian-advocate.

7. Why would the church hold this meeting in Minneapolis, MN?

Like the Olympic Games, the location of General Conference is traditionally held in a new location every four years. Minneapolis, MN was chosen contractually long before Minneapolis came to national attention in the Spring of 2020 for political unrest and racial injustices. Some have suggested negotiating out of the contract with Minneapolis, but the decision remains with the Commission on General Conference.

8. When did General Conference last meet? What was approved?

General Conference last met in 2016 followed by a special session in 2019 focused on matters of human sexuality. The special session approved a “traditional plan” that retains the traditional language in the Book of Discipline concerning LGBTQ marriage and ordination. That is the Book of Discipline under which we continue to operate.

9. Why is there conflict in The United Methodist Church and at General Conference around human sexuality?

Even after the 2019 special session where a “traditional plan” was approved, there continues to be conflict as the church struggles to achieve consensus and compliance around matters related to human sexuality. The conflict is not due to a lack of awareness about Biblical passages related to sexuality, gender, and marriage. Rather, the conflict is due to a difference in how those well-known scriptures are interpreted. On one side of the conflict are those who align themselves with the traditional Christian teaching that biblical marriage is between one man and one woman. On the

other side of the conflict are those who maintain that biblical prohibitions of homosexuality are addressing practices such as ritual prostitution, pederasty, and sexual promiscuity, rather than committed relationships between same-gender persons. Those on both sides of this conflict maintain that they are trying to be faithful to their understanding of the scriptures, which has led to an unfortunate division in the church.

10. In conversations around General Conference, three terms are often used: traditionalist, progressive, and centrist. What do these terms mean?

It is important to remember that clergy and laity in The UMC are sincerely seeking to be faithful to their understanding of the scriptures when discussing matters of human sexuality. For the purposes of this document, we have defined those terms as:

Traditionalists - those who embrace the traditional Christian teaching that biblical marriage is between one man and one woman. Traditionalists support the phrasing placed in the Social Principles (§161.G) in The Book of Discipline in 1972, which states “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.” Further, Traditionalists believe scriptural prohibitions against homosexuality make it improper for the church to ordain or appoint self-avowed, practicing homosexuals as clergy. These positions are the current stance in The Book of Discipline.

Progressives - those who believe the biblical verses used to prohibit homosexuality are addressing practices such as ritual prostitution, pederasty, and sexual promiscuity, rather than committed relationships between same-gender persons. Progressives focus on justice to all people and Jesus’ deferential care of the marginalized, and thus advocate for full inclusion of all persons in the church who are living out their God-given identity.

Centrists - those who may lean toward either traditionalist or progressive positions on the topic of homosexuality, but are more comfortable living in the tension between the two different views. Another word used in denominational discussions is to call individuals holding these centrist beliefs as “compatibilists.” Centrists value unity in the church while realizing the diversity of opinion on many theological and social matters that has been evident in the church from the very beginning.

11. What legislative petitions have been submitted to General Conference that deal specifically with the structure of The United Methodist Church?

Many plans have been submitted to the postponed 2020 General Conference concerning the structure of The United Methodist Church and ways to move The United Methodist Church beyond the current impasse over human sexuality. Once General Conference actually occurs, these various plans can be debated and amended during the session in order to determine which of them might be appealing to the laity and clergy delegates. A summary has been prepared that compares proposals from various groups, in alphabetical order, about the structure of The United Methodist Church. It does not include proposals from individuals. All proposals will be open for amendments at General Conference and may be subject to Judicial Council review. Comparison chart:

www.sgaumc.org/files/files_library/gc+2020+plans+chart.pdf.

Section 2: General Conference Postponement

1. Why was General Conference postponed?

Covid-19 has had a world-wide impact. Closed countries, travel restrictions, a world-wide pandemic, and the staggered roll out of vaccines are all among the reasons that the 2020 General Conference was postponed.

2. If Annual Conferences are able to hold their sessions, why can't General Conference hold its session?

Vaccination availability, internet accessibility, and location (international sites) are obvious concerns when considering how to hold General Conference. The complexities of General Conference with a world-wide delegation is significantly greater than the challenges of conducting a South Georgia Annual Conference session.

3. Could General Conference be further postponed?

Yes, there is the possibility that General Conference will be further delayed because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges it presents for a global gathering of this nature.

