

## General Information Regarding the UMC: History and the Split – What’s This All About?

### Part I: Basic Definitions for understanding

- Book of Discipline – the fundamental book outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organization, work, and procedures of the United Methodist Church. It also includes the Social Principles, the most recent official stated convictions, adopted in 1972 at the first UMC General Conference.
- General Conference – the international body that passes legislation and sets official social positions included in the Book of Discipline. (BoD) The General Conference convenes every 4 years, unless a special GC meeting is called, and is composed of clergy and lay delegates.
- Annual Conference – the regional body consisting of many local churches, headed by a regional office and professional staff that coordinates and conducts the business of the conference. There are 54 annual conferences in the United States, 5 in Texas. Bandera UMC is a member of the RioTexas Annual Conference. The term “Annual Conference” also refers to the annual meeting of delegates representing churches from the conference.
- Bishop – is the official who serves as general superintendent of the church, and is assigned to a specific geographical area. In the United Methodist tradition, bishops are not “ordained”, but are clergy-elected and consecrated to the office of bishop.
- Deacon and Elder – The main difference between a deacon and an elder is that elders are preachers of the Word of God while deacons are servants of the church. Elders are required to have extensive training and experience before being appointed to a position. The Elder is an ordained minister who has the responsibility to preach, teach, preside at the celebration of Holy Communion, and lead the congregations under their care in service and ministry to the world. Deacons require no prior experience, but they may assist the elder/pastor with Communion. The deacon is basically an ordained layperson.

### Part II: History

- The Book of Discipline (BoD) has extensive explanations of General Conference, Annual Conference, and others in Division Two – Organization. A detailed history of the foundings of the Methodist Church, from pre-Methodists, the early Moravians, and the Wesleys, John and Charles, beginning the church, the spread to America, etc., can be found also in the beginning of the BoD. It’s very enlightening if you want to know where Methodism really comes from.
- Forward to 1968! The United Methodist Church denomination was founded when the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church.
- 1972 – The first United Methodist General Conference was held. At this conference, the UMC Social Principles was adopted. This was the first GC which debated about human sexuality. [The Social Principles can be found in Part IV of the BoD.]
- 1976 – 2012 – Debates continued at GC about the church’s stand on human sexuality. Changes made in the BoD: In 1984, qualifications for ordained ministry were amended to exclude “self-avowed, practicing homosexuals.” In 2000, language was added prohibiting UMC clergy from officiating same-sex weddings.
- The 2016 GC had much debate on the issues of human sexuality. A Commission of Bishops (Commission on a Way Forward) was formed to develop a proposal that could bring healing and unity to the UMC. From 2016 – 2018 the Commission drafted a 32-page report titled “The Way Forward”, which offered three possible futures to the UMC:

\*One-Church: Removes the phrase added in 1972 and allows local churches to decide how open to be to LGBTQIA+ persons. This was the Commission's recommended plan.

\*Traditionalist: Would uphold the current teachings and establish stronger compliance.

\*Connectional Conference Plan: This would restructure the UMC into three "connectional" conferences based on rules concerning same-sex marriage rather than geography.

- February 2019: A Special General Conference was called to choose a direction based on the three plans the Commission proposed. It was widely covered by the mainstream media. The Traditional Plan was chosen by a slim margin, in part due to strong support from the African Bishops. Disappointed by this result, some bishops and clergy announced that they would defy the decisions of the conference, thereby making a split inevitable.
- So, special legislation was written [Paragraph 2553 of the BoD] and approved, with an expiration date of December 2023, giving churches four years to leave the UMC, with their property and assets, over the issues of human sexuality.
- Later in 2019, a group of UMC leaders developed legislation called "A Protocol for Grace & Reconciliation through Separation." This "Protocol" enabled formation of one or more traditionalist denominations while allowing progressive and centrist churches to remain in the UMC. This was to be presented at GC in 2020.
- BUT, spring 2020: Covid forced the postponement of the GC until 2022, pausing discussion of the Protocol. From 2020 – 2022, traditionalist bishops worked on shaping a new denomination, announcing in March 2021 the name Global Methodist Church (GMC), and stated it would launch following approval of the Protocol in the summer of 2022. But in March 2022, the Commission postponed the next GC until 2024. Support for the Protocol is pulled by its original supporters, so traditionalists then announced a May 2022 launch of the Global Methodist Church.

Since the next General Conference will not be held until after the "exit clause" of paragraph 2553, and the launch of the GMC, much discussion and debate has arisen in churches across the denomination.