

Monthly Update

October 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This Monthly Update leans heavily on providing information on the state of our denomination and different plans being proposed for the 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church (GC2020). That is of paramount importance for many of us who are concerned about the state of our connection. I would draw your attention to the two excellent articles written by Dr. Riley Case, a retired United Methodist pastor and former District Superintendent. As I once told him, his written words express my own thoughts better than I ever could. He has a depth of analysis that is unmatched. Also, are preliminary information of legislation that will be coming before GC2020, the three plans being proposed (at this point), and notification of an upcoming meeting of the UM Judicial Council. What is not included are some of the actions by our bishops.

I had received a copy of a communication ostensibly transmitted from my own bishop Hope Morgan Ward to “Pastors and Church Leaders” in which she said in part, “I offer this message in response to queries received about the Franklin Graham Decision America campaign coming to North Carolina in October. The North Carolina Conference is neither an endorser nor a sponsor of Decision America....” The second was an official news release from the Council of Bishops with the subject line, “UMC bishops call for discipleship; urges end to white supremacy, xenophobia”; it begins with, “In the aftermath of the mass shootings in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio, Council of Bishops President Bishop Ken Carter is calling for United Methodists to help end white supremacy and xenophobia which he says is fueling the culture of violence” and goes on to quote him as saying, “Underneath the violence is a culture of white supremacy and a fear of immigrants (xenophobia). These are expressions of our sinful nature...”*

It is instructive that a few months ago Bishop Ward saw fit to appear and speak at a “Sacred Witness” rally promoting the “LGBTQUIA+” agenda, yet she went out of her way to emphasize that our conference does not support the Franklin Graham crusade that is coming to our state. It is understandable that our conference would not support every movement and activity that comes to North Carolina, but to single this one out? Why? To have supported the Franklin Graham crusade would have been more reflective of our orthodox Wesleyan doctrine. In a similar way, the Council of Bishops’ attributing the tragic shootings to “white supremacy and a fear of immigrants” is sadly off the mark; it would be more accurate to attribute them to the mental derangement of individuals, not with racist comments nor to impugn citizens’ desire to protect our borders from illegal aliens, some with dangerous drugs. These exemplify our deep-seated top down problems.

We in Concerned Methodists are in the battle to get our denomination back on track and doing all that we can to increase accountability for misguided actions and priorities.

Contending for the faith,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

* (News release by Rev. Dr. Maidstone Mulenga, Director of Communications – Council of Bishops, August 6, 2019)

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October 2019 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Truth sounds like “hate” to those who hate the truth.

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The Good Stuff

+ *I bequeath.... you 3 little girls.*

Dear World:

I bequeath to you today [three] little girls...in a crispy dress...with two blue eyes...and a happy laugh that ripples all day long.. and a flash of light blonde hair that bounces in the sun when she runs.

I trust you'll treat her well.

She's slipping out of the backyard of my heart this morning...and skipping off down the street to her first day of school. And never again will she be completely mine.

Prim and proud she'll wave her young and independent hand this morning and say “Goodbye” and walk with little lady steps to the schoolhouse.

Now she'll learn to stand in lines...and wait by the alphabet for her name to be called. She'll learn to tune her ears for the sounds of school-bells...and deadlines...and she'll learn to giggle...and gossip...and look at the ceiling in a disinterested way when the little boy 'cross the aisle sticks out his tongue at her. And now she'll learn to be jealous. And now she'll learn how it is to feel hurt inside. And now she'll learn how not to cry.

No longer will she have time to sit on the front porch on a summer day and watch an ant scurry across the crack in the sidewalk. Nor will she have time to pop out of bed with the dawn and kiss lilac blooms in the morning dew. No, now she'll worry about those important things...like grades and which dress to wear and whose best friends is whose. And the magic of books and learning will replace the magic of her blocks and dolls. And now she'll find new heroes.

