

General Conference 2019 Actions & Suggested Talking Points

GC19 Actions and Facts - What was decided

The following is a high level, bullet pointed summary of what was decided at General Conference and other facts that may prove helpful as background information. The below are not intended to be suggested talking points, those are offered on the next page. Rather this is intended as background and factual information for your use should you wish to issue a statement.

- More than 53 percent of the multi-national/global denomination's top lawmaking body supported the Traditional Plan that reinforces the church's bans on same-gender unions and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.
- It still remains to be seen whether the legislation will take effect as delegates requested a declaratory decision by the Judicial Council on the constitutionality of the Traditional Plan.
- The denomination's top court will address the request at its next scheduled meeting April 23-25 in Evanston, Illinois. Legislation that the Judicial Council declares unconstitutional would not be included in the Book of Discipline, the denomination's policy book. Legislation found to be in line with the Book of Discipline will be added effective Jan. 1, 2020 at the earliest.
- The April meeting will be the Judicial Council's third review of the Traditional plan legislation to see if it is in line with the denomination's constitution. There are parts of the Traditional plan as adopted that the Judicial Council has already ruled as constitutional, which include an augmented definition of "self-avowed practicing homosexual," to say it includes people "living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual." Also, previously held as constitutional is legislation that sets a minimum penalty for clergy performing a same-sex wedding of one year's suspension without pay for the first offense and loss of credentials for the second.
- The Traditional Plan was one of three plans put forth by the Council of Bishops following the work of and report by the Commission on A Way Forward along with The One Church Plan and Connectional Conference Plan.
- The One Church Plan had the backing of a majority of bishops and was affirmed by a majority of commission on a way forward members. But the plan only received approximately 47 percent support from the General Conference delegates.
- The last piece of legislation General Conference approved was an amended version of a petition that allows a pathway for a graceful exist for churches to leave the denomination. The Judicial Council ruled a previous iteration of the legislation as unconstitutional, but the new version is not, at this point, up for court review.
- The special General Conference itself cost about \$3.6 million.

Suggested Talking Points begin on the next page

Talking Points

The following are some suggested talking points to use when answering questions about General Conference - how people should be reacting, what it means for the local churches going forward, etc.

- Above all, we are STILL THE CHURCH. We must stay focused on our WIG - our Wildly Important Goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and stay committed to treating each other in ways that truly and faithfully honor Christ.
- Bishop Lowry is calling on all churches, organizations, ministries and people of the CTC to a 30-day period of prayerful discernment before engaging in public responses or making decisions that could lead to leaving the UMC. In those 30-days, Bishop is calling for all to engage in discerning prayers and patient, careful, compassionate, loving and Christ-filled conversations with each other.
- One positive that could come from this is that it should spur us to begin to engage in meaningful conversations with each other about all our differences - to foster a better understanding of each other's point of view, backgrounds and beliefs.
- We have long been a church filled with people who hold different and deeply-rooted beliefs. Our diversity of thought has been, is and can be a towering strength in our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Be a people who reflect Christ with each other. Kind, caring, grace-filled with each other. This is a time for calm - for walking with Christ and walking with each other, especially those with whom you might disagree with mutual love, mutual respect, mutual compassion
- The phrase Bishop Lowry has repeatedly used for years - deliberately used repeatedly - is to Breathe Deep. Jesus is still Lord. Regardless of the outcome of GC19
- General Conference was a time of high emotions for everyone involved. AS such, in our responses, we need to be respectful and compassionate people who listen carefully to one another and respond to those who are grieving and are respectful towards those who believe the right decisions were made at GC19. And in these compassionate, Spirit-led discussions, we emerge with a renewed focus on our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- Have the same attitude in you - the same mind in you that was in Jesus Christ. An attitude or mind of peace and calm
- Do not demonize those with whom you disagree - rather be calm and deeply prayerful
- The church is not defined by its boundaries, rather it is defined by its center - the Lord Jesus Christ. The closer we draw to Jesus - to our center - the closer we draw to one another. It is out of this center that we will find our way forward.
- No one "won" General Conference. Every disagreement/argument, every word said in anger is painful for all. We are all the Body of Christ and when one part hurts, the whole body is negatively affected

