

What is going on at WMUMC & the UMC in general?

Like it or not, the United Methodist Church (UMC) is facing a season of change and Pastor Jeff has alerted us that we need to begin studying and praying in order to be able to respond well when we need to make major decisions about the future of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church (WMUMC). Those decisions don't have to be made next week or next month, but they most likely will have to be made within the next few years. A Discernment Team has recently been formed by the Administrative Team to objectively and prayerfully research the pertinent issues.

So, what's going on with the UMC? The situation is complicated. I've provided handouts on the organization and governance of the UMC, a short vocabulary list and a Frequently Asked Questions sheet which are available as addendums to this document or as a separate document (FAQ's).

-Please refer to the handout on the **Organization of the UMC**.

The **General Conference** is the *top legislative body* of the UMC and makes major policy decisions for the denomination. These rules and regulations are published in the UMC **Book of Discipline**. There is only 1 General Conference that meets every 4 years and it is worldwide.

Below the GC are **Judicial Conferences**.

Below JC are **Annual Conferences**. The ACs are presided over by Bishops.

Below ACs are **Districts**, which are presided over by District Superintendents.

Within the Districts are the **Local Churches**.

A brief word about our history-

John Wesley founded Methodism in the mid-1700s in America. Over the years the church divided into many denominations because of disagreements over things like theology, governance, slavery and segregation. The encouraging news is that in the early 1900s an effort toward unity was made and several denominations merged. In 1968 (54 years ago), the **Methodist Church** (resulting denomination of a previous merger in 1939 of The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Protestant Church & The Methodist Episcopal Church, South) merged with the **Evangelical United Brethren Church** to form our current denomination, the **United Methodist Church**. I am quoting the 2016 UMC Book of Discipline when I

say, “Conflicts over homosexuality, marriage and abortion have continued uninterrupted nearly since the formation of the denomination.”

The controversy we are facing now and have been facing for several decades has been at the General Conference level. However, things have come to a head over the past 2 to 3 years and the controversy is now involving Annual Conferences, Districts and local churches.

The current issue that is divisive enough to cause fracturing of the denomination is policies about homosexuality. There are many other problems, but this one is driving the wedge. If you had a chance to hear our speaker in May, Dr. Ryan Danker suggested that this issue of homosexuality is the tip of an iceberg of deeper disagreement between traditionalists and progressives in the UMC. An article in Christianity Today puts it this way, “The traditionalists connect holiness to purity and questions of sexual ethics while the progressives connect holiness to inclusivity and acceptance.” (Christianity Today, May 24, 2022)

Discussions about policies on homosexuality have become more and more contentious and disruptive at General Conference over the years. In 2016, the issue was so disruptive that other business wasn't being addressed. Therefore, the issue was tabled and a Special General Conference was scheduled for 2019. The special conference was held in February 2019 and the Book of Discipline's stance on homosexuality was upheld and strengthened by a nearly even vote of 53% to 47%. Everyone left that meeting distressed by the bickering and ugliness of it and with the understanding that the arguments would continue. It became obvious that a split of the denomination was the only answer. Several proposals were made for an amicable and financially fair separation. In December, 2019 a theologically diverse group of well-respected international UMC leaders met with an internationally renowned mediator and devised a plan known as “The Protocol” (the *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation*) which many consider to be the best separation proposal that has been made. These proposals for separation of the denomination were to have been voted on at the 2020 General Conference. That General Conference was postponed due to Covid for 1 year, then a 2nd year, then 2 more years until 2024, so that no vote has yet been taken. If The Protocol or an amended form of it is adopted in 2024, local churches like ours may need to decide if they want to vote on whether to stay or leave the UMC. The financial implications of disaffiliation are unclear at this time because the 2020 General Conference has been delayed for so long.

At the 2019 Special General Conference, when it became obvious that a split of the UMC would occur, a new paragraph was added to the Book of Discipline. This paragraph (2553) created a general path for disaffiliation from the UMC. This path was temporary and expires 12/31/23. The apparent expectation was that a more detailed proposal for the split would be created and voted on at the 2020 General Conference. With the continuing delays of the 2020 General Conference, paragraph 2553 will expire before the General Conference meets at its rescheduled time in 2024 so that **no** official disaffiliation process will be in place for most of 2024. There is no guarantee that a new disaffiliation process will be passed in 2024 nor how restrictive it might be. The chances of the Protocol passing in 2024 appear to be diminishing rapidly. Some churches that were hoping that the Protocol would be passed in 2024 are feeling pressured to disaffiliate in 2023 using paragraph 2553.

