

# We Confess



## JANUARY - APRIL 2016

### *Pray for Safety & Civility at General Conference*

General Conference 2016 is less than a month away. Please be in prayer for our denomination's legislative session as it will determine the future direction of our church. More than in years past, there is great concern about the safety of those involved in the meeting. Although the rules state that only delegates and bishops can be on the floor during session, this rule has been violated for many years as demonstrators have been allowed on the floor or enters to disrupt proceedings and, in one case, destroy a chalice on the alter. Those who oppose the church's long standing position on issues of sexuality have been urging supporters for many months to make their voices heard at GC through protests and disruption tactics. The Reconciling Ministries Network Gather at the River Conference last August went as far as to provide workshops on disruption "Strategies and Techniques of (non) violent Direct Action." The Love Prevails website states, *"The time for polite persuasion has passed. To ensure discrimination no longer flows uninterrupted, we will protest and disrupt local, national and global events. We will undermine all policies that limit or deny the full participation of LGBTQ United Methodists in the life of the church. Through our media campaign and physical presence, we will stand in the way of business as usual."* It is expected that protests and acts of disruption will begin on opening day. If history is any indication, the church is in for a very contentious meeting. In response to these concerns, several renewal groups sent a letter to the Commission on General Conference and the bishops asking how they plan to prepare for certain disruption and potential violence. The bishops' response included the following statement:

*"The Commission has taken seriously its responsibility to care for the safety of those attending the conference and the effective operation of the General Conference. In coordination with local officials and our local support team, appropriate strategies are being developed to respond to situations that may emerge. As with past General Conferences, there will be [a] Response Team coordinating these efforts."*

We earnestly pray that the presiding bishop upholds the rules of the conference and does not allow acts of protest and disruption to hijack the important work of General Conference as they have in years past. There is also a financial cost involved. One hour of GC time during demonstrations will cost the church \$120,000. This is neither an expression of holy conferencing or a display of effective stewardship with the church's time and money.

#### In This Issue

- **Pray for Safety & Civility at GC**
- **Issues to Watch for at GC**
- **The Importance of the CM and GC**
- **Bishop Scott Jones refers Complaint to Counsel**



## ISSUES TO WATCH AT GENERAL CONFERENCE

Petition Number: 60929-GA-¶705-§-G seeks to increase Central Conference representation in light of the growth seen in places like Africa.

*Amend ¶ 705 by addition as follows:*

*The following provisions shall govern the nomination and election of the voting membership of those general Church bodies to which the Jurisdictional Conferences nominate and elect and Central Conferences nominate and elect members. The voting members of the general church bodies must be proportionate and equitable by jurisdictional and central conferences. Central Conferences Representation shall be equal to at least one-third of the general Church bodies' membership.*

The current imbalance can be seen in the disparity between General Conference delegate representation in United States jurisdictions and those in the Central Conferences. The disparity is even more stark when comparing Europe and the Philippines with West Africa:

PERCENTAGES	% of Members	Total Members	Delegates	Avg. Member Per Delegate	% of Delegates
North Central USA	10.2%	1,279,976	92	13,913	10.6%
Northeastern USA	10.1%	1,266,098	86	14,722	10.0%
South Central USA	13.6%	1,715,834	108	15,887	12.5%
Southeastern USA	22.5%	2,829,689	188	15,052	21.8%
Western USA	2.7%	343,894	30	11,463	3.5%
Africa Central	6.0%	750,609	42	17,872	4.9%
Congo	20.7%	2,600,987	138	18,848	16.0%
West Africa	12.0%	1,510,831	80	18,885	9.3%
Europe	0.5%	60,073	40	1,502	4.6%
Philippines	1.7%	218,236	50	4,365	5.8%
Concordat	0.0%	-	10		1.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,576,227</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>14,556</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>EUROPE AND PHILIPPINES</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>278,309</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>3,092</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
<b>WEST AFRICA</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>1,510,831</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>18,885</b>	<b>9.3%</b>

## Proposed Compromises that Offer Little Hope for Unity

There will be numerous petitions at General Conference to remove language from the Discipline regarding homosexuality, marriage, and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. Among these petitions is A Third Way, proposed by The Connectional Table (CT), the church body tasked with discerning and articulating “the vision for the church and the stewardship of the mission, ministries, and resources...as determined by General Conference and in consultation with the Council of Bishops.” What has been presented as a compromise in the name of unity would be more like an acquiescence on the part of evangelicals to an almost complete reversal of the church’s historic stance on sexuality. The CT is calling for a redefinition of marriage that deletes the word “heterosexual” from all statements about marriage, instead affirming the union of “two people” in a “monogamous” relationship while acknowledging marriage is traditionally between one man and one woman. In a similar way, A Third Way relegates the current position of the church that states “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching” to a traditional, or “historical” position, suggesting it may no longer be applicable. Annual Conferences would decide if sexual orientation would be a barrier to ordination, local pastors would determine whether or not to perform same sex marriages and the action of performing a same-sex marriage would no longer be a chargeable offense. This divisive issue would simply move the battleground from General Conference every four years to Annual Conferences and local churches on a yearly or even daily basis.