4. Who makes the decision about another possible postponement and when will this decision be made?

The Commission on the General Conference makes the decisions on dates for General Conference, including any decision on another possible postponement. The Commission has indicated they will make a decision regarding the viability of the conference being held on schedule by late in the first quarter of 2022 or early in the second quarter of 2022.

5. What happens if General Conference continues to be delayed beyond 2022?

If General Conference is further delayed, South Georgia will continue to operate in compliance with the current Book of Discipline with a traditional view on human sexuality. If there is a delay, South Georgia Conference leadership will be prepared for any implications the delay brings.

6. While we are in a delay, can new legislation be introduced to General Conference?

It remains to be seen whether any new proposals will be before delegates. As you might expect, the delay of General Conference has given people more time to review the Protocol and other proposals and to think carefully about the consequences of each plan. Several new proposals have emerged among some United Methodists who feel the options offered by the Protocol were limiting. There are provisions in ¶1507 in the Book of Discipline that lay out the process for how new petitions could be received by General Conference.

Section 3: The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation

Protocol website: www.gracethroughseparation.com

1. What is the Protocol?

The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation is a proposal for restructuring and separation of The United Methodist Church as we know it today. The proposed separation provides the opportunity for the expansion of Methodism in the world through launching new denominations and a broad reform within The United Methodist Church. Utilizing a mediation process, sixteen United Methodist leaders reached the conclusion that the best option for moving beyond the current conflict over how the church should consider and respond to LGBTQ persons in The United Methodist Church is through separation. The signatories to the Protocol have agreed to support the development and implementation of legislation necessary to implement the terms of the Protocol.

2. Who created the Protocol?

The Protocol was developed by a [theologically diverse group of United Methodists](#) composed of laity and clergy identifying as progressives, traditionalists, and centrists representing a variety of groups in The United Methodist Church, as well as US and Central Conference Bishops. The 16-member group came together as an outgrowth of a consultation initiated by bishops from Central Conferences located outside of the US.

3. What do the writers of the Protocol anticipate as the intended outcome if the Protocol passes?

It is the intention of the Protocol Meditation Team to provide a pathway that enables all groups, no matter their theological conviction, to serve and live out their calling without the threat of punishment or compromise. They hope that: 1 - their work on the Protocol will be the stimulus for a gracious acknowledgement that while we share a common heritage we cannot share a common structure moving forward; and 2 - the outcome of this work will be an amicable process of separation that in a predetermined time frame will create a post-separation UMC and allow for one or more other Methodist denominations to emerge with their own mission, vision, and structure.

4. When did the Protocol become official legislation to the General Conference? Why isn't the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation included in the General Conference Advance Daily Christian Advocate (ADCA)?

On February 6, 2020, the team that agreed to the [Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation](#) released its proposed legislation to implement the Protocol. The Protocol Team proposed a new paragraph of the Book of Discipline, ¶2556 – “Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring.” All of the provisions necessary to implement the Protocol are contained in one paragraph. This was released after the deadline for submitting resolutions and after the printing of the ADCA. However, the mediation team worked through three Annual Conferences to have it presented at their Annual Conference session for adoption as a petition to General Conference (Michigan, Philippines, and Sierra Leone). This is a process outlined in the Book of Discipline ¶507.6 that allows the legislation to be properly presented at General Conference.

Read the full text of the legislation here: www.gracethroughseparation.com/legislation.

5. What are some of the key components of the Protocol?

- The mediated agreement allows theological traditionalists - those who want to maintain current church teachings - to leave with local church assets and property and \$25 million in existing UMC funds to start their own traditional denomination.
- The protocol also sets aside \$2 million for other denominations formed.
- Under the Protocol, conferences and local congregations could vote to separate from The UMC to affiliate with a new Methodist denomination created under the agreement within a certain time frame.
- If an Annual Conference does not vote to separate, it remains in The UMC, and local churches remain in The UMC unless they vote to separate.
- If an Annual Conference votes to separate, a local church can vote to remain in The UMC and move to another Annual Conference.
- By default, clergy remain a member of their current Annual Conference unless they choose otherwise.
- Provisions exist for entities that choose to separate to retain their assets and liabilities and be released from the trust clause. Unfunded future pension liability could be transferred to the new denomination which a church or conference joins.
- All current clergy and lay employees would keep the pensions they have already earned regardless of the Methodist denomination with which they ultimately affiliate.

