

Monthly Update

August 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The August edition of the Monthly Update addresses various aspects of the issues facing our United Methodist Church here in the United States and worldwide as it deals with the fallout from the results of General Conference 2019 (GC2019) in St. Louis held this past February. We present a plan by two of our bishops as a way for us to move into the future for the denomination. Even though we give coverage what they have here, we do not necessarily support it; it is offered to you for your information to consider and analyze to show you what is on the table. This plan exemplifies concerns that we have across our United Methodist Church for how we will move forward from here. This Update also gives some of the fallout over where we are as a church – that of future projections; this is to be expected for those on both sides of the “sexuality” issue.

A petition passed by the Western North Carolina Conference is included to give an example of the deep interest that was shown in many, if not most, of the annual conferences that have met over the past few months. Even though a lack of space precludes our giving more of the news covered (literally from coast to coast and from overseas), we did want to present this to show how confusing (and confused) are the discussions that are being held. What is missing in all of this is what the Bible has to say.

Finally, we have included a very brief summary, often only two or three lines, from each of the annual conference reports of those that have been held. If any of you wants a more complete report, please let us know and we will either mail you one or send it to you by e-mail; just let us know which conference report you are requesting.

Despite all of the things going on in our United Methodist Church and the consequent turbulence, I would urge you to remain optimistic. There is much to do, and assuredly those of us in Concerned Methodists are doing all that we can to effect a good outcome for not only our denomination but also for its members and local churches. It is important for each of us to: 1) pray for guidance and peace (as exemplified in Rev. Boyette’s prayer in this Update); 2) pray that the members of our church will be led into the truth of His Word; 3) pray for those of us involved in the renewal effort; 4) inform others of what is at stake here; 5) do not leave our United Methodist Church but resolve to stay and fight for its future; and finally 6) let your money speak for you – use it wisely in helping in this battle, especially between now and GC2020 in Minneapolis. There is still much to be done. We can have a bright future. Let us stand firm for the “faith entrusted to the saints.”

We ask for your continued partnering with us through your gifts and your prayers.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

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August 2019 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

A great prayer for each of us as we begin a new week of loving and serving the Lord: “Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.” Psalm 25:4-5

– Posted by The Rev. Dr. Keith Boyette, July 15, 2019

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The Good Stuff. *Helen Keller.* She has stated among other things: “Four things to learn in life: To think clearly without hurry or confusion; To love everybody sincerely; To act in everything with the highest motives; To trust God unhesitatingly.”

On June 26, 1955, the day before her 75th birthday, she stated: “Self-pity is our worst enemy and if we yield to it, we can never do anything wise in the world.” She also stated, “I thank God for my handicaps, for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.”

In the film documentary of her life, *The Unconquered*, Helen Keller responded to the question, “Can you see the world?”: “I can see, and that is why I can be so happy, in what you call the dark, but which to me is golden. I can see a God-made world, not a man-made world.” Regarding reading the Bible, She also stated, “It gives me a deep comforting sense that ‘things seen are temporal and things unseen are eternal.’”

Cultural views of handicapped persons is strikingly different.

The traditional Islamic attitude is that a handicapped person is being punished or cursed of Allah. “Such are the men whom Allah has cursed for He has made them deaf and blinded their sight.” (Qur’an 47:23)

Hindu and Buddhist attitudes is that a handicapped person is being punished for sins of a supposed past life by an impersonal “bad” karma.

The Socialist attitude is that a handicapped person is a burden on the State, being worth less because of their limited capacity to contribute to society.

The Jewish attitude of defending the handicapped is in Leviticus 19:14: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD,” and Deuteronomy 27:18 “Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.”

The Christian attitude was expressed by Jesus, who said: “Whatever you have done unto the least of these my brethren you have done unto me.”

Helen Keller stated: “Just as all things upon earth represent and image forth all the realities of another world, so the Bible is one mighty representative of the whole spiritual life of humanity.”

– William J. Federer, *American Minute.*

Of Interest.

+ ***2 bishops offer plan for denomination’s future.*** Two bishops propose turning The United Methodist Church into an umbrella organization for new, self-governing church groups that would offer different approaches on ordination of gay clergy and same-sex unions. Michigan Conference Bishop David Bard and Texas Conference Bishop Scott Jones began collaborating on a plan after the rancorous 2019 General Conference and shared it with *United Methodist News* this week. “We both envision a future where the church will focus on its mission of making disciples and spend less time and energy debating issues of human sexuality, which means we need to bless different parts of The United Methodist Church to be about the mission in their own ways,” Jones said.

The denomination has faced conflict for more than four decades over theological differences regarding homosexuality. The 2019 General Conference, held Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis, reinforced restrictions on LGBTQ ordination and same-sex unions, but also led to protests and resistance by many churches across the U.S. Bard and Jones’ plan comes as various groups of church leaders discuss options for the denomination, including schism. A Sept. 18 deadline looms for petitions to be submitted for the 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis.

