

Session One

Fall 2021 Update

- ▶ Waiting on General Conference to convene in August, 2022. 56% of delegates are from the U.S.; 32% from Africa; 6% Philippines; 4.5% Europe.
- ▶ GC is the only body that can alter the Book of Discipline. (Church law)
- ▶ There is growing concern with the Delta variants of Covid-19 that the global body of delegates will NOT be able to gather in person.
- ▶ IF not, the gathering would probably be postponed until the regularly scheduled gathering in 2024.

A History of How We Got Here

- ▶ 1990s- growing tensions/factions emerging: conservative/progressive
- ▶ Feb. 2002- 800 representatives of conservative churches gather to “oppose the influence of liberalism and progressivism in mainline denominations, with an emphasis on “orthodox” doctrine.
- ▶ General Conference, 2016- a vote to split the UMC narrowly fails in favor of a study commission to report to a called GC in 2019. Various plans of re-organizing the denomination would be developed.

A History of How We Got Here

- ▶ February, 2019- GC passes the “Traditional Plan” strengthening prohibitions against same sex unions and ordination of gay persons. The vote was 438-384. (later improper vote influencing was alleged.)
- ▶ January, 2020-- an ad hoc group of representatives of conservatives, progressives and centrists agree to a “Protocol” for separation.
- ▶ Spring 2021- Paragraph 2553 allows for “disaffiliation” of congregations for reasons of “conscience.” (Referred to the Judicial Council- ruled admissible to the Book of Discipline.) The “window” of disaffiliation ends in 2023.

Latest Developments

- ▶ The Wesley Covenant Association has launched a blueprint for a new, much more conservative denomination called “The Global Methodist Church.” (Complete with a transitional “Book of Discipline.”)
- ▶ The Global Methodist Church will have annual reviews of pastors and congregations for adherence to the church’s stances on “orthodoxy.” Any clergy or congregation not in compliance will be kicked out.
- ▶ The “Surviving UMC” leaders across the U.S. and world are making plans for a smaller but hopefully refocused global UMC church/presence.

Envisioning the “Surviving” UMC

- ▶ This October, the Church of the Resurrection in KC will gather the largest 400 UMC pastors likely to stay in the denomination to envision the future of the church and prepare for GC, 2022.
- ▶ Most likely, all language related to homosexuality will be removed from the surviving UMC Book of Discipline, in exchange for a provision for local churches determining their own marriage policies.
- ▶ Hopefully the surviving UMC will be streamlined in structure and cost. Already, Bishops are serving multiple Episcopal areas.

Primary Issues

- ▶ Church policies on a denominational and local basis related to homosexuality- especially same sex unions and ordination.
- ▶ How are “orthodox” beliefs (right beliefs) defined in a post-modern era? Who decides? How? By what criteria?
- ▶ UM Quadrilateral: (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience)
- ▶ What is the nature of the authority of scripture? What is the relationship of scripture to other elements of our Methodist Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason and experience.
- ▶ How can our “connectional” church be reformed and renewed for the 21st century?

Exiting Churches and Annual Conferences

- ▶ The new paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline that allows for churches to go through a lengthy exit/disaffiliation process for a reason “of conscience” stated in writing is only for individual churches.
- ▶ Several Annual Conference levels of approval are required to exist with resources and property.
- ▶ Churches have until the end of 2023 to get approval to “disaffiliate.”
- ▶ There is no large-scale, legal (church or civil) way for groups of churches or Annual Conferences to exit right now. Each one will have to negotiate their disaffiliation until General Conference meets. (pension/apportionments)

How will our local church move forward?

- ▶ Can we navigate toward a balanced middle position on the spectrum of theological, political and practical views?
- ▶ Our emphasis: Scripturally grounded, Christ-centered, Grace-based
- ▶ Grace-based- means maintaining the core of Wesleyan theology: Prevenient, Justifying and Sanctifying Grace.
- ▶ Ministry as being grace (love) embodied and in action!

How will our local church move forward?

- ▶ Is a faithful “middle/centrist” space still possible for a local congregation in our community and region? Can we maintain a balanced, “centerist” position/voice?
- ▶ Will a “centerist” coalition of churches emerge in the surviving UMC or beyond?
- ▶ What are the keys to maintaining OUR unity as a congregation?



Fall 2021 Town Hall Meetings

Listing your questions and concerns

Session Two: Our Local Congregation

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Sharing the story of grace... 4 Key Areas

▶ Our vision: What does sharing the story of grace look like?

-spirited, authentic worship with a “tapestry” of styles

-authentic connection (intentional Christian community...beloved community), excellence in communication, and genuine care

-impactful servant ministry engagement with our broader community

-compelling discipleship/spiritual formation opportunities for all ages

Challenges

- Covid has accelerated cultural trends of secularism
- secularism as diminished influence and relevance of Christian values/practices and norms.
- changes in concentric rings of connection or disconnection
- passing the content of faith forward (in a digital age)

Challenges

- demographics: aging core members; diminished younger generations; restarting the growth “cycle”
- instilling commitment, loyalty, and service vs. hyper-individualism (church on your own terms)
- re-tooling the church to keep it relevant/effective in the broader culture without losing integrity

Hopeful Signs

- ▶ Overall, we have navigated Covid well (better than many UMCs)
- ▶ We are updating our ministries (35+ projects to “retool”)
- ▶ The starting of our RENEW service targeting YA/Wesley students
- ▶ 30+ new participants have come from our Covid period online offerings

Hopeful Signs

- ▶ We are financially sound
- ▶ We have “re-branded” to emphasize our local church amid denominational break-up
- ▶ A new vision for the “surviving” UMC will emerge

Discussion

- ▶ Is a faithful “middle/centrist” space still possible for a local congregation in our community and region?
- ▶ Are there red lines a majority of the congregation doesn't want to cross?
- ▶ What are the keys to maintaining OUR unity as a congregation?
- ▶ What are your biggest concerns for our congregation right now?