



Commission on a Way Forward

Council of Bishops

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

To help prepare you for the upcoming General Conference

A Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church will be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis Missouri. The General Conference is made up of 864 delegates (half lay and half clergy) from around the world. Forty percent of delegates are from outside the United States. The General Conference is the highest legislative body of The United Methodist Church and the only body that can speak officially for the denomination.

The Florida Conference is represented by nine clergy and nine lay delegates. Please pray for our delegates and share your perspective with them by emailing fldelegation@flumc.org.

The purpose of this General Conference is to receive and vote on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward along with other legislation. The Commission on a Way Forward was formed by the 2016 General Conference and asked to find a way forward for the church that would move us beyond the current impasse related to human sexuality. Currently our *Book of Discipline (BOD)* states that all our churches are open to anyone, all people are welcome at the communion table and baptism fount, and all are persons of sacred worth and included in the ministry of Jesus. At the same time, the *BOD* considers homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teaching and does not allow our clergy to perform same-sex weddings, our churches to host same-sex weddings, or for LGBTQ persons to be ordained.

The Commission's report includes three plans:

1) One Church Plan – removes the current *BOD* restrictions that do not allow clergy to perform same sex weddings, churches to host same sex weddings or conferences to ordain LGBTQ clergy. Adds in protective language that would ensure no one has to act against their convictions. Churches could continue to operate the same way they do now with no votes required. If churches wanted to host same-sex weddings it would require a church wide vote of approval. Bishops would work with churches to appoint pastors that match their convictions.

- 2) Connectional Conference Plan – restructures the church to create three smaller bodies (connectional conferences) within the denomination with their own *Book of Discipline* and rules around same-sex marriage and ordination of LGBTQ clergy. One part of the church would continue the current restrictions, another part would allow churches and clergy to decide, and a third part would require clergy and churches to perform or host same-sex weddings. General Agencies would be reduced, and the role of the Council of Bishops would be redefined. Churches would have an opportunity to vote to choose which part of the church they wanted to be in if they disagree with the choice of their Annual Conference. Each part of the church would have its own unique name and logo.
- 3) Traditional Plan – keeps the current language around homosexuality and increases accountability by streamlining the processes to enforce penalties for violations of *The Book of Discipline* related to marriage and ordination of homosexual persons. Those who cannot live within the current *Discipline* requirements could create their own self-governing church that would be connected in some way to The United Methodist Church.

Each of these plans would need a majority approval by the General Conference and the Connectional Conference Plan would require a 2/3 majority vote. It is possible that none of the plans will be passed, in which case the current *Book of Discipline* would remain. If a plan is passed, it would not become official church law until January 1, 2020.

If you have questions or concerns about the upcoming General Conference, please speak to your pastor or a lay leader. You may hear and read stories about the General Conference in the media. Be sure you are getting information from a reputable source. We will have time to process this General Conference as a church. And no matter what, we will continue the important ministry we do in the community.

You can follow the General Conference live web stream at www.umc.org/gc2019. For more information or to see a list of our Florida delegation go to www.flumc.org/wayforward or send any questions to fldelegation@flumc.org.