

General Conference 2016: An Overview

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The General Conference is an international body of 600 to 1,000 delegates that meets every four years. The delegates are elected at annual conference sessions by all annual conferences around the world. Half of the delegates are laity and half are clergy. The General Conference is convened in years divisible by 4, such as 2008, 2012, 2016, etc. This year the approximately 850 delegates to General Conference will meet in Portland, Oregon from May 10 through May 20.

During General Conference, delegates discuss and vote on petitions and resolutions proposed by individuals, agencies, annual conferences, and other groups within the denomination. These actions result in a revision of the *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's foundational statements, and the *Book of Resolutions*, policies of the denomination on current social issues.

It is at General Conference where delegates wrestle with today's issues in light of scriptural teachings and the church's understanding of that teaching. Here is where the church's official stands and church policies are made and determination of ministries and funding are made. Only the General Conference can set official policy and speak on behalf of The United Methodist Church. (For more information see www.umc.org.)

Some interesting facts about General Conference 2016:

1. This year's theme is "Therefore Go."
2. There is a mobile app available. You can also follow proceedings at <http://gc2016.umc.org> and on Twitter at #UMCGC. OCUIR will also be posting, so make sure you follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
3. This year Central Conference delegates have been given tablets, so they can receive up-to-date information easily.

4. This year 504 delegates (~58%) will come from inside the US and 350 delegates (~39%) from outside the US. The remaining delegates from Concordat churches. Additionally, more than 2,500 visitors are expected.
5. The Council of Bishops will meet immediately before the General Conference begins and for an extra day after its conclusion. The Judicial Committee will also meet around the General Conference.
6. The major issues expected to be discussed include: a method for holy conferencing, proposals for restructuring, the worldwide nature of the denomination, the process of ordination, a new hymnal, a study paper on ecclesiology ("Wonder, Love and Praise"), human sexuality, divestment, immigration, climate care and the legislation being brought by COB OCUIR.

OCUIR will have several things to HIGHLIGHT for General Conference:

* Pre-GC Consultation on Methodist Relationships: Our partner churches in Affiliated Autonomous, and Concordat Church relationships with the UMC are invited to send representatives to a pre-General Conference meeting on May 6 and 7 to talk about those relationships... if they should be reconfigured... and how we might work together better.

* An Ecumenical Prayer Book: For 17 days around General Conference prayers have been offered on our behalf by leaders in other partner denominations. Those prayers have been put into a booklet and will be available to delegates and online.

* Ecumenical Day: Tuesday, May 17 will be Ecumenical Day at the General Conference. We will introduce representatives from many different churches around the world present to celebrate with us. We will also celebrate the 200th Anniversary of African Methodist Episcopal Church, our full communion relationships, and this year's recipients of the bishops' ecumenical award. There will also be a special lunch with a Taizé brother speaking to the participants.

* "Wonder, Love and Praise": This paper articulates and clarifies who we are as a church, and points out unique contributions of the Wesleyan expression to the church universal. It comes from the Faith and Order Committee with a petition to make this a church-wide study in the upcoming quadrennium. The hope is this document will be refined and strengthened through the study and feedback process so that the 2020 General Conference might adopt it as a parallel document to "This Holy Mystery" and "By Water and the Spirit." Together they would provide the UMC with comprehensive statements on the church and sacraments.

*OCUIR will also have a booth: The booth will give you access to our newest resources and documents... and we will have some sort of gift for delegates.

*Several pieces of legislation: OCUIR will be recommending legislation on ordination, wording changes, organizational updates and other recommendations.