In the meantime, a group formed within the UMC as an unofficial advisory group to advocate for traditional values and the authority of Scripture as the primary guide for the church. (The Wesleyan Quadrilateral for theological reflection: Scripture-primary; Tradition; Reason; & Experience). That group developed into the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA). They launched a new Methodist denomination on May 1 of 2022 named the Global Methodist Church (GMC). Because of the continuing delay of a vote on The Protocol, continuing differences in opinions on the issue of homosexuality and continued fighting within the UMC, some UMC churches on both ends of the theological spectrum have already left the denomination or are in the process of disaffiliating from the UMC.

So, this is a fairly general overview of what's been going on. There are many more details and diverse views on the issues. I believe it behooves all of us as members of WMUMC to pray for wisdom and guidance; to treat each other and our pastors with kindness and charity; and to continue to study and learn about the various issues affecting our Church.

Mary Sansing
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ORGANIZATION OF UMC and Vocabulary

Organization of UMC:

General Conference of UMC
Judicial Conferences (USA-5) + Central Conferences (non-USA 7)
Annual Conferences (7-14 per Judicial Conference)
(53 in USA, 80 outside USA)
Districts (3-17 per annual conference)
Local Churches (140+ churches in our District)

WMUMC's assignments

General Conference
Southeastern J.C.
Western North Carolina A.C.

Northern Piedmont District
Wesley Memorial UMC

-General Conference (GC)-both an *organizational body* and the name of a *meeting*. The General Conference (organizational body) meets every 4 years for a General Conference (name of the meeting). This is the top **Legislative body** of the UMC and has delegates from all over the world. There is only one GC worldwide. There are 600-1000 delegates that go to the meeting. Half are lay members and half are clergy.

-Judicial Conference (JC)-both an *organizational body* and the name of a *meeting*. These are geographical divisions in the USA. They preside over, organize and support and have limited control over the ACs in their region. There are 5 in USA and they are each made up of 7-14 Annual Conferences.

-Central Conferences- Similar to the JC, but outside the USA. There are 7 worldwide.

-Annual Conferences (AC)-both an *organizational body* and the name of a *meeting*. The AC is the basis body of the church. It votes on constitutional amendments and elects delegates to GC and JC. It is presided over by a Bishop. (Our Bishop is Bishop Ken Carter.) There are 53 AC's in the USA and 80 AC's in the rest of the world.

-Districts-Presided over by a District Superintendent. (Our District Superintendent is Rev. Bev Copley.) We are 1 of 8 Districts in the Western North Carolina Annual Conference. Our District is the Northern Piedmont District and has about 149 churches in it.

-Local Church-Our local Church is Wesley Memorial UMC.

Government of UMC

-A *legislature* which is the **General Conference**.

-The *judicial branch* is the **Judicial Council** which is the "Supreme Court" of the UMC. It rules on the constitutionality of acts by GC, JC and Bishops. All decisions are final.

-The **Council of Bishops** has administrative and supervisory roles in the UMC. They have some *executive branch* functions, but we don't have a president, vice president or a CEO of the United Methodist Church.

Bishops in USA have a lifetime tenure. Outside the USA, tenure varies.

There are 46 USA Bishops and 20 non-USA Bishops.

-The UMC has a **Constitution** and a book of rules called the **Book of Discipline**.

-The Book of Discipline is the UMC's Book of rules, regulations and organization. It contains a History of the UMC, the **Constitution** of the UMC, the Articles of Religion and Social Principles of the UMC as well. The most recent publication of the Book of Discipline was in 2016, and a 2019 Addendum was published after the February 2019 Special General Conference.

Vocabulary

-The Trust Clause-Paragraph 2501 in the 2016 Book of Discipline outlines the Trust Clause which states that the property and assets of a local church are held “in trust” for the benefit of the entire denomination. In other words, the property & assets of WMUMC belong to the Western NC Annual Conference and not to WMUMC.

-Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA)- Started as an unofficial advocacy group within the UMC. Became an independent organization in 2016. They were the main organizing group that launched a new theologically conservative Methodist denomination called the **Global Methodist Church (GMC)** on May 1, 2022.

-Wespath Benefits & Investments- Manages UMC pension fund for clergy and employees of the UMC. An independent company that is subcontracted by the UMC.

-The Protocol (short for the “Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace through Separation”)-An agreement devised by a diverse, international group of members of the UMC, assisted by a world-renowned mediator, to provide for a just means of separating the UMC into 2 or more denominations. It was completed on December 17, 2019.

-Paragraph 2553-an amendment to the BOD passed at the 2019 Special General Conference detailing the process of disaffiliation by local churches.

-Paragraph 2548.2-allows the transfer of the deed to the property of a UMC Church to another Methodist or Evangelical denomination.