6. Can the Protocol be amended?

Yes. While the Protocol design team has strongly suggested adoption in its current form, the General Conference delegates can amend the Protocol through the legislative process.

7. Will the Protocol be addressed with high priority on the agenda at General Conference?

The South Georgia delegation, along with other bodies, has asked the Commission on General Conference and the Council of Bishops in the strongest terms, to put consideration of the Protocol at the highest level of priority.

8. Under the terms of the Protocol, will any newly formed Methodist denominations receive financial assets from The United Methodist Church? How were the figures determined? What is the per-member distribution of these funds?

The General Council on Finance and Administration will hold a total sum of \$25M for a traditional denomination after it is formed and incorporated. If more than one traditional denomination emerges, then an agreement will have to be worked out between those parties. A total sum of \$2 million dollars is to be escrowed by GCFA for payment to potential additional Methodist denominations pursuant to this Protocol after they are formed and incorporated. The Protocol Mediation Team arrived at these figures after review of the financial health of The UMC, and discussion with experts from GCFA and the Connectional Table. It was agreed as a part of this financial settlement that no further claim would be made on any properties or assets retained by the post-separation United Methodist Church. It is impossible to determine the “per-member” distribution prior to any separation because no one knows what decisions will be made by clergy, local churches, and ultimately church members as to which expression of Methodism they will associate. ([Page 23, Section 10](#))

9. Why are traditionalists the ones being asked to leave The United Methodist Church under the Protocol?

Traditionalists are not being asked to leave; they are deciding to leave. During the Protocol mediation process it became clear that progressives and centrists are not ready or willing to leave The United Methodist Church. Forcing anyone to leave involuntarily would require numerous church trials that would distract from the church's mission, cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, ruin the church's reputation, and all with no assurance of producing the intended outcome. No one wants to see that happen. Therefore, the traditionalist representatives at the Protocol meditation table felt that starting a new expression of Methodism would provide a fresh start for accountability and flexibility.

10. Why can't individuals and churches who want to change the Book of Discipline around matters related to human sexuality leave and start their own church?

Churches that want to change the Book of Discipline could leave, and some have already gone through the disaffiliation process. But there are churches and individuals who want to see the Book of Discipline changed who are choosing to stay because they feel this issue is a matter of justice based on a different interpretation of scripture. Currently, there are some Bishops, Conferences, and Jurisdictions in parts of The UMC who feel so strongly about their position they have chosen to operate in a manner that goes against our current Book of Discipline. This is the tension that brings us to the current conflict in the church, which the Protocol is addressing.

11. If the Protocol passes at General Conference, how is the process initiated?

No institution as large as our current United Methodist Church can be altered or re-organized quickly; this will take time. One of the key components of the work yet to be done is to create a realistic yet timely manner in which these changes can be implemented. Care will need to be taken to make sure that all aspects of the work are cared for in a manner that honors the Protocol and the decisions made at the General Conference and any subsequent conferences before the separation takes place.

12. If the Protocol passes, how could traditionalists retain the name of "The United Methodist Church"?

As the Protocol is currently written, the post-separation United Methodist Church would retain the name of "The United Methodist Church." Of course, this could be part of the deliberation that will happen at General Conference. ([Page 27, Section 12.I](#))

13. What is the official decision-making process for an Annual Conference as outlined in the Protocol's legislation?

The proposed process for decision-making is detailed on [page 7, section 4. a and c of the Protocol legislation document](#).

- A. In its present form, the legislation states that a motion supported by one-fifth of the lay and clergy members present and voting is required to initiate the decision making process at a regular or called session of the Annual Conference.
- B. A 57% super-majority is required of the clergy and lay members present and voting for separation from The UMC.
- C. A process for equalizing the number of lay members is referenced to bring balance due to the number of clergy members who are not represented by a local church due to their clergy status (e.g., retired, leave of absence, etc.). Efforts at lay equalization are made for each Annual Conference session through the use of at-large lay members.

