

Questions from post-General Conference webinar May 7, 2024

Questions have been edited for clarity or combined with similar questions for brevity.

1. Is there a biblical basis for the change in the Book of Discipline with regards to gay clergy and gay weddings? If so, please share relevant scripture. Thanks

Answer: Some verses for reflection are Matthew 22:35-40 and John 15:16. We also recommend the book Holy Love by Steve Harper.

2. Can an individual church prevent the assignment of a gay pastor to their church?

Answer: Each year a church completes a church profile through the Staff Parish Committee. This is the place where a church can name important aspects of its context, its theological leanings and important details that will help with appointment making. This, along with a conversation with the superintendent, is appropriate. We seek to appoint clergy to churches where there is a good fit.

3. When speaking to the body, why did many delegates introduce themselves based on gender and race?

Answer: We were asked to do this by two of our general agencies (The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women and the General Commission on Religion and Race) as a way of monitoring how well we were doing in terms of the diversity of voices speaking. They gave us a report each morning on how we did each day. We wanted to hear as many diverse voices as possible.

4. Can you speak to the changes to the pension plan? It seems like there was less communication in advance about these changes. The change to the plan eliminates an actual pension for clergy and is very discouraging to younger clergy and clergy of color. Our tradition has always included a pension and this seems to leave that behind.

Answer: We will continue to have a pension plan. The rollout of the Compass Pension plan will be in 2026 so there will be ample time to learn about the changes before then. The new plan is more in line with pension plans that standard employers would use. There are some unique aspects of it that specifically speak to younger clergy and clergy who make lower salaries - for example, the ability to use student loan payments to count for the 4% "match." Wespeth also heard lengthy conversation about concerns and are prepared to address them in the years to come. Thank you for expressing this concern. Cynthia Weems served on this committee if you have further questions.

5. Is homosexual practice sin? Does the United Methodist Church know? If not, how can I trust The United Methodist Church to accurately teach God's word regarding sin? How do I know if that sin should be repented or openly glorified as an objective moral good?

Answer: There are differences of opinion within The United Methodist Church, as well as others, on the understanding of human sexuality. We practice convicted humility as we continue to learn from one another, from God and from our discernment of scripture. We believe that limitations on sexual practices that are in keeping with the Christian faith, such as fidelity in marriage, monogamy and chastity in singleness, are normative to the Christian life for all people.

6. Will the African churches be allowed to keep the old Book of Discipline and not allow LGBTQ+ assignments, etc.?

Answer: The "Central Conferences" (those conferences outside of the U.S.) have always been able to adapt The Book of Discipline to their context. This will continue. The changes we made do not impact those conferences. If churches in Africa want to continue some of the same practices we have now they will be able to do so.

7. More traditional pastoral Biblicists still in the UMC for whatever reason are hurting a lot. Some will try to leave now. Some congregants will stop attending UMCs. WE need to continue to pray for those who caused anger on the progressive side of any discussion and are gone, and who will leave. I know you all will. We need to offer grace to our now missing friends.

Answer: YES! Thank you for this message. We want all persons to feel welcomed and respected in the UMC no matter what their views on these and other matters. Offering grace is essential to our present and future.

8. Do the regional conference meetings replace General Conference?

Answer: No, the regional conference does not replace GC. The work of Regional Conferences will be region-specific and the General Conference will focus on general church/worldwide church issues.

9. Do you believe the UMC will consider divesting itself of Israeli financial investment? I heard that UMC is the first major denomination voted to divest from Israel bonds. Petition 20554-CC calls for UMC to lobby the US Government against aid to Israel. Is this true?

Answer: The General Conference did pass a resolution to divest from bonds in a few countries that are involved in prolonged military occupations. This is a non-binding resolution and Wespeth will examine it.

10. Have the traditional conservative churches who have left UMC formed a new church yet? If so, can you please direct us to those churches?

Answer: Some churches joined other denominations and some remain independent. Because they disaffiliated, we do not have a list of their current affiliations.

11. Does regionalization apply to the US meaning will there be some orthodox, traditional conferences or jurisdictions?

Answer: Regionalization means the U.S. will be one region and it will have the ability to meet on its own and make decisions related to the U.S. context. Other regions (outside of the U.S.) will have the same opportunity.

12. Can you explain what parts of the Book of Discipline that Central Conferences are allowed to adapt to their setting?

Answer: Primarily, anything in our Constitution, our theological standards, and Revised Social Principles are non-adaptable parts of the BOD. There is work being done to further determine what parts of the BOD should be adaptable as we anticipate regionalization.

13. Are clergy allowed to be openly gay?

Answer: The General Conference removed the prohibition on self-avowed practicing homosexuals being licensed, commissioned and ordained. Candidates who seek to be clergy will need to be examined and approved by their local church, their district committee on ministry and the Board of Ordained Ministry.

14. Is the Anglican church included in the proposal with the Episcopal Church?

Answer: The Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) nor The Church of England are a part of the Full Communion proposal with The Episcopal Church.

15. Can you speak to the change in Deacons sacramental authority? I heard someone mention it but didn't know details.

Answer: As of January 1, 2025, Deacons are permitted to administer the sacraments (holy communion and baptism) in their ministry setting if it is contextually appropriate.

