



Coffee Conversations – Questions from Session 3 and other FAQs: General Conference

1. When is General Conference?

General Conference will convene April 23 – May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

2. Is “General Conference” what used to be MN Annual Conference or is it the Conference that is representing the worldwide Methodist Church?

The General Conference is the body that represents the whole worldwide United Methodist Church. How the United Methodist Church is structured is not a short answer:

To set this denominational structure in context, let’s start with Centennial UMC:

- Centennial United Methodist Church is a local church.
- We are one of 80 or so local churches with the Twin Cities District.
- The Twin Cities District is one of five districts within the Minnesota Annual Conference.
- The Minnesota Annual Conference is one of ten Annual Conferences in the North Central Jurisdictional Conference.
- The North Central Jurisdictional Conference is one of five Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States.
 - Outside the United States, Annual Conferences are grouped in what’s called Central Conferences. There are seven Central Conferences in the world total.
- Together, the seven Central Conferences and the five Jurisdictional Conferences are all represented by the General Conference, which is the biggest umbrella and highest decision-making body of the United Methodist Church.

(The General Conference, the Council of Bishops, and the Judicial Council make up the governing bodies of the United Methodist Church. They are comparable to the three branches of government in the United States. General Conference is like the Legislative branch, Council of Bishops is like the Executive Branch, and the Judicial Council is like the Judicial Branch. This is not a perfect comparison, but it helps to understand how they all work together to divide up the leadership responsibilities in the UMC.)

The General Conference is the highest decision-making body within the United Methodist Church (which is a unified worldwide denomination- not to be confused with the Global Methodist Church, which is the newly formed denomination).

The General Conference is made up of representatives (equal parts lay and clergy) from all Central Conferences and Jurisdictional Conferences. This is everybody. The General Conference convenes every four years to decide doctrine, make rulings, and establishes procedures for virtually every aspect of the church’s life. (This is why an updated Book of Discipline, Book of Resolutions, and Social Principles comes out every four years- because the only body that can make changes to those documents is the General Conference.)

3. How many churches are still represented at General Conference and what is the world-wide representation? How are United Methodist congregations distributed across the world?

There are 330 local churches within the Minnesota Annual Conference. According to the internet, there are 43,409 local United Methodist Church worldwide (as of 2018).

The United Methodist Church connects more than 12 million members on four continents. The global distribution is represented at General Conference and has shifted over the past 40 years. In 1980, 8% of General Conference delegates came from outside the United States. In 2024, 44% of the delegates will come from outside the United States.

4. What has happened to disaffiliating churches in Minnesota?

Most have moved to the Global Methodist Church. Some have moved to other forms of Methodism or to free churches.

5. Who is in the Global Methodist Church? Will this new denomination support existing Methodist institutions such as Africa University?

The Global Methodist Church is a new theologically conservative denomination, composed largely of clergy and churches that have separated from the United Methodist Church. Launched in May 2022, its policies and programs are still being formulated. Adoption of formal constitution is set for the fall of 2024.

6. What is happening for United Methodists in locations where there are no longer reconciling local churches?

This is a challenge for our denomination moving forward. We need to look at how we connect people and churches in other ways of worship and participation.

7. Who can change the UMC Book of Discipline? Who can change the UMC Constitution?

The General Conference can change the Book of Discipline. Amendments to the United Methodist Church Constitution are passed by vote at the Annual Conference level. To pass, an amendment must receive $\frac{2}{3}$ of all votes cast across all Annual Conferences.

8. Is the issue for General Conference regionalization?

We do not yet know what specific legislation will be considered by General Conference. But regionalization is a likely discussion point. Regionalization allows different regions of the United Methodist Church to operate under policies relevant to their context. Presently, churches in the United States work under the current Book of Discipline. Churches in other parts of the world operate under their local context.

9. What are the most controversial questions that are expected to be voted on?

Specifically, on the eligibility of queer candidates for ordained ministry, and the legality officiating same-gender marriages by ordained clergy.

It is important to note that while there will be motions to change the language concerning human sexuality, what we are not voting on is whether a local church or any particular member of a United Methodist Church “has to agree” or “has to believe” one way or the other. So any

insinuations that General Conference is voting on who gets to stay and who is getting kicked out are not correct.

The consequences of these motions will largely be whether clergy will be penalized, de-frocked, or have charges brought upon them if they officiate a same-gender marriage, or whether bishops will be penalized for ordaining queer clergy.

Beyond that, every individual lives in some sort of tension with the adopted doctrine of any denomination all the time. And they get to choose if they want to remain a part of the body and live in that tension, or they feel that tension is intolerable and they decide to disaffiliate (remove themselves from membership) from the denomination.

10. Will the congregations and clergy who disaffiliated be represented at General Conference?

Clergy and churches who have disaffiliated prior to General Conference will not be represented at General Conference. Once you are disaffiliated, you are no longer a part of the UMC, so you would not be represented at the General Conference of the UMC.

11. The MN Conference is Reconciling. If a church disaffiliates, is it still part of the conference?

The Minnesota Annual Conference has adopted a vision statement which outlines the values we will hold and that we will not penalize clergy who officiate over same-gender weddings, or prohibit queer candidates from pursuing ordination. Any clergy or churches that disagree with that statement who are members of the UMC and the Minnesota Annual Conference are within their right to live in tension with those values and remain in the Minnesota Annual Conference, or they may choose to disaffiliate. If they choose to disaffiliate, they are no longer a part of the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and also no longer represented (that is able to vote) at Annual Conference.

12. With some churches leaving the Minnesota Annual Conference, will there be budget cuts to staffing or programming at the conference level that will impact the churches that remain with the conference?

Bishop Plambeck is overseeing a significant restructuring of the Conference level staff to fit the needs of local churches as well as fit with the financial realities brought about by COVID and the schism. Local churches will continue to be resourced, supported, and supervised by conference staff.

13. Is CUMC sending any representatives to General Conference? If so, who? Is MN Annual Conference sending reps to General Conference? Who? Were these reps selected last year at MN Annual Conference?

The General Conference is the biggest umbrella, representing and speaking for all the UMC. The General Conference exists only when it is assembled every four years. It is not a set body. Every two years (I think) each Annual Conference elects representatives to Jurisdictional Conference or Central Conference. And every four years (quadrennium) members of the Jurisdictional Conference elect representatives to the General Conference. So the individuals that make up these bodies changes every time they happen.

Centennial UMC elects lay representatives to Annual Conference, who, with the appointed clergy, have voting power within the Annual Conference. Both those Lay Representatives (called Lay Equalization Delegates because there are always the same number of lay reps elected as there

are clergy appointed to make sure that Annual Conference is made up of equal parts lay and clergy). Those Clergy and Lay are eligible to be elected by the annual conference to be representatives at the Central Jurisdictional Conference, which elects representatives to General Conference.

Centennial UMC's lay equalization delegates for 2024 are Amy Hostetler and Michael Webster. We elect these representatives every June at our Church Conference.

14. Is there an expectation that the Discipline will be amended?

Most items to be voted on at General Conference are amendments, changes, updates to the Book of Discipline. This is why a new Book of Discipline comes out after General Conference (every 4 years).