Though bishops don't vote at General Conference, Bard and Jones said they feel an urgency to stimulate debate and action. "We're offering this plan as a thought experiment that we hope others will take seriously and consider as they are making decisions about the future of the church," Jones said. Bard added, "Scott and I acknowledge that there's room for other ideas to be incorporated."

Under the Bard-Jones plan – titled "A New Form of Unity: A Way Forward Strategy 2019-2022" – an annual conference would choose to join one of three groups the bishops are tentatively calling the Traditional Methodist Church, the Open Methodist Church and the Progressive Methodist Church.

The Traditional Methodist Church would begin with a Book of Discipline that includes the Traditional Plan, which passed by a vote of 438 to 384 at the 2019 General Conference and strengthened enforcement of restrictions on LGBTQ ordination and same-sex unions.

The Open Methodist Church and Progressive Methodist Church would begin with a Book of Discipline modified to include the Simple Plan as presented in St. Louis. That plan called for eliminating restrictions on same-sex unions and ordination of gay persons as clergy, as well as removing the church's official position that homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching."

Under the Bard-Jones proposal, the Progressive Methodist Church's Book of Discipline would be further modified to affirm clearly the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in marriage and ordination candidacy. The Open Methodist Church and Progressive Methodist Church might choose to be one group, the bishops say.

The two or three churches would each decide on a name ("Methodist" isn't required to be part of it), and each would hold its own General Conferences, with complete freedom to revise its Book of Discipline. Each would fund its bishops and decide on approved seminaries. The two or three churches would share in governing the General Council of Finance and Administration, Wespeth, the United Methodist Publishing House and the General Commission on Archives and History. They would contribute proportionally to the Black College Fund and Africa University. Other general church agencies would have their own boards and be accountable to the Open Methodist Church but would provide services as requested to the other churches.

The United Methodist Church would no longer have individual members but would continue to exist "as an umbrella to facilitate this new form of unity," the plan says. The churches would be in full communion, and each could use the cross-and-flame logo of The United Methodist Church.

Though specific in many ways, the plan leaves unanswered big questions, such as the global nature of The United Methodist Church. "Churches in Europe and Asia could form their own Methodist Churches or belong to one of the two or three churches, with the precise nature of the relationship to be determined," the plan says. "There would be a United Methodist Church in Africa, the precise affiliations to the two or three churches to be determined." Asked about the ambiguity, Bard said, "While we've had conversations with our colleagues from other parts of the world, we didn't want to go too far in defining what they may wish to do."

Another unknown: Would these new churches have a Judicial Council? "Each of the new church groupings would determine whether or not to form a Judicial Council or similar body," Bard said.

The Connectional Conference Plan that failed at the 2019 General Conference would have realigned the denomination according to perspectives on LGBTQ inclusion, as does Bard-Jones. But the Connectional Conference Plan required constitutional amendments, a lengthy process involving votes throughout the annual conferences. Bard and Jones believe their plan could be launched by General Conference action only. "The key is the proposal to allow U.S. annual conferences to leave the denomination," they say in the plan. "It was contained in section 9 of petition 90041 of the Traditional Plan. This section of the petition was ruled constitutional by the Judicial Council. Because the petition died in the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, section 9 would need to be reintroduced and passed in 2020."

The Bard-Jones plan foresees churches that disagree with their annual conference's affiliation decision having the right "to transfer conferences with their assets, thereby joining a different church."

The plan also lays out an implementation timetable, with the 2020 General Conference approving the major steps, followed by annual conferences choosing their affiliations with one of the two or three new churches in 2021 and the first General Conferences of those churches in 2022.

Bard and Jones have known each other since long before they were episcopal colleagues, having crossed paths at Southern Methodist University, where they both earned Ph.Ds. They said they have shared their plan

with fellow bishops as well as with groups discussing the future of the church. The stakes are high, and the two bishops hope to have an influence.

“Our plan offers a vision for keeping as much unity as possible and a pathway for decisions to be made,” Jones said.

– By Sam Hodges, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); July 10, 2019. Hodges is a Dallas-based writer for UMNS.

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A New Form of Unity: A Way Forward Strategy 2019-2022
Bishops David A. Bard and Scott J. Jones

Brief Analysis of Our Current Situation. Responses to the passage of many petitions that comprised the Traditional Plan, and the subsequent Judicial Council rulings upholding approximately half the petitions passed, have been strong and diverse, from vigorous support for the legislation and a determination to strengthen it at the 2020 General Conference, along with a feeling that it is simply time for The United Methodist Church to move on, to intense dissent from the legislation along with indications that people may act in ways contrary to it. These responses reveal in stark terms the depth of division which exists within our denomination. What are the possibilities for moving into the future to address our division and the animosity which often accompanies it?