For five full years now I've been her sage and Santa Claus and pal and playmate and mother and friend. Now she'll learn to share her worship with her teachers ...which is only right. But no longer will I be the smartest woman in the whole world. Today when that school bell rings for the first time...she'll learn what it means to be a member of the group...with all its privileges and its disadvantages too.

She'll learn in time that proper young ladies do not laugh out loud...or kiss dogs...or keep frogs in pickle jars in bedrooms...or even watch ants scurry across cracks in sidewalks in the summer.

Today she'll learn for the first time that all who smile at her are not her friends. And I'll stand on the front porch and watch her start out on the long, lonely journey to becoming a woman.

So, world, I bequeath to you today one little girl...in a crispy dress...with two brown eyes...and a flash of light brown hair that bounces in the sunlight when she runs.

I trust you'll treat her well.

– Dan Valentine; August 15, 2019.

A Way Forward.

+ *United Methodism: Upper Grade Clergy* by Dr. Riley Case

The May 20, 1926 issue of *Christian Century* carried a four-page editorial titled, “What Is Disturbing the Methodists?” The editorial commented that Methodism seemed much less disturbed by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy than other denominations. There were several reasons for this. For one, Methodists, it seems, were quite disinterested in doctrine and basically didn't believe in heresy. Another reason was that Methodists had bishops and bishops spent a great deal of time keeping the peace. That was their job. Bishops denied unrest really existed and sought to downplay issues that would lead to problems.

All of this worked, according to the *Century*, because of the unique way Methodism functioned. Methodism was dominated by clergy and in Methodism the clergy came in three grades. The “upper grade” consisted of bishops, secretaries of agencies, men in seminaries, men in detached services and men who served “big” churches. They were influential, prestigious men who had attended seminary. They were also progressive and

liberal. Through them the Sunday school material had advanced (that is, became liberal) beyond any other denomination except, perhaps, for the Congregationalists. The upper grade ran things and they had no problem with any of the “new” thinking.

The “second grade” consisted of those men who aspired to be grade one. They usually had entered the conference through the Course of Study and pastored the medium-sized churches. The “third grade,” by far the largest number of pastors, consisted of the rest. They were lay pastors and pastors in rural areas. They had less education. In the southern church only 12% of the pastors had seminary training. Within Methodism itself 3,500 of the pastors had never passed the seventh grade.

The *Century* article, written over 90 years ago, is perceptive not only for 1926 but for nearly 100 years before that and for 100 years after that. It offers insight into the UM crisis of today over issues of marriage and human sexuality.

By 1926, when the *Century* article appeared, Methodism had been pretty much operating according to the *Century*’s analysis for nearly 100 years. The first Methodist conferences were clergy only. The first bishop, Francis Asbury, was called a dictator by some. He was also a keeper of the peace. It was no easy task. Frontier revivalists were creating new Americanized forms of the faith inherited from John Wesley. Despite Methodism’s top-down structure and a strong attempt to be true to the Wesleys, a lot of energy was being created from the bottom up. It was this bottom-up faith that did a lot to change the religious culture of America.

Methodist music serves as an example. Perhaps the most successful of all American denominational hymnals was the first official M.E. hymnal of 1848. It was fully orthodox and, if the term can be used, very “traditional.” But it was not an American hymnal. 1,146 of its 1,148 hymns were of British or European origin. Meanwhile, alongside the official and approved hymnal, camp meeting and American indigenous gospel music was taking America by storm. The first official hymnal added a stern admonition: Methodists were to use only those hymnals signed by the bishops. The warning was widely ignored. Methodists were writing and producing their own hymnbooks, known as “spirituals,” by the dozens. So there was one group in Methodism moving toward respectability and the middle class and another group which represented the masses. The respectability groups sought to reform the nation by civilizing it which meant, among other things, advancing high cultural values which in music did not include spirituals, ditties and choruses. The revivalists sought to reform the nation by conversion and used populist music, or whatever was available, to reach that goal.