16. When will annual conferences ratify decisions of GC?

Answer: We will vote on the constitutional amendments at Annual Conference 2025. Once all the annual conferences have voted, the Council of Bishops will certify the results.

17. Do the changes to the Book of Discipline take effect immediately?

Answer: Most changes take place on January 1, 2025, while some have explicit language making them effective immediately after GC concluded. Constitutional amendments like regionalization go into effect after they are ratified by annual conferences.

18. Will there be a recap video that churches can use in worship?

Answer: [You can find a shareable video here](#)

19. This has all been very helpful. Do congregations have the right to refuse a female pastor?

Answer: Each year a church completes a church profile through the Staff Parish Relations Committee. This is the place where a church can name important aspects of its context, its theological leanings and important details that will help with appointment making. This, along with a conversation with the superintendent, is appropriate. Consultation is required by our Discipline and we seek to appoint pastors where there is the best fit.

20. Was there any legislation that will help churches in Florida to accompany Spanish-speaking/Hispanic/ Latino people?

Answer: There was a petition requesting a study of expanded Spanish language resources at GC, but not beyond that. Spanish is a language primarily specific to the US context. A future US Regional Conference may decide to expand outreach to Spanish speaking populations in the future.

21. Do we know when the new Social Principles be published and generally available? Same question for the 2024 Book of Discipline?

Answer: This is a good question. It typically takes several months. It has been eight years since we printed new books so perhaps things have changed. They must be translated into other languages as well and that does take time. Stay tuned!

22. If the Central Conferences are, and have been, allowed to pick and choose from the Book of Discipline, why did the UMC have such a breakdown with them?

The Central Conferences are able to adapt portions of the Book of Discipline. There has not been a breakdown with the central conferences. They participated throughout General Conference and many of them were supportive of the greater plan for regionalization.

23. If I understand it, the SPRC is responsible for developing the profile of the church that may state LGBT are welcome to attend and participate in church activities, however, not occupy the pulpit as clergy?

Answer: Yes. Each year a church completes a church profile through the Staff Parish Relations Committee. This is the place where a church can name important aspects of its context, its theological leanings and important details that will help with appointment making. This, along with a conversation with the superintendent, is appropriate. Consultations with churches are required by our Discipline. All of our churches are open to anyone participating in church activities.

24. Is LGBTQIA inclusion a matter of justice or biblical interpretation?

Answer: It is a matter of both. There is not a dichotomy between justice and the bible.

25. Is the General Conference still the only legal and financial body of the official UMC around the world, regardless of regionalization?

Answer: Yes the General Conference remains the primary legislative body in the UMC. The regions will be granted specific authority and responsibilities by the General Conference. The regions (if regionalization is ratified in the Annual Conferences next year) will make certain decisions under the umbrella of the General Conference/UMC body.

26. Is this correct?

General Conference

Regional Conferences

Jurisdictional Conferences

Annual Conferences

Districts

Charge conferences (local church)

Answer: This is generally correct, if regionalization is ratified in the Annual Conferences. However, not all bodies are decision making bodies. The District is not a decision-making body. The charge conference makes decisions for the church and the Annual Conference makes decisions for the Annual Conference.

27. Are A.M.E. churches a part of our General Conference?

Answer: The AME is not a part of the UMC, however there are representatives of that denomination that have voice at our GC. The AME is an ecumenical partner of the UMC.

[More info can be found here](#)

28. Earlier it was stated that the season of disaffiliation is over. Do churches still have the opportunity to vote or not? Thanks.

Answer: No. Paragraph 2553 ended December 31, 2023.

29. If a local church prefers to NOT host LGBTQ weddings, is this a policy that must be articulated by Church Council?

Answer: Pastors should consult with their local church leadership around policies related to weddings. There is nothing in our Discipline that prevents a Board of Trustees to write a policy around weddings.

30. What is the social stand of the UMC regarding abortion?

Answer: Thank you for this question. This is found in our Social Principles. "The UMC believes in the sanctity of unborn human life and makes us reluctant to approve

abortion...But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child."

31. Are there other denominations who have made changes like our General Conference has done?

Answer: Yes, within the last 15 years, the Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church and the United Church of Christ have all passed resolutions to include LGBTQ persons in marriage and ordination.

32. If the UMC will allow same sex marriages, will they also allow marriage between heterosexuals who, for financial reasons, cannot legally marry?

Answer: My sense is that pastors are asked to officiate weddings of this kind and typically respond contextually and pastorally.

33. Will the next General Conference be in four years (2028)?

Answer: The next regular session of GC will be in 2028. The Council of Bishops may call a special session in 2026.

34. Not a question but just want to say this is the first time in over 30 years that I feel fully welcomed, accepted and affirmed in my gifts and call to serve in the church since I came out 30 years ago. I have not felt truly SAFE inside the church world in a very long time, and I am beyond blessed to be part of this denomination, and called to serve in it. Thank you ALL.

Answer: THANKS BE TO GOD FOR YOU AND YOUR WITNESS! We are glad you stayed with us.

35. What is the website to preorder the BOD coming this fall.

Answer: Cokesbury.com