- Move into the future as we have lived in the recent past, relying on the legislative processes of General Conference to help us make needed change. This would likely lead to few changes to the Traditional Plan and thus continue the escalating cycle of more rules and more defiance thereby damaging our Wesleyan witness.
- One “group” or the other (progressives or traditionalists) simply decides to leave and start something new. This could be facilitated by a more defined gracious exit process which would need to be negotiated between groups representing differing sides of our disagreement.
- A “forced schism” either through countless judicial processes leading to the removal of progressive pastors and bishops and the disaffiliation of more progressive churches, or by massive resistance and disobedience by progressives which they hope might lead to the withdrawal of traditional pastors and bishops and the disaffiliation of more traditional churches. Uncalculated damage could come from such a chaotic way forward. Planning Annual Conferences and General Church bodies would become extraordinarily difficult as resources are withheld or diverted to judicial processes. Intense, angry conflict would significantly damage our Wesleyan witness. The role of bishop would be consumed by conflict management and judicial processes.
- Begin with a vision of what we would like The United Methodist Church to look like in 2022 and negotiate a new unity, a new connectionalism, a new Methodism, an amicable separation, or a mutual blessing/parting of the ways, which creates more space between United Methodists who are not currently living well together.
- We believe that annual conferences are the crucial vehicles for achieving this new form of unity with as little disruption and conflict as possible. Vision: What do we want the United Methodist Church to look like in 2022? We envision a more vibrant and missionally effective Wesleyan movement that no longer spends significant energy debating questions of human sexuality and LGBTQ inclusion. To achieve this, we envision that the United Methodist Church will have no individual members in 2025 and that all current members, clergy, congregations and bishops will join one of two or three self-governing churches. The United Methodist Church would continue to exist as an umbrella organization to facilitate this new form of unity. Whether there are two or three self-governing churches is a matter for further conversation.
 - The churches will be in full communion.
 - All the churches may use the name “Methodist” but are not required to do so.
 - All the churches may use the cross-and-flame logo but are not required to do so.
 - We envision regular contact between leadership teams of the churches to coordinate shared mission and cooperation.
 - It is envisioned that bishops of all the churches will hold regular meetings for the purpose of coordinating expressions of unity.

- It is envisioned that all the churches will choose to belong to the World Methodist Council, the Pan-Methodist Commission and other ecumenical bodies.
- All the churches will share in the governance of the General Council on Finance and Administration, Wespeth, the United Methodist Publishing House, and The General Commission on Archives and History with governance strength proportional to lay membership strength.
- The General Board of Global Ministries (including UMCOR), General Board of Discipleship, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Communications, General Commission on Religion and Race, General Commission on the Status and Role of Women and General Commission on United Methodist Men will all have boards elected by and accountable to the Open Methodist Church but provide services as requested to the Progressive and Traditional Methodist Churches and to affiliated Methodist churches outside the United States as they may organize.
- Each church will contribute proportionally to a General Administration Fund which will only support GCAH and a greatly reduced staff and budget of GCFA. Each church will contribute proportionally to the Black College Fund and the Africa University Fund. Africa University will be governed by a board elected by the African Central Conferences which may include persons from outside Africa as well. The Black College Fund will be administered by a committee elected by and accountable to the Open Methodist Church.
- Each church will have its own financial administration organization to handle episcopal funds for central conferences, agencies and other connectional expenses.
- Each church will fund its own bishops.
- There will be no World Service Fund, Episcopal Fund, Interdenominational Cooperation Fund or Ministerial Education Fund unless established by the new church.
- Each of the churches could be global with member conferences in Europe, North America and Asia. Churches in Europe and Asia could form their own Methodist Churches or to belong to one of the two or three churches, with the precise nature of the relationship to be determined. There would be a United Methodist Church in Africa, the precise affiliations to the two or three churches to be determined.
- The rights to the name “United Methodist” and the cross-and-flame logo will belong to the General Council on Finance and Administration. Divisible Assets will be distributed to the churches in proportion to the numerical strength of their lay membership. GCFA’s governing Council membership will be proportional to the lay membership strength of each church. Each church will elect its own representatives to GCFA.
- Each church will have its own General Conference with complete freedom to change its originating Book of Discipline after 2020. The current constitution of the UMC will be adaptable by a majority vote of the first General Conference of each church.
- Each Church will select its own name. It will begin with the current Book of Discipline as modified by the following:
 - o The Progressive Methodist Church Discipline will include the Simple Plan as presented in 2019, and would be further modified so that full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in marriage and eligibility for candidacy, commissioning, ordination and appointment was clearly affirmed.
 - o The Open Methodist Church Discipline will include the Simple Plan as presented in 2019. The Progressive and Open Methodist Churches may decide to be a single Methodist Church.
 - o The Traditional Methodist Church Discipline will include the Traditional Plan as presented in 2019. It will keep the current social principles and standards for ordination.
- In 2022 each church will hold a General Conference which will re-write its Book of Discipline by majority vote of the delegates. That conference will have the right to choose whether or not to have a constitution. Each church will have the right to amend its doctrinal statements, adopt a new constitution, set its own standards for church membership and ordination and all other matters of polity and doctrine.
- Each church will determine which seminaries are approved and how theological education, including M. Div. programs and Courses of Study will be organized and funded.
- Each church will decide on the election, assignment, duties and funding for its bishops.