The music war heated up by 1878 when the next “official” M.E. hymnal was published. It was an upper grades hymnal. The noted hymnologist Louis Benson made the comment that “the hymnal had hardly appeared before complaints began...” Many of the hymnals ended up stacked in furnace rooms. Why? A clue is in the make up of the committee which planned the hymnal and, according to the *Quarterly Review*, consisted of “men” of “repute,” “college presidents, professors and presiding elders... representatives of distinct classes of culture, position, and experience.” It is telling that of 307 authors 66 were Episcopalian, 22 were Congregational, 20 Presbyterians and only ten members of the M.E. Church. None of these were from Methodism’s holiness or revivalist wing. Only 7% of the hymns were of American origin and of the 1,117 hymns, only three were identified with anyone west of Rochester, New York or south of Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, by this time, forty-four hymnals had been published by Methodists unofficially, often from places like Cincinnati or Chicago. Ira Sankey, a Methodist Sunday school superintendent when he was discovered by Dwight L. Moody in 1872, published *Gospel Hymns* 1 to 6 which in various forms sold 50 million copies. It might be of interest that in the official hymnal only 7% of the authors were women while gospel hymnals were running about 30% women. Of course, the 1878 M.E. hymnal still carried the admonition that only books signed by the bishops were to be used in Methodist churches. The hymnal contributed part of the reason why large swaths of Methodism’s holiness wing and Christians less-privileged splintered of into groups like Assemblies of God, Nazarenes and the Pentecostals.

The first two questions, as I recall, asked of me when I had my first interview with the Board of Ministerial Training (forerunner of the Board of Ordained Ministry) was did I smoke and what did I think of the Methodist hymnal. When I became a district superintendent one of the first things I did on my first round of the churches was to survey how many churches were not using the UM hymnal as their primary hymnal. The answer was 29 out of 72 churches. (For the record the UM hymnal of 1988 was a much more inclusive and popular hymnal.)

These paragraphs have been about the hymnal. A similar analysis could be done with Sunday school material or church colleges or seminaries or missions or evangelism. There is a gap between the leadership of the church and ordinary UM church members or, to put it another way, between the upper grades clergy and everyone else. Much of it is a theological gap but certainly not all (especially if we go back to the 19th century). The upper grades clergy (in the words of the Christian Century article) ran things, or at least gave the impression that they did. The old-timers called them “the authorities” or in more recent times, the “ruling elite.” At one time, at least, this was not a bad thing. These pastors were more educated, gifted and skilled. At the same time Methodist broad-mindedness allowed many diverse expressions to thrive. I can remember (in the days before the 1968 merger) when this upper grade was almost entirely old, white male liberals. They were the clergy elected to be general conference delegates. They served on boards and agencies and some were elected to the episcopacy. Some of these men were my mentors. But some things changed after the merger; mostly, the upper grade group became ethnically and gender and age inclusive. But nothing much else is different. The circle was enlarged but it was still a specialized group with values of institutional unity, peace, avoidance of conflict and a desire for status in the world. It wanted to relate to the ecumenical world and the academic world and the entertainment world and the media world. It cared less about relating to the group down at the gas station. In a recent survey conducted by Mainstream UMC (a centrist group), a favorable view of boards and agencies is affirmed by only 18% of traditionalists.

This inability to be sensitive to or even to understand the rest of the church has been quite evident in the discussions and debates on homosexual practice, marriage and human sexuality in the past few years. The institutional establishment is so obsessed with the idea of “unity,” which in almost every case means institutional unity, that other values get cancelled out. The discussions on “compatible” and “incompatible” are revealing. For the “upper grades” institutional clergy it is inconceivable that church presently should set theological boundaries which, if they are breached, will have serious consequences. Nor has it been admitted (until some in the last few months) that the cause of Christ might best be served by giving one another freedom to pursue a different vision of the church, as in separation.