*Other examples of language changes regarding homosexuality to the Discipline include:*

- Essentially voiding the current language of the *Discipline* by adding **“While a significant majority of United Methodists continue to hold the long-standing belief that homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian teaching, we acknowledge and respect differences in opinion on human homosexuality.”**
- Removing the word **heterosexual** from the statement affirming sexual relations only in the covenant of monogamous ~~heterosexual~~ marriage.
- Deleting the statement **“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching”** as well as the subsequent statement that **“self avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”**
- Replacing the words **“a man and a woman”** with **“two persons”** from the definition of marriage as defined by the Social Principles which states “we affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between two persons ~~a man and a woman~~.”
- Deleting the statement **“Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”**
- Removing language that prohibits UM funds from being given to any gay caucuses or groups to **“promote the acceptance of homosexuality.”**



## DIVESTMENT

The 2012 General Conference in Tampa rejected petitions calling for divestment from Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard and Caterpillar because these companies provided products and services to Israel. Instead, the Finance and Administration Committee called for positive rather than punitive solutions. The issue of divestment will again be addressed at General Conference in Portland. Petition 60857 states: “The 2016 General Conference calls for all boards and agencies of The United Methodist Church to take action to divest promptly from Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, and Hewlett Packard and continue to exclude these companies until they end their involvement with the Israeli occupation.”

## Petition to Withdraw from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC)

There are several petitions that call for the “Board of Church and Society and the United Methodist Women to withdraw immediately from membership in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (Petition 60837).” Petition 201504 lays out in great detail the concerns many United Methodists have with the church’s continued association with RCRC. Similar petitions were presented at General Conferences in 2008 and 2012. Although the 2008 GC narrowly voted to continue participation in RCRC, many African delegates were not present. This has long been an issue of great importance to the Central Conferences and their votes may have resulted in a very different outcome. The 2012 petition was voted on affirmatively in legislative subcommittee and committee but never received a plenary vote and, therefore, could not be adopted. RCRC has consistently supported all abortions including partial birth abortion.

### No Guarantee of Appointment

Amend ¶ 54 as indicated following:

**¶ 54. Article X.**—The bishops shall appoint, after consultation with the district superintendents, ministers to the charges; and they shall have such responsibilities and authorities as the General Conference shall prescribe. A presiding bishop has the authority, but not the obligation, to appoint any minister to any charge within the annual conference where the minister has membership and where the charge is located within the conference over which the bishop presides. This provision is not a guarantee of appointment of any minister. Moreover, the guarantee of a right to trial prescribed in Restrictive Rule 4, ¶ 20, of this Constitution is not a guarantee of appointment or a guarantee of lifetime employment for any minister. General Conference may provide for the bishops to make other appointments of ministers and other persons in representative service in the Church.

*The underlined language would be added to Article X thereby repealing the guarantee that every UM pastor will be assigned to a church .*

## PLAN UMC: CUTTING DOWN ON THE OVERHEAD

The big issue before the 2012 United Methodist General Conference was the Call to Action, and a restructuring proposal that would have downsized and reformed some of the general agencies of the church and brought accountability to these agencies. The proposal had the support of the Connectional Table, the bishops, and a number of other groups, but there was disagreement as to details. A compromise plan finally passed the General Conference only to be ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council, United Methodism's Supreme Court.

The proposal is back again for the 2016 General Conference. Plan UMC Revised, makes minor changes from the legislation of four years ago so that it will meet the constitutional requirements. It reduces the number of agencies, increases their accountability by means of a strong executive, and keeps agencies focused on the church's mission statement. For many in the church, there is a disconnect between the agencies and local churches; there is a lack of collaboration between agencies, and the tendency for the agencies to act independently, accountable to no one but themselves. This time the proposal lacks the support of both the bishops and the Connectional Table.