Roadmap: What steps are necessary to implement the vision for a New Form of Unity? The process for achieving this vision is most easily accomplished by using different pieces of legislation presented to the 2019 General Conference. The key is the proposal to allow US annual conferences to leave the denomination. It was contained in section 9 of petition 90041 of the Traditional Plan (2019 ADCA pp. 187-88). This section of the petition was ruled constitutional by the Judicial Council. Because the petition died in the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, section 9 would need to be reintroduced and passed in 2020. Under this provision, when an annual conference decides to leave the denomination by majority vote, congregations and clergy who disagree with that choice are allowed to transfer conferences with their assets, thereby joining a different church.

The roadmap involves approval of key ideas at the General Conference of 2020. Following that, annual conferences worldwide would decide by majority vote which of two or three churches they will join: the Progressive Methodist Church, the Open Methodist Church or the Traditional Methodist Church or outside the United States, the churches that may be organized there (e.g. The United Methodist Church of Africa). Congregations which wish to transfer conferences will be allowed to do so with all of their assets though agreement between the conference and the congregation for debts owed for past pension and health care benefits already or conference loans would need to be negotiated. Pension liabilities would be cared for.

To limit the acrimony in this transition, legislation suspending the paragraphs or portions thereof related to complaints against persons for officiating at same-sex weddings or for the consideration of LGBTQ persons for candidacy, licensing, commissioning and ordination beginning at the end of General Conference 2020 and continuing through the first General Conferences of the new churches would be part of the New Form of Unity legislation. All of this could be accomplished with no constitutional amendments. However, clear agreements about details, including the assets and continuing ministries of all other general agencies would need to be agreed upon.

2019 August Agreement in principle by key stakeholders for taking steps leading the new form of unity

September..... Petitions due to 2020 General Conference

2020 May..... General Conference approves steps required for the new form of unity and provision for annual

conferences in the US to leave the UMC

May to July 2021..... Annual Conferences choose which church to affiliate with and local churches ask to change

conferences if they so desire

2021 May to April 2022 Annual Conferences elect delegates to General Conferences

2022 Summer or Fall First General Conferences of the three new churches are held

– Bishops David A. Bard and Scott J. Jones, July 8, 2019; UMNS.

+ ***Apportionment collection rates down after GC2019.*** The United Methodist Church continues to face a financial hangover from the 2019 General Conference in St. Louis, where passage of the Traditional Plan led unhappy churches and individuals to a range of resistance actions, including withholding money. Board members of the denomination’s General Council on Finance and Administration, meeting July 18-19, learned that this year’s January-to-June annual conference apportionment remittances to the seven general church funds were \$4.9 million behind the first half of 2018. The lag comes despite a strong U.S. economy. Churches in the U.S. provide the bulk of funding for general church ministries. “There was an initial reaction to St. Louis that just happened dramatically, and I think we ought to name that,” said North Texas Conference’s Bishop Michael McKee, who serves as GCFA board president.

In the Dallas meeting, the board was, as usual, focused on the nuts and bolts of the denomination’s finances, and discussed a range of money matters in committee and plenary sessions. But General Conference 2019 – which underscored deep divisions over how accepting to be of homosexuality and has led to intensifying discussions about whether the denomination can or should stay together – was always in the background.

McKee said the 438 to 384 vote for the Traditional Plan, reinforcing bans on same-sex unions and ordination of “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy, pleased many but left many others deeply unhappy. He noted the North Texas Conference is among those with churches withholding apportionment payments. The Desert Southwest Conference recently reported that its apportionment receipts have declined for five consecutive months, and the conference is on track to have its worst ever apportionment contribution percentage.

One of the charts presented at the GCFA board meeting in Dallas showed apportionment collection rates through June were down for all seven general church funds, and down about 3 percent overall, compared to January-June 2018. Another chart showed that the 2019 percentage of apportionments collected for the World Service Fund (which supports eight general church agencies, the Connectional Table and a contingency fund) is projected to be below that of the recession year 2009.

But the apportionment payment picture, compared to 2018, varies a good bit from conference to conference. “We’re within about one percent,” said Christine Dodson, North Carolina Conference treasurer and GCFA vice president.

Bishop Minerva Carcaño leads the California-Nevada Conference, and she said apportionment payments there are up this year. Carcaño, a GCFA board member, called passage of the Traditional Plan hurtful but, with her cabinet, has argued against withholding apportionment payments, saying that to do so harms vital ministries. “We’re trying to lead and holding up what I believe is the heart of our conference, and affirming that heart, in terms of wanting to be part of this connectional church,” she said. “It is our church, and we’re going to continue to help it be better.”