As far as we know the bishops in the time leading up to the 2019 General Conference never held serious conversations with traditionalist and evangelical groups. Out of their wisdom and status, evidently, they simply rejected the Commission on a Way Forward proposals about the Traditional Plan being a serious option and the idea of gracious exit. It was like they wore blinders: the One Church Plan was obviously God’s will. For this plan they lobbied unabashedly and openly citing, among other things, the overwhelming support the plan had from a majority of bishops, from the seminaries, from the colleges, from the boards and agencies, and from groups calling themselves centrist or mainstream or moderates (in other words, the “upper grades”). Then, to make matters worse, significant numbers of the upper grades cried foul after the conference voted to uphold the Traditional Plan. They would apologize to the gay community, defy the actions of the general conference, and scheme again for 2020.

But perhaps there is hope. The upper grades’ vision has not worked. Need we be reminded that the American church has lost 5 million members in 50 years under their watch? Perhaps we are presently having a reality check. Perhaps we are at a point in the church where we can really begin to listen to one another. Several of the plans for the future offering some form of separation, or at least space, might well be able to trigger a new day for United Methodism.

Now is not the time for name-calling, for accusations, or accusing each other as being less loyal. Now is the time for some risk-taking for some vision, for letting the Spirit lead.

– By Dr. Riley Case,
Happenings Around the Church.

+ *Unity and Institutionalism* by Dr. Riley Case

Leaders in the United Methodist church are continuing to discuss and negotiate ways that United Methodism can best serve the Church of Jesus Christ in the months and years ahead. There is an attempt to find some consensus on various ways forward that will be presented to the next General Conference in May, 2020. The following is an attempt to clarify some realities that must be taken into consideration as decisions are made about the UM future.

The kind of unity described in the New Testament is quite different from much of that advocated by the institutional church.

Many of us believe our church leaders are understanding “unity” as denominational institutionalism instead of the New Testament unity of oneness in Christ based on a commitment to shared beliefs and values.

I have been a part of Methodism’s evangelical renewal efforts for over 50 years. I responded to Chuck Keysor’s original article in the *Christian Advocate* in July 1966. That article would launch the Good News Movement. The institutional church at that time saw evangelicalism (always labeled then as “fundamentalism”) as a dying relic of the past and basically refused to take evangelicals very seriously. Keysor (and others), very much aware of the evangelical ferment of the times, understood that evangelicalism not only was not dying but instead was the future for Protestantism in America and, for that matter, across the globe. Originally, Methodism in the New World defined the American form of evangelicalism. A great part of Methodism has always been faithful to that original vision. The goals of Good News at that time were quite modest: recognition of the evangelical world and of evangelicals and the contribution they could make as the church moved into the EUB merger and the forming of a new United Methodist Church.

While a number of church leaders in the late 1960s gave guarded encouragement to the new evangelical movement, others had concerns. Their concerns were about “divisiveness.” The church needed support, not dissension. Politically the nation had passed through the Joe McCarthy era and some were thinking evangelicals (“fundamentalists”) might introduce an era of religious witch-hunts. This issue was addressed by the *United Methodist Reporter* which, as an independent UM-related news outlet, was itself sometimes criticized for not being supportive enough of the denominational agenda. In an editorial (9-24-1970) the editor, Spurgeon Dunnam, wrote:

... Are evangelicals a divisive force within the church? Yes, they are divisive. Divisive in the same way as Jesus was divisive to first century Judaism. Divisive in the same way Martin Luther was to sixteenth century Catholicism. Divisive in the same way that John Wesley was to eighteenth century Anglicanism. And, strangely enough, divisive in the same way that many liberal “church renewalists” are to Methodism in our own day. A survey of Methodism in America today reveals these basic thrusts. One is devoted primarily to the status quo. To these, the institution called Methodism is given first priority. It must be protected at all costs from any threats of change from any direction...

Dunnam understood that the greatest tension in the church was not evangelicals versus the social activists, but evangelicals and social activists versus the status quo institutionalists. It is curious that for the past fifty years a major criticism of evangelical renewal groups is that they are divisive, meaning among other things, that their support of the major vision of Methodism (“You have nothing to do but save souls”) sometimes places them at odds with United Methodist institutional revisionism.