- General Conference was a GLOBAL gathering, with more than 40 percent of the delegates from outside the U.S. Within a matter of years, more United Methodists will live outside the U.S. Its fastest growing faith communities are now found in Africa, the Philippines, and parts of Eurasia.
- It is important to remember that Africa is a continent and not a country. There are hundreds of languages spoken in Africa and myriad customs, traditions and histories. We must be careful of painting our African siblings with a broad “conservative” or like-minded brush. Many of our Eastern-European and Asian sisters and brothers also come with a very conservative biblical point of view.
- General Conference was not a “we vs. they” or an “us vs. them” debate. This was a WE Process. Friends and loved ones were/are on both sides of this debate/vote. Friends who’ve been together in ministry; labored in the fields together; enjoyed times of fellowship and laughter; and shared tears in times of sorrow. The Apostle Paul tells us that nothing can separate us from the love of God, let us strive to not to let a vote separate us from those we love.
- The wording in the traditional plan echoes the language that has been in the Book of Discipline since 1972. While there were amendments which are being reviewed by the Judicial Council for constitutionality, the wording is virtually the same. Some would say yes but WE just closed the door further to inclusiveness. While that sentiment is easily understandable, many are choosing to believe that the hearts of the people of the UMC are still firmly secure in being in ministry to ALL persons regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc.
- This is one of many differences among our Christian siblings with which we must set aside as we work to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world - differences such as beliefs about divorce, race, gender, language, political affiliation, age, money, etc. - that we use to divide ourselves into various camps. We ALL share a common ministry rooted...United, if you will....in one Lord, one Faith and one Baptism.
- The mission of our church - our Wildly Important Goal (WIG) - has not and will not change. Before GC19, during GC19 and after GC19 our focus - our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- Church fights don’t happen between the unfaithful, but rather the faithful. That may be a hard concept for our “non-churched” brothers and sisters to grasp and is has, is and will generate disdain toward the church and people who claim the name of Christ. We are a family. Families have fights. But we also have love - the love of Jesus Christ which surpasses all human understanding. Love keeps families together and the love we have as Christians is the greatest love of all.
- Remember it is our center - Jesus Christ that should define us, not our boundaries.
- People of great faith were part of every side on every issue of GC19. Everyone in that room - the delegates on the plenary floor, the reserves and guests in the stands, the bishops on the stage, the press and communicators in the rafters - everyone left GC19 wounded.

- No matter how hurt the feelings are at this moment, no matter how confused or upset some may be, it is important to remember that should a tornado sweep through our conference, or flood waters rage, or an earthquake shake another region of our world, or an act of deadly violence occur or any other natural or human disaster were to take place today, those same people would immediately set aside their differences and would be working side-by-side as the hands and feet of Christ. Serving together and loving alike. That's what brothers and sisters do. Sometimes they fight, but when the chips are down, they are there for and with each other.
- We are broken... some say beyond repair.... but it is in our brokenness that God can, and often does use us the very most. Whether separate or apart we are all brothers and sisters in Christ!
- To all those who are not part of our church but watched with our behavior toward each other at GC19 with horror, please don't judge us by what you saw when we were at our worst. Rather, recall all the subtle ways in which we are in ministry to and with EVERYONE... 12 million people doing billions of dollars' worth of mission and ministry every year worldwide. Some of it gets press - UMCOR Disaster Relief for example - but most is done without fanfare, but it's all out of love.
- Please be patient with one another as wounds begin to heal. Whether you agree with each other or not... Jesus Loves You... you are brothers and sisters in Christ... each of us is better for having each other in our lives.
- No legislation will change our conviction that the LGBTQ+ persons are beloved children of God and the churches of the Central Texas Conference will continue to be welcoming, safe and loving spaces for the LGBTQ+ community.
- We are committed to conversations and actions that affirm the sacred worth and love of all people regardless of their perspective in our church's decades-old debate. To that end, we remain open to good faith conversations about the future of the church. We recognize irreconcilable differences exist, not just about human sexuality, but also around our understanding of the authority and interpretation of Scripture, and the nature of the church.