The Dallas meeting saw few actions by the GCFA board, but one was to keep bishops’ salaries flat in 2020, to reduce their 2020 housing grants to the 2016 level and to reduce their office grants by 50 percent for the first quarter of 2020. Bishops’ salaries vary by region, with U.S. bishops at the high end, making \$162,345 in 2019. The Episcopal Fund already is strained by the number of bishops and is drawing on reserve funds in 2019. The 2016 General Conference approved adding five more bishops in Africa by 2021. One chart shown at the Dallas meeting projected various years for the exhausting the Episcopal Fund reserves, depending on apportionment collection rates. At an 85 percent rate, the fund goes in the red by 2024.

The Rev. Steve Wood, who chairs the GCFA committee that deals with episcopal matters, called the current financing model for the Episcopal Fund unsustainable. He believes that options – including reducing the number of bishops and episcopal areas, reducing compensation and benefits and raising apportionments – must be considered. “We’re going to have to prayerfully consider how that will be dealt with,” he said. “There’s not that many variables.”

GCFA board members also heard a report from Lonnie Chafin, Northern Illinois Conference treasurer, about the work of the Jurisdictional Study Committee. It’s studying options for setting the number and boundaries of jurisdictions and episcopal areas in the U.S. Moses Kumar, top executive of GCFA, encouraged board members and others at the meeting to spread the word about the need for generous giving. So did Rick King, chief financial officer. “It’s on all of us as leaders of the church to explain some of the unintended consequences of withholding apportionments,” he said. However, Kumar noted that the overall giving picture has brightened some since the immediate aftermath of the St. Louis meeting.

McKee said he’s optimistic that giving will “smooth out” and show the current projections to have been too low. GCFA is recommending a \$493.8 million general church budget for 2021-24, the smallest in more than 20 years. The plan, worked out with the Connectional Table, calls for deep spending cuts by agencies. But Kumar noted that giving patterns, financial forecasts and other data could result in adjustments early next year. The 2020 General Conference, to meet May 5-15 in Minneapolis, will have final say over the quadrennial budget.

– By Sam Hodges, United Methodist News Service (UMNS); July 22, 2019. Hodges is a Dallas-based writer for UMNS.

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Annual Conference Reports

Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference. The conference was held June 2-5 in Montgomery, Alabama, with Bishop David Graves. \$9,606,334 million budget for 2020, a 10% decrease and the lowest in 20 years. No membership statistics were available.

Alaska Annual Conference. The conference gathered at Christ FUMC in Wasilla, with Bishop Elaine J.W. Stanovsky officiating. Membership stands at 3,153, down 155 from the previous year. – Jim Doepken, Alaska Conference communications

Arkansas Annual Conference. The conference met May 29-June 1, Bank of the Ozarks Arena, Hot Springs, Arkansas with Gary E. Mueller officiating. Membership stands at 124,869, down 2,498. – Amy Ezell, director of communication, Arkansas Conference

Austria Provisional Annual Conference. The conference met May 30-June 2, in Graz, Austria.
– Quelle: www.emk.at, Supt. Stefan Schröckenfuchs, Office of Bishop Patrick Streiff, Zurich (Switzerland)

Baltimore-Washington Conference. The conference met May 29-June 1, in Baltimore, Maryland. Membership stands at 151,816, down 3,964 from the previous year. – Submitted by Melissa Lauber, director of communications

Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Conference. The conference met April 4-7, in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria with Bishop Patrick Streiff presiding. He explained the decisions of General Conference 2019. Basically, the decisions to maintain the traditional understanding in regard to homosexuality was received with relief in both Bulgaria and Romania. The denomination in Bulgaria dates 160 years ago until World War II. – Submitted by Bishop Patrick Streiff, Central and Southern Europe Episcopal Area.

California-Nevada Annual Conference. The conference met June 19-22, in Modesto, California with Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño officiating. Membership is 69,704, down 1,300. – Submitted by Cate Monaghan, Interim Director of Communications.

California-Pacific Annual Conference. Conference met June 13-15, in Redlands, California with Bishop Grant J. Hagiya presiding. Conference Apportionment Budget of \$11,551,327 (a 4% decrease from 2019) was passed for 2020 with no questions asked.

Czechia-Slovakia Annual Conference. The conference met May 17-19, in Prague, the Czech Republic...The Russian-speaking congregation and the English-speaking congregations of Prague have been established as separate circuits. In the city of Tachov, in the west of Czechia, there is a large group of Bulgarians, mostly Turkish-speaking Muslim Roma people. In the closing worship service, the congregation heard words in Czech and Slovak and also in English and in Russian, songs.

– Submitted by Bishop Patrick Streiff, Central and Southern Europe Episcopal Area.

Dakotas Annual Conference. The conference met June 8th with Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Area, presiding. Membership stands at 36,879, up 239. – Submitted by Doreen Gosmire, director of communications, Dakotas Conference

Desert Southwest Annual Conference. The conference met June 13-16, in Mesa, Arizona. Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata officiated. Membership stands at 27,972, down 1,231. Legislation: A petition to the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops for a special session of the Western Jurisdictional Conference to consider and develop a process should separation from The UMC become inevitable.