14. How does the Protocol allow for church property to transfer to the local church?

[Page 14 of the Protocol legislation document](#) addresses matters of property, assets and liabilities. This section has a lot of legal terminology. This is a brief summary for churches who are separating from The UMC in accordance with all the provisions of the proposed legislation:

- A. Local churches departing to unite with a new Methodist denomination would retain all property, assets, and liabilities.
- B. Prior to separation, departing churches will maintain connectional responsibilities (i.e. paying apportionments and direct bills for the church's clergy's benefits).
- C. The Annual Conference session would be required to give approval for departing churches to finalize the process.
- D. Disclaimer: *This is a good faith representation of the basic aspects of the proposed legislation as it relates to churches departing to unite with another denominational expression of Methodism and the transfer of church property. Please read all the fine print in the legislation.*

15. What if the Protocol is not adopted at General Conference?

There is a possibility that the Protocol will not be adopted. If this happens, the Annual Conference will need to decide its next steps. Regardless of what happens at General Conference, South Georgia's current disaffiliation policy is still in effect. The process for disaffiliation for a local church is available online at www.sgaumc.org/disaffiliation.

Section 4: South Georgia's Position on the Protocol

1. Does the delegation elected to represent South Georgia support the Protocol?

Yes. The South Georgia Conference delegation has expressed their support for the Protocol. They see a great need to vote on and pass the Protocol as soon as possible.

2. What is the South Georgia Conference's official position on the Protocol?

- A. The annual gathering (session) of the South Georgia Annual Conference is technically the only body who can decide our conference's position on matters such as this legislation. There has not been an in-person meeting since the Protocol was developed and presented to allow for thorough preparation, discussion, debate, or a time of voting on a position on the matter during an Annual Conference session.
- B. In the meantime, our elected delegates to the General Conference have gone on record as supporting the Protocol in its present form. This decision was made in preparation for their attending the General Conference session.

3. Will the South Georgia Conference vote to take a position on the Protocol?

- A. The current Protocol legislation provides a decision-making process and timeline following the General Conference session when there are finalized details and options for each Annual Conference, local church, and clergy person to consider.
- B. Any vote on the Protocol prior to General Conference action should be viewed as non-binding due to the unpredictable nature of the legislative process. In short, there may be changes to the proposed legislation with which the required number of lay and clergy members voting at the Annual Conference would be uncomfortable. (In the Protocol legislation, a 57% vote is required for the Annual Conference to separate from The UMC and join or form a new Methodist denomination.)

Section 5: Impact on the South Georgia Conference and Local Churches if the Protocol Passes

1. What does the passing of the Protocol potentially mean for local churches and Annual Conferences?

If a local church or an Annual Conference wishes to remain in the post-separation United Methodist Church, there are no actions required. If a local church or an Annual Conference wishes to affiliate with a new traditional Methodist denomination or another new Methodist denomination, there is a clearly stated process that will enable them to do so gracefully and affordably. And, if a local church or Annual Conference wishes to disaffiliate without affiliating with another Methodist denomination, there is an approved process that spells out those requirements ([Page 25, Section 12](#)).

Strong efforts of collaboration and cooperation will be needed from all sides in order to create a consistent narrative concerning the options being considered; to provide strong, non-anxious leadership in the midst of the transitions; and to model how we can bless and send one another into new expressions of who we are as Methodists.

Local churches and Annual Conferences that separate should be prepared for the disciplinary and structural changes that will be approved and instituted by any new Methodist denomination that emerges.

Regardless, each local Church and Annual Conference can expect change to occur. They can also expect to be supported in their efforts to provide meaningful, contextual ministry to the people in their communities and under their care as well as to continue every effort to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

2. If the Protocol passes, will my local church be required to vote, and if so, when?

- A. Local churches would only be called upon to vote on this matter if the Annual Conference session takes action with which a sufficient number of local church members disagree. This applies to churches who would prefer to join a new Methodist denomination or to remain part of the post-separation United Methodist Church.
- B. According to the Protocol legislation in its current form, ([Section 4.c](#)), the local church council (or equivalent body) decides whether to require a majority vote or a $\frac{2}{3}$ super-majority vote prior to taking the vote. Note that this is a difference in percentage of vote required at the local church level than at the Annual Conference level.
- C. Churches that do not take a vote will default to the choice of the Annual Conference session.
- D. Local churches have several timelines that will likely be adjusted because of the postponement of the 2020 General Conference session. However, it should be noted that the local church can actually vote on their denomination affiliation anytime after the adjournment of the General Conference session.

3. Is there a defined process if a local church wants to remain in the post-separation UMC? Will there be a clear path for those who remain in the post-separation UMC to join another Annual Conference so that local churches can remain connected and vital in ministry?