In our present day there is discussion over the church’s stand on sexual morality. The “status quo” is the position called “compatibilist,” a position that identifies those who, regardless of how they feel about the practice of homosexuality, believe that it is a minor issue as far as church values are concerned. They also believe that, for the sake of “unity” (read “status quo institutionalism”), the church should be more inclusive and open-minded so that we might move forward as one big happy family. Unfortunately, we have not for some time been living as one big happy family. We have such different understandings of what UM doctrine and moral life is that we often cannot even carry on intelligent conversation. But the “big happy family” position is that advanced by the “centrists,” the “Mainstream UMs,” and the American bishops and the boards and agencies. “Unity” is living under an institutional big tent. That was the approach of the disastrous One Church Plan, evidently the only plan the many of the bishops and centrists would seriously consider as a way forward before the 2019 General Conference. The plan called for doing away with all negative references in the Discipline to homosexual practice, letting everyone live as they pleased and maintaining the institutional status quo complete with the present Council of Bishops, the boards and agencies and the seminaries being able to carry on as usual.

One historical reference. In the 1840s, when the issue was slavery, the divisive troublemakers were the abolitionists who in our day would be labeled “incompatibilists.” They (and others) dared to bring petitions to

the 1844 General Conference to force bishops and the church to follow the Discipline in regard to slaveholders. At the time the bishops, always the “compatibilists,” would not even discipline one of their own who was a slaveholder. The bishops, ever seeking ways to hold the church together, urged more study and more discussion. Their position was basically an 1840s version of the One Church Plan.

Reality check: the status quo is not working. Doesn’t the loss of 5 million American UM members in the last 50 years tell us anything? Any “Way Forward” must allow for expressions of Biblical unity based on shared values and beliefs. Social institutionalism in America as an important expression of societal cohesiveness has been in decline for several decades.

Surely it is being observed that social clubs, organizations and institutions which, until recently, provided societal cohesiveness for many people, are having a rough time of it. Fraternal organizations like the Masons and Eastern Star, service organizations like Rotary as well as established institutional churches have been declining. Denominational labels no longer inspire loyalty. Within Protestantism many growing local churches have de-emphasized denominational labels. Baptist churches are self-identifying as “community churches.” Often these groups don’t even use the word “church.” They are “Abundant Life Ministries” or “Worship Centers.” When UM churches have de-emphasized the “Methodist” brand name they have come under criticism from institutionalists who believe that de-emphasizing the word “Methodist” is a form of disloyalty. And yet our parishioners these days change churches for the slightest of reasons and have less brand loyalty than ever before.

Interestingly, this phenomenon is not so evident outside the US. African churches and churches in the Philippines believe that the UM cross and flame communicates that which is good in religion. They have indicated they do not want to give up the denominational label. At this point a lot of conversation needs to take place.

In addition to the fact that the church is hopelessly divided and that institutional “unity” (loyalty) simply is not working the way it once did, at least in America, it should be evident that the time is ripe in United Methodism for the possibility of real renewal. No matter what our theology we need new structures, new visions and new ways of being in ministry together. For progressives perhaps this is a time for freedom to revise a new set of doctrinal standards (or perhaps for affirming the absence of any standards) that they can in good conscience support. While evangelicals would see no need in any revised standards (we are committed to these as they are), there would be interest in new institutional structures. There would be interest in designated giving, in initiating programs from the bottom up instead of from the top down, and for allowing churches to use resources that may have been developed outside the denominational structures. This would be possible if the denomination were able to allow realignment and the opportunity to start afresh. According to the survey done by Mainstream UMs, only 17% of evangelicals presently hold a favorable view of the boards and agencies. This is no way to run a church. Many in the church, including those same centrists and progressives, understand this.

Since the 2019 General Conference there has been willingness to talk seriously about some form of amicable separation. This would offer an opportunity to open the doors of change for new expressions of the Spirit of God

– By Dr. Riley Case, *Happenings Around the Church*; 9/26/19.