East Ohio Annual Conference. The conference met June 10-13, in Lakeside, Ohio with Bishop Tracy S. Malone presiding. Membership decreased by 5,449, to 133,219. – Submitted by Rick Wolcott, director of communications for the East Ohio Conference.

Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference. The conference met June 13-15, at Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks, Pennsylvania with Bishop Peggy Johnson officiating. Membership stands at 32,180, down 2,264 from the previous year.

Florida Annual Conference. The conference met June 5-8, in Lakeland, Florida. The conference treasurer reported that local church membership was 220,600 in 2018, down 8,100 or 3.5% from 2017. CF&A's 2020 budget request is 5.399% less than 2019.

Great Plains Annual Conference. The conference met May 29-June 1, in Topeka, Kansas. Membership: 205,633, down 3,701. 5 tips: • You can't lead people where you aren't going. • Successful people do what unsuccessful people won't do. • Pay attention. • Preach the Word. Love the people. • Don't give up in the face of criticism. – Submitted by Todd Seifert, conference communications director.

Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. The conference met May 19-21, in Wildwood, New Jersey with Bishop John Schol presiding. Membership stands at 85,164, down 1,646. – Submitted by Carolyn Conover, director of communications

Holston Annual Conference. The conference met June 9-12, in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina with Bishop Mary Virginia "Dindy" Taylor presiding. Membership is 158,861, down 1,702. – Submitted by Annette Spence, editor, The Call

Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference. The conference met at the Peoria Civic Center, June 6-8. Bishop Frank J. Beard presided. Membership stands at 118,681 in 2018, down 3,841 from 2017. – Submitted by Paul Black, director of communication ministries

Indiana Annual Conference. The conference met June 12-15, in Indianapolis, Indiana with Bishop Julius C. Trimble presiding. The total income budget of the Indiana Annual Conference has been set at \$12,835,000. Mark Dicken, retired clergy, proposed a resolution to defer and delay investigations, trials, and decisions regarding homosexuality for the next 12 months. Bishop Trimble ruled it out of order. Mark Dicken challenged the ruling of the chair. The conference voted to support the ruling of the chair (63%).
– Submitted by Serena Acker, communications officer

Iowa Annual Conference. The conference met June 11, 2019 with Bishop Laurie Haller officiating. Stewardship: This category of apportionments paid, et. al. declined from \$20 million in 2013 to \$13 million in 2018, down \$6.7 million.

Kentucky Annual Conference. The conference met June 10-12, in Covington, Kentucky; Bishop Leonard E. Fairley presided. The 2020 budget of \$6.8 million was approved. Membership stands at 148,807, down 996.

Liberia Annual Conference. The conference met Feb. 4-10, in Gbarnga, Liberia. Membership stands at 297,308, up from 297,000 from the previous year. – Submitted by E Julu Swen

Memphis Annual Conference. The conference met June 2-4, in Collierville, Tennessee with Bishop William T. “Bill” McAlilly presiding. Mourned the closing of six churches. – Submitted by Lane Gardner Camp, Conference Director of Communications.

Michigan Annual Conference. The conference met May 30-June 2, in Acme, Michigan with Bishop David A. Bard presiding.
Membership stands at 73,047, down 2,138. – Submitted by Kay DeMoss, senior content editor, Michigan Conference

Minnesota Annual Conference. The conference met June 18-20, in St. Cloud, Minnesota with Dakotas-Minnesota Area Bishop Bruce R. Ough presiding. Membership was 58,705, down 1,702. – Submitted by Christa Meland, Director of Communications.

Mississippi Annual Conference. The conference met June 5-8, in Jackson, Mississippi. Bishop James E. Swanson Sr. officiated. Membership is 161,121, down 3,403. Worship attendance is 56,213, down 4,942. Church school attendance is 66,913 down 1,492.

Missouri Annual Conference. The conference met June 7-9, at the Expo Center in Springfield, Missouri, June 7-9 with Bishop Robert Farr presiding. Membership stands at 148,633, down from 152,285 the previous year, a net loss of 3,652.

New England Annual Conference. The conference met June 13-15 at the Double Tree Manchester in Manchester, New Hampshire; Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar presided. Membership is 76,369, down 2,613.– Submitted by Beth DiCocco, dir. of communications

New Mexico Annual Conference. The conference met June 12-14, in Albuquerque, New Mexico at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Albuquerque; Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe presided. Membership stands at 27,703, down 1,239 from the previous year.

New York Annual Conference, The conference met June 6-9, in Hempstead, New York; Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton presided..
Membership is 95,907, down 2,406. Worship attendance is 28,363, down 1,014. – Submitted by the Rev. Joanne S. Utley.

North Alabama Conference. The conference met on June 2-4, 2019, at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville; Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett presided. Membership is 127,717, down 1,941. Worship attendance is 69,108, up 4,865. – Submitted by Danette Clifton.