If the Annual Conference votes to remain in the post-separation UMC no action will be required for a local church that wants to remain in the post-separation UMC. If the Annual Conference votes to

affiliate with a new traditional Methodist denomination or another new Methodist denomination, then the local church would need to vote to leave the Annual Conference in order to be a part of the post-separation UMC. The same vote threshold will be required as set by the church council prior to any vote (majority or $\frac{2}{3}$). The process of those churches joining a new Annual Conference has not been defined yet. The Annual Conference with which such a church would align would be determined after seeing where post-separation UMC churches exist. Under the Protocol, there is a clear path for every congregation to live into their connectional identity and shared ministry as part of an Annual Conference. Once decisions are made, individuals will have a better idea whether he or she can remain a member of their church, or whether they will choose to affiliate with another church. Every South Georgia United Methodist is encouraged to be a part of the conversation in their local church and model respectful and loving dialogue.

4. How can individuals who want to remain in the post-separation UMC affiliate with others if his or her church wants to join a new Methodist denomination?

Any member whose church moves in a direction different than he or she feels led can transfer their membership at any time to a church which aligns with his or her theological conviction.

5. Is the South Georgia Conference already working to join the Global Methodist Church?

The South Georgia Conference, as an official body, has not taken any formal steps to join the Global Methodist Church. The Annual Conference is the only body who could make this decision.

***The Protocol anticipates new expressions of Methodism emerging from The United Methodist Church. One of these new expressions is the [Global Methodist Church](#), created by theologically conservative United Methodists. While it has not been legally formed and is not operating as a church at this time, leadership of the GMC expects the Global Methodist Church will be legally formed and begin to operate as a church when the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopts the Protocol.*

6. Will the South Georgia Annual Conference be permitted to leave as a whole? Is the South Georgia Annual Conference planning to leave The United Methodist Church and be a denomination on its own?

No formal option currently exists for an Annual Conference to disaffiliate or form its own independent denomination. The Annual Conference, as an official body, has not taken any formal steps to leave The UMC or be a denomination on its own.

7. What are our options for uniting with an expression of Methodism that maintains the traditional teachings on human sexuality, marriage, and ordination?

Presently, there is at least one new Methodist denomination in the process of organizing - the Global Methodist Church. It is possible other similar denominations will be formed so it is prudent for the conference to monitor various options.

8. If the Protocol passes and the Annual Conference votes to separate from The UMC, will churches immediately become a part of a new denomination or can this occur only after organizing conferences of the respective denomination?

Any plan of separation that is approved is likely to have a window of 1-2 years during which time local churches can study the situation and decide where they best align. Once a new denomination is formally organized and legally instituted (including, for instance, tax status, health and pension plans,

doctrines and by-laws) and holds their organizing conference, then local churches and Annual Conferences may decide whether or not they wish to join a new denomination.

9. If General Conference is delayed beyond 2022, or if no decision is reached in 2022, is there a plan for our conference or its local churches to disaffiliate from The UMC with the same terms (financial and property) as the original Protocol?

No. There is no such process currently defined by the General Conference. The South Georgia Conference already has a [policy in place for a local church to disaffiliate](#) that expires on December 31, 2023. Whenever there is an opportunity to respond, conference leadership will provide the mechanism for the conference to decide its future.

10. How will the South Georgia Conference continue to thrive if many of our clergy and churches decide to join another denomination?

While we don't know how everything is going to settle out, we have confidence that all our churches will continue to share the love of Christ with those around them no matter what denominational affiliation they may have.

Section 6: Conference Leadership

1. Has the South Georgia Conference leadership taken a position on the Protocol?

While individuals serving in leadership positions may have taken a personal position on the Protocol, only the Annual Conference session - meaning voting clergy and lay members to Annual Conference - can speak for or make decisions on behalf of "the" conference. The delegation, however, has stated their position is one in favor of the Protocol as they prepare for the upcoming General Conference.

2. Is our Conference leadership (Cabinet, staff, etc.) working for a Conference decision to affiliate with a new traditional Methodist denomination?

The Annual Conference, as an official body, has not taken any formal steps to affiliate with a new traditional Methodist movement. The Annual Conference is the only body who could make this decision. Conference leadership is currently engaged in scenario planning in preparation for the future, recognizing most of the conference supports the current [Book of Discipline](#).

3. While what is approved by the General Conference cannot yet be known because of the nature of the legislative process, how will the South Georgia Conference help prepare local churches in the meantime for the possibility of denominational separation and the kinds of decisions the Annual Conference and local churches will have to make?