### What is Rule 44?

The Commission on General Conference (COGC) has proposed the addition of Rule 44 as an alternative process for considering legislation. Although the rule is not tied to any specific legislation, Judi Kenaston, Chairperson of COGC, has acknowledged the commission intends to ask GC to use rule 44 on 99 pieces of legislation, all of which pertain to issues of sexuality. Here is a brief summary of the process:

- Delegates are divided into 58 small groups of no more than 15 people
- A “monitor” is assigned to each group from the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the General Commission on Religion and Race, and JustPeace to encourage adherence to the “Guidelines for Conversation” that are part of the proposal which aims to discourage any language or behavior that might be deemed offensive to others.
- Groups will be asked to make recommendations to the Facilitation Group as to how the petitions should be processed.
- The Facilitation Group will be comprised of one male and one female from each central conference and US jurisdiction nominated by the Leadership Discernment Committee of the Council of Bishops. From these 24 names, the Executive Committee of the (COGC) will choose six to be presented for election by the GC.
- Members of the GC may nominate an additional eighteen for consideration.
- The election of six persons shall be by plurality with the Secretary of the General Conference serving as an ex-officio member of this group.

This proposed “Group Discernment Process” would effectively replace the individual vote of each delegate with the vote of six individuals. Regardless of the intentions behind this proposal, Rule 44 would give too much power to the six-member Facilitation Group. Especially on an issue of such enormous importance to the future of The United Methodist Church.



## WHY IS GENERAL CONFERENCE IMPORTANT?

To understand the importance of General Conference it is helpful to review how the United Methodist Church is structured. Methodism traces its American origins to the organizing conference in Baltimore in 1784. The young United States of America was also organizing itself about the same time and the church structure took on many of the same characteristics as the nation's structure.

In the church, the chief executives for the denomination is the Council of Bishops. The chief legislative body for the church is the General Conference, made up of delegates from the conferences, which meets every four years. The church judicial function is handled by the Judicial Council for the general church.

The General Conference as the chief legislative body of the church sets the rules and laws and policies for the denomination. It alone speaks officially for the denomination. Even the bishops do not have authority to speak for the church.

While the General Conference can make social and doctrinal statements and while it may make changes in the moral and social stances of the church, it cannot change the church's doctrine which is protected by the Constitution of the Church. The Constitution can be amended but amendments are difficult to come by since they require a 2/3 vote by members to the annual conferences and may be ratified by 89 of 133 Annual Conferences.



## PRAYING FOR GENERAL CONFERENCE

A large group of people have committed themselves to pray the Lord's Prayer every day at noon from now until General Conference. In addition The Confessing Movement board is encouraging individuals to personal time not only in prayer, but prayer and fasting for the United Methodist Church and its General Conference.

Here are some prayer suggestions:

... that the Holy Spirit will give guidance to delegates as they discern God's will.

...for success in acquiring visas for overseas delegates, and for travel safety for all delegates.

...that the right persons will be hired for the written translation work and, especially, live translators during meetings for non-English speaking delegates.

...that the delegates and attendees will treat one another with Christian love, civility and respect.

...that the conference would be free from intimidation, bullying, disruptive demonstrations and any efforts to impose ideological positions apart from respectful discussion

## UPDATES AT GENERAL CONFERENCE

*The Confessing Movement will provide updates from General Conference through our website, Facebook page, and Twitter. The meeting begins May 10 and concludes on May 20. Please follow updates regularly for new information.*

## WHY WE NEED THE CONFESSING MOVEMENT

The Confessing Movement continues to work for revitalization and refocus of The United Methodist Church in the original precept of the faith, particularly the Great Commission and humanitarian relief efforts. We seek to contend for the apostolic faith and to inform and motivate the church to reaffirm its great doctrines and the authority of Scripture. The Confessing Movement will participate and discuss with delegates petitions at General Conference. We will support petitions that uphold Holy Scripture and oppose petitions who destroy or dilute Christian truth or our Wesleyan heritage



### **Bishop Scott Jones Refers Complaint Against Rev. Cynthia Meyer to Counsel for the Church**



Bishop Scott Jones is the presiding bishop of the Great Plains Annual Conference in the South Central Jurisdiction.

On January 3, 2016 Rev. Cynthia Meyer shared in her Sunday morning sermon that she was in a committed relationship with another woman. On January 5, after receiving a copy of the sermon from Rev. Meyer, her district superintendent, Rev. David Watson, filed a formal complaint against her because it is a chargeable offense according to the *Discipline* for a clergy member to be a self-avowed, practicing homosexual.

In accordance with church law, Bishop Scott Jones and Rev. Meyer participated in the supervisory response process but were unable to agree on a just resolution. As a result, Bishop Jones referred the complaint to the Rev. David Bell as counsel for the Church. The next step in the process is for Rev. Bell to review the evidence and determine whether the complaint will be taken to the Committee on Investigation. It is the responsibility of the committee to decide whether to move the matter to a church trial.

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**within The United Methodist Church**

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The United Methodist Church to retrieve its**

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