North Carolina Annual Conference. The conference met June 12-15, in Greenville, North Carolina; Bishop Hope Morgan Ward presided. Membership for 2018 was 225,987, down 1,184. – Submitted by Julie Brown and LeeAnne Thornton, NCC communicators.

North Georgia Annual Conference. The conference met June 11-14 at The Classic Center in Athens, Georgia; Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson presided. Membership in 2018 was 353,110, down 3,531 compared to 2017. – Submitted by Sybil Davidson, communicator.

Northern Illinois Annual Conference. The conference met June 2-4, in Schaumburg, Illinois Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel and Convention Center; Bishop Sally Dyck presided. Membership is 77,682, down 2,850. Worship attendance is 26,701, down 1,765.

Northwest Texas Conference. The conference met June 8; Bishop W. Earl Bledsoe presided. Membership is 52,708, down 1,512. Worship attendance is 16,689 down 454. Church school attendance is 8,334, down 163 from 2017. – Submitted by Angie Brokaw.

Oklahoma Annual Conference. The conference met May 30; Bishop Jimmy Nunn presided. Membership is 220,972, down 4,419. Worship attendance is 49,879, down 297. – Submitted by Meagan Ewton, editor for the Oklahoma Conference

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. The conference met June 6-8 at the Northeast Region Center at Preston, Oklahoma. Wyandotte Chief Billy Friend was present to bring greetings and share that history and connection with The United Methodist Church. David Wilson and Eli McHenry were elected as clergy and Anne Marshall and Josephine Deere were elected as laity representatives.

– Submitted by The Rev. David Wilson, conference superintendent

Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference Report. The conference met June 12-15 in Eugene, Oregon; Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky. presided. Membership is 23,031, down 691 or 3%. Worship attendance is down 4%. – Submitted by Greg Nelson, director of comms.

Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. The conference met June 7-9, in Puyallup, Washington; Bishop Elaine JW Stanovsky of the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area presided. Membership is 36,845, down 898. – Submitted by Patrick Scriven, dir. of comms.

Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference. The conference met May 30-June 1, 2019 at the Chase Center on the Riverfront in Wilmington, Delaware; Bishop Peggy A. Johnson presided. Bishop Hope Ward Morgan, “shared the good news of moving the center to the margins and the blessings we receive (and give) when we allow others, especially newcomers, to lead.” Statistics not available.

– Submitted by Doug Lanter, communications coordinator for Peninsula-Delaware Conference

Red Bird Missionary Annual conference. The conference met May 11 at the Annville United Methodist Church in Annville, Kentucky; Bishop Leonard Fairley presided. Membership increased by 16. – Submitted by Rev. Robert Amundsen, conference sec.

Serbia-Macedonia Provisional Conference. The conference met April 11-14 in Skopje, Macedonia. The participants of the annual conference session expressed their willingness to be one church – in spite of different countries and a difficult common history in the past and in the present. In Macedonia, there is only one ordained elder in active service, the Rev. Marjan Dimov. The churches in Serbia, Macedonia and Albania live in contexts that are, at least in part, marked by nationalism. In the closing worship service, Dimov was appointed as new superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Macedonia. The statistical report revealed an interesting reality: 75% of the church members are women. – Submitted by Pastor Matthias Bunger, Thun, Switzerland

Sierra Leone Annual Conference. The conference met Jan. 23-27, in Freetown, Sierra Leone; Bishop John K. Yambasu, resident bishop of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference presided. This was the 139th session of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. Membership stands at 285,000+. – Submitted by Keziah Kargbo, director of Church and Society for the Sierra Leone Conference.

South Carolina Annual Conference. The conference met June 2-6 at the Greenville Convention Center in Greenville, South Carolina; Bishop L. Jonathan Holston presided. Membership is 219,166, down 3,647. – Dan O’Mara, communications coordinator.

South Georgia Annual Conference. The conference met June 2-5, in Columbus, Georgia in Columbus, Georgia; Bishop R. Lawson Bryan presided. Membership is 107,624, down 3,302. – Submitted by Kara Witherow, conf. editor, & Kelly Roberson, dir. of comms.

Susquehanna Annual Conference. The conference met May 30-June 1 in Hershey, Pennsylvania; Bishop Jeremiah J. Park presided. Membership is 138,082; down 3,249. – Submitted by Shawn Gilgore, director of communications, Susquehanna Conference

Tennessee Annual Conference. The conference met June 12-14, in Brentwood, Tennessee; Bishop William T. McAlilly presided. Membership is 114,009, down 1% or 1,140. Worship/church school attendance 41,336 & 20,295 both remain strong. A resolution was presented and voted to merge the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences to be completed by 2021. [The bishop announced on his blog on Monday, June 17, that the measure passed in both conferences with 68% overall approval – TNUMC: 441 yes, 236 no (65%) and MEM: 319 yes, 123 no (72%)]. – Submitted by Amy J. Hurd, APR, Tennessee Conference director of communications

Upper New York Conference. The conference met June 5-8 at the Oncenter in Syracuse, New York; Bishop Mark J. Webb presided. Membership is 150,120, down 1% or 1,501. – Submitted by Stephen J. Hustedt, Conference director of communications.