The Leadership Forum, Leadership Forum Task Force, Delegation, and Cabinet are working to provide necessary information to help educate church leaders and members about the legislation, its implications, and options available. The timeline for this process is outlined in Section 11 of this FAQ document. District informational sessions are planned for this Fall. In addition, the conference has trained facilitators who can help congregations navigate through the process of making decisions around denominational matters (www.sgaumc.org/navigators).

4. How will Bishop Graves help the South Georgia Conference proceed after General Conference with such limited time and knowledge of our conference? How will South Georgia United Methodists know who is making decisions?

While Bishop Graves is the Episcopal leader of the South Georgia Conference, decisions regarding the future of the South Georgia Conference will ultimately be made by the clergy and lay members of the Annual Conference. Bishop Graves begins his new episcopal assignment in South Georgia on September 1. He has made the commitment to spend the first 100 days in our conference, meeting with Conference and District lay leadership, Cabinet members, and local church pastors. Bishop Graves continues to say that as the episcopal leader he wants to help churches and individuals get to where God is leading them. He will make decisions as needed, and other Conference leaders will remain in place to assist in decisions. Bishop Graves and Conference leaders have a desire to bring people to the table and into conversation so that they are prepared to make the necessary decisions. Good communication will continue to be one of our most valuable tools as we act together as a conference.

Section 7: Delegation

1. Will the delegation seek response from clergy and lay members to Annual Conference in regards to the Protocol? Is it anticipated that our delegation, or some other group, will bring a recommendation to the 2022 Annual Conference?

The South Georgia delegation, along with other groups, are planning informational conversations this Fall at the district and local church levels to talk about denominational matters as it relates to General Conference and the Protocol. The delegation represents and can give leadership to the Annual Conference. However, the Annual Conference itself is the only decision-making body. The delegation has stated that it will submit a resolution to be voted on by the 2022 South Georgia Annual Conference session - a statement of declaration in support of the Protocol and the desire to be part of a traditional denomination. While this would not be a binding vote, the delegation feels it would express the direction of the Annual Conference.

2. Will there be a definite decision made by delegates at General Conference or will it lead to more questions without answers?

The delegation sees a great need to vote on and pass the "Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation." While the delegation knows that it is possible for congregations who wish to disaffiliate to do so now under our current Book of Discipline, they recognize it is significantly more expensive. Therefore, it is the hope of the delegation that: 1 - there will be a definitive decision reached at General Conference for a peaceful separation into two or more Methodist denominations; 2 - if the Protocol passes, then each Annual Conference, church, member, and pastor can decide where they can best live out their faith and calling; 3 - the Protocol will provide a means for those desiring to disaffiliate from The UMC for doctrinal reasons to do so gracefully and affordably and affiliate with a new denomination that is traditional in nature.

3. How long does the delegation think The UMC can remain together to make necessary decisions when meetings and decisions are delayed because of the pandemic?

If General Conference is delayed or the Protocol is not passed, the delegation feels there will be adverse effects within the South Georgia Conference. While the delegation realizes the current Book of Discipline with a traditional view of human sexuality remains in place, the delegation feels that the

disobedience of the BOD on the parts of some Bishops, Conferences, and Jurisdictions to our agreed upon polity has created great angst and unrest in our denomination and is why the next General Conference is so important. The delegation wants to find a “win/win” for the churches, members, and clergy in the South Georgia Conference. The delegation wants there to be a “good place to land” for both traditional, progressive, and centrist congregations. They feel it is time for every congregation to follow their conscience and understanding of scripture and our Wesleyan heritage without penalty.

The delegation has also asked the Commission on General Conference to consider and vote on the Protocol at the earliest possible date. Recognizing that vaccination distribution and travel restrictions continue to be an issue, the South Georgia delegation has said they will use their collective voices to urge the Committee on General Conference to explore hybrid methods of meeting should an in-person gathering not be possible.

4. Does the delegation have what they need?

Yes, the delegation feels they have the information they need to make decisions at General Conference. The delegation continues to ask for prayers for wisdom and discernment.

Section 8: Disaffiliation

Local Church Disaffiliation

Addressing how a local church could disaffiliate from the South Georgia Conference

1. What steps does a local church take to disaffiliate? What is the deadline for a local church to disaffiliate?

A disaffiliation policy was approved by the South Georgia Conference at the 2019 Annual Conference session. The process for disaffiliation for a local church is available online at www.sgaumc.org/disaffiliation. A church can also contact their District Superintendent. The vote by a local church to disaffiliate under this policy shall be made no later than April 1 of the year in which the local church intends to seek Annual Conference consent to disaffiliate. The latest date by which a local church can elect to disaffiliate under this policy is April 1, 2023. The provisions of this policy and ¶2553 expire on December 31, 2023.

