

## **FAQ from listening sessions with the New England delegation to 2019 General Conference**

During 2018, approximately 285 people attended listening sessions with members of the New England delegation to the [2019 General Conference](#) (Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis). Delegates shared “how we got here” and heard people’s questions and hopes for our church. Below are some of the common questions that were raised and the delegation’s responses.

We are deeply grateful for this input and feel very blessed to hear the amazing commitment and hopes so many people have for the future of this denomination.

We appreciate your prayers and commit to continuing conversations whatever the future holds for all of us. May we all be blessed by the opportunity to be part of this historic opportunity to create a way forward that welcomes all people to God’s church.

– [New England Delegation to the 2019 General Conference](#)

### **Q: Is Feb. 23-26 really enough time to complete the work that needs to be done?**

Yes, and no. Legislatively, it is our hope that four days in St. Louis will be more than enough time to create a way forward. However, we recognize that the work will need to continue and we are always moving toward Christian perfection. Our responsibility as a delegation may end in the coming months, but we will be present with local churches, districts, and the greater Annual Conference and The UMC as we implement the way forward. We encourage lay and clergy alike to engage in continuing conversation before, during, and after the February General Conference as we discern God's will for The UMC.

### **Q: How will voting work?**

Unlike traditional General Conferences, the special session will not be broken into legislative committees. Instead, the entire General Conference will function as a single committee for one day, then we meet in full plenary. We believe the hope is that we be able to focus on and vote on a single framework as a group of petitions. In addition, we will re-adopt rules and elect officers for the legislative committee day.

### **Q: What happens on Feb. 27 and beyond?**

We cannot predict the outcome of this historic General Conference, however we expect much communication will be available. First, you will see information in the news which may not completely explain what has occurred. Second, whatever is approved will require explanation and communication with members of each church in our Annual Conference. Some actions could take months or years to implement, and even those proposals which simply change language will take time to live into if adopted. Importantly, several of the plans proposed require amendments to The United Methodist Constitution. Changes to the Constitution require a 2/3rds majority vote from all conferences throughout the world. Locally, churches should be planning to worship as usual on March 3.

### **Q: What happens if no plan is chosen at the 2019 Special General Conference?**

A: It is our hope that the body will discern a way forward, however sometimes the Spirit does not work in clear ways. Should no plan pass, we will continue in discernment, advocacy and conversations seeking understanding, acceptance and growth for the United Methodist community.

### **Q: If the One Church Plan passes as submitted, local churches would have an option to covenant with the bishop of their annual conference about whether they will accept a pastor who identifies as an LGBTQ individual. What happens in annual conferences who have already adopted language or resolutions that prevent discrimination?**

We trust the work of the Holy Spirit as the Cabinets and Bishops discern appointments across the connection; it is our hope that the best fit will be made in each local church.

### **Q: Is there a place for me in the UMC? How can we stay together but all live our conscience?**

We hear the pain and yearning for belonging voiced by so many persons. We believe God has a vision for The UMC moving forward, and that you will be welcome and feel like you belong in it. This is our deepest prayer.

### **Q: How does this impact the ministry of my local church?**

We hope that this will not significantly impact your local church and the ministry you are doing in the name of Christ! We also believe that courageous conversations held with respect and trust can catalyze learning, growth and reconciliation. Currently, your church is part of The United Methodist Connection in The New England Annual Conference, and we pray all churches will

continue ministering in their communities as God has equipped you. Leaders are already working to provide information and interpretation as the future unfolds.

**Q: Will there be options for churches to leave the United Methodist Church?**

There is always an option to leave The United Methodist Church. The big question is whether churches will be able to leave with their property and other assets. Each of the plans proposed offers a different process for leaving the denomination. Wesley's Trust Clause and other financial obligations create commitments to each other in our connectional polity.

**Q: What happens next? What does the timeline look like?**

Holy Conferencing requires an openness to the movement of the Spirit, so it is unwise to try to predict what will happen at GC 2019. However, we do know that the Called Session cannot dissolve the denomination or close local churches. After our delegation returns from the Called Session, there will be district conversations where we can all talk about "what now?" The New England Annual Conference will gather in June, as planned. If there are major decisions to be made, we will make them together, as part of the same conference that we all know, love, and wrestle in together. We anticipate, but can't be certain, that if there are major changes that involve restructuring the denomination, appropriate legislation will come before the General Conference in May 2020. A variety of possible timelines would be proposed to enact any legislation adopted.

**Q: What's the general view that our delegates are favoring?**

Delegates to the General Conference are not bound to vote together and are expected to vote their individual conscience in the midst of holy conferencing. As a delegation, we have covenanted to listen to God, to each other, to the Annual Conference, and to the other delegates at the General Conference, and to prayerfully discern God's vision for The UMC today. We hold commitments to integrity, our relationships with one another, and inclusion of all people regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, and diverse theological views related to human sexuality. With diverse petitions being proposed, it is hard to say which options delegates will end up voting on. Only as petitions and proposals are finally placed before the General Conference body will we really know what we are going to be considering as we seek a fair, just and fully-inclusive way forward.

**Q: Is there any other decision other than homosexuality being considered at the 2019 General Conference?**

The General Conference Committee on Reference has determined which petitions are in harmony with the stated intent of the special session ([see the press release](#)). All the petitions being considered are related to the current paragraphs in the Book of Discipline that either name The United Methodist Church's stance on homosexuality, or would be directly impacted by making a change to the language and policy on this subject.

**Q: What will it mean if the General Conference chooses to divide the connection?**

A decision to divide the denomination would cause serious changes in the organization and structures of The United Methodist Church, our global mission commitments and lead to a time of focus on internal re-organization. The delegation will share more information with the New England Annual Conference if needed, and will depend on the conference leadership to guide the conference through the modifications that this decision would bring. We are asking the New England Annual Conference to remain in prayer so that God will guide all of the delegates toward options that stop the harm we are doing to each other, progressives and traditionalists, and point us to a new way forward.