Virginia Annual Conference. The conference met June 20-22, 2019 at the Berglund Center in Roanoke, Virginia. Bishop Sharma D. Lewis is currently on a six-month medical leave; Bishop Pete Weaver, interim bishop, presided. Membership is 318,000.
– Submitted by Madeline Pillow, Director of Communications and Editor of The Advocate, Virginia Conference.

West Ohio Annual Conference. The conference met June 2-6 at the shore of Lake Erie at Lakeside Chautauqua, Ohio; Bishop Gregory V. Palmer presided. Membership is 148,153. – Submitted by Kay Panovec, director of communications.

West Virginia Annual Conference. The conference met June 13-16, in Buckhannon, West Virginia; Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball presided. Membership is 1.76% down from the previous year. Church school attendance is 1.15% down from previous year.

Western North Carolina Conference. The conference met June 20-23, in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina; Bishop Paul L. Leeland presided. Membership statistics from the previous year were not readily available. Of interest was some of the legislation considered:

The Rev. Kelly Carpenter of Green Street United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem spoke to Petition 21, which resolved that the Western North Carolina Annual Conference petition the General Conference in 2020 to remove the language in the Book of Discipline referring to the practice of homosexuality as “incompatible with Christian teaching.” The Petition passed with 692 votes for and 481 votes against. The conference voted to extend the time of the session to allow the group to discuss Petition 22. Petition 22 was a statement of opposition to the Traditional Plan as passed by the Special General Conference of 2019. The original petition was submitted by Mary Z. Longstreth, who spoke in support. A substitute petition was submitted by The Western North Carolina Annual Conference representatives to UMC Next, the full text of which can be found below. The substitute petition was accepted, and passed with 564 votes for and 328 votes against. Here is the full text of the substitute petition, Endorsing the Commitments of UMC Next and Supporting the Full Inclusion of All People:

WHEREAS, more than 600 laity and clergy leaders from every annual conference in the United States met May 20-22 at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, for an event entitled UMC Next. The event's purpose was to explore faithful responses to the Traditional Plan that was adopted by the 2019 special session of General Conference.

WHEREAS, John Wesley's first rule for early Methodists was to do no harm and enactment of the Traditional Plan continues and amplifies harm already done by the church to LBGTQIA+ United Methodists and their families.

WHEREAS, in our baptismal vows we promise to "resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves."

WHEREAS, there was a clear consensus from those in attendance at the UMC Next event about the four commitments essential to the future of The United Methodist Church.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Western North Carolina Conference formally affirm the statement and four commitments of UMC Next:

"We believe these commitments are essential to a hope-filled future for the global Methodist movement as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

1. We long to be passionate followers of Jesus Christ, committed to a Wesleyan vision of Christianity, anchored in scripture and informed by tradition, experience and reason as we live a life of personal piety and social holiness.

2. We commit to resist evil, injustice and oppression in all forms and toward all people and build a church which affirms the full participation of all ages, nations, races, classes, cultures, gender identities, sexual orientations and abilities.

3. We reject the Traditional Plan approved at General Conference 2019 as inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and will resist its implementation.

4. We will work to eliminate discriminatory language and the restriction and penalties in the Book of Discipline regarding LGBTQ persons. We affirm the sacred worth of LGBTQ persons, celebrate their gifts, and commit to being in ministry together.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge local United Methodist congregations of the Western North Carolina Conference to ensure that LBGTQIA+ persons are welcomed and included in the membership and leadership of the local churches, to encourage members of the local congregations to be inclusive of all people and to have an open dialogue about the actions of the 2019 General Conference, the Traditional Plan and these four commitments.

Submitted by: The Western North Carolina Annual Conference representatives to UMC Next:

Lynette Whitaker, laity, Winston Salem, N.C.; The Rev. Carter Ellis, clergy, Greensboro, N.C.; Kasey Kelly, laity, Waynesville, N.C.;

The Rev. Darryl Dayson, clergy, Asheville, N.C.; The Rev. Uiyeon Kim, clergy, Charlotte, N.C.; The Rev. Joy Moss, clergy, Asheville, N.C.; The Rev. Mary Brown, clergy, Andrews, N.C.; The Rev. Keith Turman, clergy, Waynesville, N.C.; The Rev. Josh Noblitt, clergy, Atlanta, Ga.; The Rev. Lory Beth Huffman, clergy, Boone, N.C.; The Rev. Ashley Crowder Stanley, clergy, Asheville, NC

– Contributors were Melissa McGill, The Rev. Juston Smith, Megan Jones, Neill Caldwell.

Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference. The conference met June 6-8 at Grove City College, Pennsylvania; Bishop Moore-Koikoi presided. Conference membership is at 155,472, down 5,259. – Submitted by Jackie Campbell, communications director

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If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ.

Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

– Martin Luther [Taken from the book *The Issues @ Hand*]