2. What guidance is offered to churches who have made the decision to disaffiliate?

The [disaffiliation policy](#) calls for District Superintendents to guide churches through the process of disaffiliation. Details are found in section 4 of the [disaffiliation policy](#). The process seeks to be as fair as possible, releasing the trust clause, and releasing the property and buildings to the local church. The local church is only assessed for pension liability and apportionments through the next Annual Conference session. District Superintendents provide guidance to local churches throughout the process.

Annual Conference Disaffiliation

Addressing how the Annual Conference could separate from The UMC

3. Why is there no option for an Annual Conference to separate from The United Methodist Church?

No disciplinary option currently exists for an Annual Conference to separate from The UMC. Until recent years, no one foresaw that an Annual Conference would need this option. Such an option is part of the [Protocol legislation](#). Until any legislation is approved by General Conference there is no current means for a conference to separate from The United Methodist Church as a whole.

4. Will our Annual Conference separate from The United Methodist Church?

No one knows the answer to this question. The options and processes for separation will not be fully known until after the General Conference takes its action. Currently, there is no disciplinary provision for the Annual Conference to make a decision to separate. In the meantime, it is prudent for the conference and local churches to prepare for various scenarios and to prayerfully allow time for the legislative process to unfold.

Section 9: Clergy

1. If the Protocol passes, how does a pastor leave the Annual Conference if he or she does not agree with the Conference's choice of denomination? How difficult will it be to find a conference with which a clergy could associate?

The [Book of Discipline](#) has outlined the transfer procedures in ¶347. This procedure will be honored should a clergy member wish to transfer to another Annual Conference. While no one can predict the decisions of the approximate 38,000 clergy and 30,000 congregations in the 54 US Annual Conferences, clergy would surely find options.

2. If the South Georgia Conference votes to separate from The United Methodist Church could a retired clergy person remain in the post-separation UMC?

A retired United Methodist clergy may remain in the post-separation United Methodist. Under the provisions of the Protocol, the retired clergy would transfer to another Annual Conference that is in the post-separation UMC. Regardless, pastors currently in retirement would see no change in their pension, no matter the expression with which they affiliate.

3. Will the Bishop and Cabinet make clergy appointments in 2022 with a pending General Conference scheduled for later that year?

Appointments will be made in the Spring of 2022. As always, some pastoral changes will be necessary. However, the Cabinet has expressed their hope and desire for sustained leadership, stability, and a limited number of appointment changes.

4. What happens to the pension plans of The United Methodist Church and the pension benefits of its clergy and lay employees if the Protocol passes?

The pension plans of The United Methodist Church will remain in place for all current clergy and lay employees affiliated with The United Methodist Church, regardless of the Methodist denomination under the Protocol with which they affiliate. The liability of Annual Conferences and local churches for pension benefits shall transfer with such entities to the Methodist denomination with which they affiliate.

Section 10: The Local Church

1. How do conversations around denominational matters and the Protocol affect my local church right now?

The hope is that you are so busy sharing the love of Christ that these conversations have minimal impact on your church right now! However, at some point after General Conference meets, your charge's lay member to Annual Conference will represent your church as the Annual Conference decides what its future will be. Once the conference decides, your church may align with the Annual Conference or choose another path. The prayer for everyone is that there will be minimal impact to your local church's worship, outreach, or evangelism efforts.

2. How does the delay of General Conference influence how the local church conducts ministry?

Hopefully, the delay of General Conference does not significantly impact your worship, outreach, or evangelism efforts of any of our local churches. While the matters before General Conference need to be resolved, the reality is the conversations at General Conference are not what churches and clergy deal with on a daily basis. While some churches have lost members or seen a financial impact in this interim period, none of those distractions keep us from sharing the Gospel with people who need to know they are loved.

3. What role does the small membership church play in these discussions?

Every church - no matter its size - plays an important role in deciding the future of the South Georgia Conference. Every charge elects and sends at least one lay member to represent them at the Annual Conference session, where conference decisions are made. Through the annual election of the local church's charge-wide lay member, each church has a voice and the opportunity to be part of both the discussion and the decision making.