+ *Methodism’s Yalta. Church leaders look at options for future of denomination.*

“Every United Methodist now knows our denomination is heading for a separation,” Sierra Leone Bishop John K. Yambasu said in an address to a diverse group of church leaders meeting in Chicago. But the bishop also called on the group attending the July 19 meeting to find a new way forward through consensus. He was speaking to a group with a wide range of viewpoints about the denomination’s inclusion of LGBTQ persons during a meeting that he termed “a call to action.” Yambasu called the meeting on behalf of the central conferences – United Methodist regions in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. Bishop Christian Alsted, Nordic and Baltic Episcopal Area, and Bishop Mande Muyombo, North Katanga Episcopal Area, attended the meeting. The meeting came at the conclusion of the executive committee of the Council of Bishops meeting. In addition to the three bishops, five church leaders who represented each of three viewpoints on the inclusion of LGBTQ

people in the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church attended. There were five centrists, five progressives and five conservatives at the meeting.

The Book of Discipline, the United Methodist policy book, says that the practice of homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian teaching,” and bars “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from ordination. Meeting in a called session this year, General Conference delegates passed legislation that retains church bans on ordaining gay clergy or holding same-sex marriages, while also strengthening enforcement measures for violating those bans. Resistance to that measure has been strong in many churches and regional or annual conferences. In his opening address, Yambasu said it was his “burning desire” to work with all sides of the debate to ensure there is no further damage to the whole church.

Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr., president of the Council of Bishops, said bishops are involved in many conversations across the church but “we want to be clear that the complexities of our polity do not authorize anyone to negotiate separation.” Carter told United Methodist News that “more conversation is better than less and may lead us to new forms of unity, giving birth to new expressions of Methodism that will multiply the Wesleyan witness in as many ways as possible.” Alsted said from a European United Methodist perspective, a division would most likely have “devastating consequences.” Europe has more than 60,000 members in over 30 countries, he said. “The sad reality is that most things in the worldwide United Methodist Church are discussed and decided in the U.S. and the rest of the world is expected to follow,” he told United Methodist News. “In all plans after the called session I have seen so far, the central conferences are treated as an appendix to the church. The message that is conveyed is: We solve things in the U.S., and the rest of the world will need to figure out where they wish to belong or how they will organize.”

Petitions to the 2020 General Conference [were] due Sept. 18 to the Commission on General Conference. Yambasu said the meetings were scheduled to allow time to process any petitions that emerge from the conversations and meet that petition deadline.

The meeting in July was closed, and members all agreed not to discuss any of the details. While they could not discuss the details, church leaders said they did appreciate the opportunity to talk to each other.

Centrists included the Revs. Adam Hamilton, Tom Berlin, Mark Holland, Junius Dotson and Jasmine Smothers. Conservatives attending were the Revs. Maxie Dunnam, Rob Renfroe and Keith Boyette, as well as Mark Tooley and Patricia L. Miller. Randall Miller, Jan Lawrence, Karen Prudente and the Revs. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli and Kimberly Scott represented the progressive viewpoint.

“We had a frank conversation and good airing of several proposals for moving past what some members of the group identified as ‘irreconcilable differences,’” said Randall Miller, a jurisdictional conference delegate from the California-Nevada Conference. “I will continue to work with this group in faith, but so far we seem very far away from reaching an agreement.”

Hamilton, pastor of the Church of the Resurrection, said it was helpful to meet “face to face” with people and hear their stories. “Not surprisingly, the central conference bishops, conservatives, centrists and progressives present agree on most of the things that make us United Methodists. But we have a fundamental disagreement over how we read scripture regarding same-sex marriage and how God would have us minister with LGBTQ persons, particularly around marriage and ordination,” he said.

