



A Perspective on the United Methodist Church and Looking to the Future

With the pandemic hopefully behind us and looking toward the future, we wanted to share with you some information on recent developments within the United Methodist Church.

As you probably know, Midway is part of the North Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Each year the clergy and lay delegates meet to conduct the business of the conference. General Conference is a worldwide gathering of clergy and lay delegates that meets every four years to make decisions and set policies for the worldwide denomination. General Conference is the only body that speaks for the UMC; not even the Council of Bishops speaks for the denomination.

After General Conference was postponed in 2020 due to Covid, the next General Conference was scheduled for August/September 2021 in Minneapolis. It was to be an in-person conference bringing together United Methodists from around the globe to fully address several key issues. However, due to the pandemic, the organizers announced that instead a virtual conference would be held, scheduled for May 2021.

Unfortunately, this Special Session of General Conference was also canceled, moving the next General Conference to August 29-September 6, 2022. This was disappointing to many United Methodists who expected that conference, whether in person or virtual, to bring resolution to some of the longstanding divisions with the denomination.

A little history....The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church merged in 1968 and created the United Methodist Church. For almost 50 years, there have been within the UMC differences between traditional and progressive members' views on some of the Church's historic teachings.

This division has continued to widen over the years. In many ways this is reflected in our country's current political climate. If we go back to the 2016 General Conference and the Special Called 2019 General Conference held in St Louis, the divide over human sexuality, the definition of marriage, and the standards for ordination were the "front and center" topics. Even though the Conference voted to uphold the current language in the *Book of Discipline* that states a traditional view of marriage and church doctrine, no path toward definitive resolution was reached.

As the dialogue and division have intensified, United Methodists representing progressive and traditional views have formed different groups. (Much like our country's political climate, there seems to be little acknowledgement that many people's view fall somewhere in between either end of the extremes.)

Some groups representing a more progressive perspective are:

- Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) rmnetwork.org
- Liberation Methodist Connection (LMX) www.thelmx.org
- UMC Next umcnext.com

Some groups representing a traditional perspective are:

- Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) wesleyancovenant.org
- Good News goodnewsmag.org
- The Confessing Movement confessingumc.org

Following General Conference 2019, some key world-wide UMC leadership, representing both traditional and progressive views, diligently worked together to prepare a roadmap to resolve the conflict once and for all entitled ***Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation*** (gracethroughseparation.com). The Protocol, as it is has come to be known, addresses the needs and wishes of individual conferences and congregations to choose their affiliation, and includes a procedure for them to retain assets and property. Supporters of the Protocol believe that with graceful separation, progressives and traditionalists can move beyond the conflict, and both sides can embody an expression of Methodist Christianity that reflects their convictions.

If the Protocol passes, progressives will retain the current United Methodist name and much of the existing bureaucracy in what will be a post-separation form of Methodism, while traditionalists would form a new expression of Methodism in a world-wide denomination called the **Global Methodist Church (GMC, globalmethodist.org)**. In early June, the North Georgia Annual Conference passed a “Resolution in Support of the Protocol of Grace and Reconciliation Through Separation,” a statement of support for the Protocol. Only passage of the Protocol by the General Conference, though, is binding.

Out of conflict comes an opportunity for us as a church. We have the opportunity...

- to be in prayer for Midway, the UMC, GMC, and the 2022 General Conference
- to listen carefully, fairly, and reverently to all sides
- to love, respect, and be sensitive to all members and views of our church family
- and to keep our focus on the vital ministry of Midway in our community and beyond.

While these are challenging times, our prayer is that over the next decade millions of Methodists, both United Methodists and Global Methodists, will be joined by millions of new passionate followers of Jesus Christ who will know nothing of the current conflict. Instead, they will join a denomination of like-minded Christians to follow Scripture, grow in God’s grace, and love God and neighbor just like Jesus.

Again, General Conference won’t take place now until August 29-September 6, 2022, which is over a year away. In the meantime, to keep you informed, Midway’s Executive Team has approved the formation of a General Conference Communications Task Force and the Nominations Committee has selected its members. This task force will continue to update you as more information becomes available.

Blessings,

Rev. Jennie Andone, Senior Pastor

Steven Holley, Church Council Chair

Bob & Carol Koenig, Lay Members of Annual Conference

Hugh Scott, Midway General Conference Communications Task Force Chair