4. How does our local church navigate this time?

The best thing is to realize that the clergy of South Georgia and the lay member representing each charge will determine South Georgia's response when the options for us become known. In the meantime, local churches continue to be about the business of the Church: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. All United Methodists can model loving and respectful conversations in order to keep divisiveness from hurting the church's witness, bringing harm to members of the church family, or hindering the church's mission and ministry. The conference has trained facilitators who can help congregations navigate through the process of making decisions around denominational matters (www.sgaumc.org/navigators).

5. How can a local church avoid a church vote and the conflict that it may produce?

Once the Annual Conference decides its path forward, churches agreeing with the decision will not be required to vote. Only churches who disagree with the Annual Conference's decision and want to separate from the Annual Conference will be required to have a church vote. Local churches in South Georgia have persons with a variety of viewpoints who have successfully worshipped together and served Christ for decades. Conference leaders recognize that if any local church has to vote it could cause conflict to surface in the church.

6. Why is every pastor not talking about these denominational matters with his or her congregation?

Pastors and the lay leadership of the local church walk a fine line between helping the church stay informed while avoiding divisive conversations within the church family. Some pastors are preparing their congregations, while others may not feel adequately prepared or fully informed themselves. Some might not want to distract from crucial ministry until they feel the time is right. If you feel like your congregation is not well informed on these matters, it is probably best to lovingly talk with your pastor and ask him or her if you can help the congregation prepare for the conversations and decisions which are likely to develop in the months ahead. Church leaders should consider together how best to inform their membership in a manner that allows open conversation. The conference has trained facilitators who can help congregations navigate through the process of making decisions around denominational matters (www.sgaumc.org/navigators).

7. If a church disaffiliates from the South Georgia Conference can it still be called United Methodist?

As the Protocol is written, if a church votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church it is no longer a part of The United Methodist Church and should not refer to itself as a United Methodist Church. In Georgia there are court rulings affirming that a church may not use the name "Methodist" unless it is part of one of the various Methodist denominations.

Section 11: Timeline

1. What target dates are being entertained for the South Georgia Conference to prepare for and make decisions for the outcome of General Conference?

Here is the timeline and process for preparation developed by our delegation in collaboration with other leadership groups of the Annual Conference. This also addresses the process to be followed after General Conference.

Fall 2021

Time of Information

- Informational video for congregations which objectively outlines where we currently are as it relates to General Conference (already released)
- Release of the FAQ document
- Informational gatherings in the districts
- Navigators (trained facilitators) available to work with local congregations

January - May 2022

Time of Preparation

- Town Hall meetings
- Special Town Hall meeting for licensed local pastors
- Navigators (trained facilitators) available to work with local congregations
- Additional videos for congregations which objectively outline the known options coming before General Conference
- Conference leadership continuously relays all known matters coming before General Conference

June 5 - 7 or 8, 2022

Annual Conference 2022

- Time of discussion around General Conference matters.
- If needed, conduct another conference survey after options have become more clear and new alternatives may have arisen.

August 29 - September 6, 2022

Next regular session of General Conference

September 2022 or October 2022

Special Called Annual Conference

- Assuming General Conference is able to meet in 2022, the South Georgia Annual Conference session will meet to decide how it will respond as an Annual Conference to the outcome of General Conference.

2. If the Protocol passes at General Conference, what is the timeline to make decisions?

The Protocol legislation provides a decision-making process and timeline following the General Conference session when there are finalized details and options for each Annual Conference, local church, and clergy person to consider. A special called Annual Conference is scheduled in September or October 2022 to respond as an Annual Conference to the outcome of the August 2022 General Conference. The Protocol envisions a gracious timeline for all churches, clergy, and individual members to make the necessary decisions to find their place.

3. What do we do until General Conference occurs?

Here are some suggestions:

- A. Let's focus on doing the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in our local churches and Conference. Thankfully, no one has to wait on any committee or legislation to continue doing what Jesus has commissioned us to do.
- B. Continue to educate your church leadership regarding the current reality in The United Methodist Church and the options before us.
- C. Pray - "Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT)
- D. Educate ourselves about our Wesleyan roots in hopes of recapturing the passion and zeal for Christ and lost souls, for which we were once known. "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out." John Wesley, 1786

For additional information, visit www.sgaumc.org/gc2020.



UNITED METHODISTS: Structure of The UMC