Boyette, president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, said he was grateful to have the opportunity to have frank conversations about the current context of The United Methodist Church. “I am grateful that those conversations will continue, and I am hopeful that they will be productive in providing some resolution for the ongoing conflict,” he said. Berlin told United Methodist News, “I was pleased that the meeting was called by central conference bishops who understand that the impact of the 2019 General Conference, which passed the Traditional Plan, will impact the global UMC connection and is not only of deep interest to members of the UMC in the United States.” Tooley said he has opposed division and for 30 years has worked for a “vision of denominational revival.” “I now admit division is inevitable,” he said. “It will happen of itself, chaotically. Or it will happen through negotiation and some leadership. The latter seems preferable.” Holland said he is committed to finding an amicable path forward for separation. “My observation is that the ‘Renewal and Reform’ group very much wants to split the church and divide up the assets. The progressives, centrists, and central conferences want to stay together. There is no reason to divide the global church to cater to a minority of

churches and individuals in the United States. We need to find a way to allow those who do not want to be United Methodist to leave amicably without burning down the whole church to do so.”

Yambasu, quoting Isaiah 1:18, said the conversation was not about who is right and who is wrong. “This consultation is a call to action. It is an invitation for all sides of the debate to ‘come and reason together.’” – By Kathy L. Gilbert, UM News; July 29, 2019.

(UM) General Conference 2020 (GC2020). What comes after GC2020 petitions deadline.

The deadline to submit legislation to the 2020 General Conference is now in the rearview mirror. So what is ahead?

The coming months will provide a fuller picture of what options will be before delegates when The United Methodist Church’s top lawmaking assembly meets May 5-15 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

A big focus of the coming assembly will be dealing with the fallout of this year’s special General Conference. The contentious gathering has led to varied proposals for the denomination’s future in light of its still-unresolved debate over homosexuality.

But getting legislation into a format that is readily accessible for a multinational and multilingual denomination takes time. By denominational rules, the Advance Daily Christian Advocate – which contains the petitions and reports requiring General Conference action – must be distributed to delegates at least 90 days before the assembly begins. That date is Feb. 5 for the 2020 gathering. “It’s a pretty safe bet that we can have it ready in advance of that 90-day publication date,” Brian Sigmon, the editor of the Daily Christian Advocate and its advance edition, told the Commission on General Conference at the group’s August meeting. He and other General Conference organizers hope to have the Advance Daily Christian Advocate available online for download as soon as the materials are finalized. As of Sept. 19, General Conference staff said it was still too soon to know an exact date. The entire Advance Daily Christian Advocate must be available in the four official General Conference languages — English, French, Portuguese and Kiswahili. Typically, about 1,000 petitions are submitted for consideration at a regularly scheduled General Conference.

Proposals coming to GC2020 include legislation to add five more bishops to Africa, to revise the Social Principles, to create a new structure for U.S. decision-making and to establish the 2021-24 general church budget. All four of these proposals were drafted by international church bodies. United Methodist News also confirmed that petitions have been submitted for at least three plans for the denomination’s future. In alphabetical order, these include:

- The Indianapolis Plan, submitted by the Rev. Kent Millard and assembled by a group of centrists, traditionalists and progressives. This plan includes provisions for separating into different denominations depending on views around homosexuality.
- New Forms of Unity, submitted by the Texas Conference’s Bishop Scott Jones. Under this plan, an annual conference could become a self-governing church or join an existing one. Jones first began working on the plan with the Michigan Conference’s Bishop David Bard. Bishops do not have a vote at General Conference.[Note: See the August Update. AM]
- The UMCNext Proposal, assembled by a group of centrists and progressives. This proposal lifts restrictions related to gay ordination and same-sex weddings, while allowing local churches that disagree to depart and organize into new forms of Methodism.

These three plans were all drafted in the United States. However, this is not a comprehensive list of the options that will be before the delegates to reorganize or divide the denomination and its assets. Individual United Methodists also can submit legislation, and some already announced plans to do so ahead of the deadline.

During the shortened special General Conference, delegates considered plans that contained multiple petitions as a package. But General Conference organizers have decided that won’t be the case at GC2020, at least not initially.

The Rev. Abby Parker Herrera – General Conference petitions secretary – has the task of giving numbers to each properly submitted petition and assigning it to one of 14 legislative committees or the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

The legislative committees deal with different subject matters and related sections in the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s policy book. The standing committee deals with proposals that affect United Methodist regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines. These committees are the first stop where legislation is debated, refined and possibly approved to go to the full General Conference plenary for a vote. So if a plan has multiple petitions that deal with different sections of the Discipline, those petitions will first head to the committees that handle those sections. If petitions coming from multiple committees need to be considered together, the Committee on Agenda and Calendar can schedule that, said the Rev. Gary Graves, General Conference secretary. There is also a Committee on Reference, which meets at the start of General Conference and considers requests to reassign petitions to different legislative committees. The Book of Discipline requires all valid petitions to receive a vote in legislative committee, and all petitions approved by a legislative committee to receive a vote in plenary.

The 2020 General Conference will have 862 delegates overall, equally split between clergy and laity. Of the 2020 delegates, 55.9% will be from the U.S., 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe and the remainder from concordat churches that have close ties to The United Methodist Church.

As the big meeting approaches, Graves and other General Conference organizers urge continued prayers for all staff and volunteers working diligently to prepare.

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Key terms to know:

The Book of Discipline: The United Methodist Church’s policy book that contains its law, doctrine, constitution, organizational work and procedures. Each General Conference amends the Book of Discipline.

The Book of Resolutions: This volume contains resolutions or pronouncements on issues that General Conference has approved. The text of any resolution is considered the denomination’s official position on a topic.

Petition: A request to the General Conference for official action on a topic or issue, similar to a bill before the U.S. Congress. But not all petitions are intended to become law. A petition can suggest a change in the Book of Discipline, approval of a resolution or some course of action the denomination should take.

Advance Daily Christian Advocate (Advance DCA or ADCA): A set of volumes containing the agenda, rules, delegate listings, petitions, reports from church organizations and other information for delegates.

Daily Christian Advocate (DCA): The official journal of the General Conference.

– By Heather Hahn, United Methodist News Service (UMNS), Sept. 20,, 2019. Hahn is a UM News reporter in Dallas.

(UM) Judicial Council. *Judicial Council sets October oral hearings.*

EVANSTON, Ill. – Two oral hearings have been set for Oct. 30, during the fall meeting of the UM Judicial Council at the Hilton Orrington Hotel. The hearings, which are open to the public, are at 9:30 a.m. for Docket 3 & 11 a.m. for Docket 4. Both dockets involve requests from the UM Council of Bishops related to actions of General Conference 2019.

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Never disregard a conviction that the Holy Spirit brings to you...You were looking for some big thing to give up, while God is telling you of some tiny thing that must go.

But behind that tiny thing lies the stronghold of obstinacy, and you say, “I will not give up my right to myself” – the very thing that God intends you to give up if you are to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

~ Oswald Chambers

Global Outlook

When you do the right thing it may not feel right, but in the end it will be the right thing.

~ As quoted on Family Talk

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Haiti. My son posted this on his Facebook page. Since he's there, he can give you a better perspective on life in Haiti at present. So far, all our schools, our Bible institute, & feeding program's been shut down. We are watching & waiting to see what will become of life in Haiti as we know it. The President spoke last night calling for an end to the violence. Our Haitian brethren are very discouraged & weary. We need your prayers. "I was able to buy about 65 gallons worth of gas today from some other missionaries who were kind enough to sell from their stock. I think my body's still on the mend, too, although I don't have much of an appetite yet. I was encouraged by a pastor friend in the States who kept calling even though we got cut off about 5 times. Banks and most businesses were closed today after a bank was burned in Port-au-Prince yesterday. A series of attacks have targeted members of the ruling party. There was a fire at the airport in Port-au-Prince this morning that doesn't seem to be protest-related but it's adding to the anxiety for travelers wanting out. My Mom always says that Murphy's Law (whatever can go wrong will go wrong) must have been inspired by Haiti." – John

[Note: A travel advisory has been posted to not travel to Haiti. – AOM]

– "Haiti" posted by Dana Adams; Sep 25, 2019.

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When the heart is right, the feet will be swift. ~ Thomas Jefferson