

Questions for United Methodists Considering Their Options

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Introduction

Who we are:

- We are three members of Reconciling Ministries in Western Pennsylvania. • Rev. William (B.T.) Gilligan is the senior pastor of Nixon UMC. • Tracy Merrick is a lay member from Pittsburgh First UMC.
- Rev. David Morse is a retired elder and former professor of United Methodist studies at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

We believe in full-inclusion of all people at all levels of the church, and we believe that all churches should make an informed decision far beyond inclusion to determine what is best for their ministry context.

Our Rationale:

It seems almost certain that the United Methodist Church is heading for some kind of division. Various proposals for separation have been put forth and the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation is the one discussed most widely. In light of this pending separation, The United Methodist Church will likely divide into at least two or three different expressions of Methodism:

The United Methodist Church (UMC) will continue. (UMC website: www.umc.org) It will probably lift the restrictions currently in place regarding LGBTQIIA+ persons and grant them full participation in the life of the church, including marriage and ordination.

The Global Methodist Church (GMC) is a new denomination being proposed by the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA). (GMC website: <https://globalmethodist.org/>) The WCA, a traditionalist group, has already produced foundational documents which are still undergoing revisions in preparation for the organizing of The GMC:

- *The Transitional Book of Doctrine and Discipline The Global Methodist Church (TBDD)* will be in effect after the Global Methodist Church is legally formed.
 - (link: <https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/>)
- The proposed *Draft Book of Doctrines and Discipline for A New Methodist Church (DBDD)* will be presented in some form to the organizing General Conference of The GMC, will be subject to final approval by the organizing General Conference of The GMC, and will go into effect at a time defined by the organizing General Conference of The GMC.
 - (<https://wesleyan covenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Doctrines-and-Discipline-Version-1.pdf>)

The Liberation United Methodist Connection (LMX) has announced its intention to form a connexion and has included its foundational principles on its website.

- (LMX website: <https://www.thelmx.org/>)
 - (LMX updates: <http://www.thelmx.org/the-lmx-a-year-in/>) As United Methodists across the world prepare for the decisions they will need to make, there are certain questions that individuals, local churches and other groups should be asking as they consider expressions of Methodism with which to affiliate. This document suggests some of those questions and offers some answers. Since these are only a few of the questions that need to be posed, it will be important to read all of the relevant documents to get the “big picture”.

Our Purpose:

To provide information to anyone seeking answers regarding leaving the United Methodist Church for a different denomination, including the Global Methodist Church or any other Methodist Expression.

There are still many unanswered questions. All references to the protocol are tentative until voted on by the next General Conference of The UMC. All DBDD references are tentative until voted on by The GMC's first gathering.

Part I - Questions for Laity

How do I become a member of a GMC congregation?

- If you are a member of a congregation that has decided to affiliate with The GMC, your membership automatically transfers to The GMC.
- If you are a member of a congregation that has decided to remain with The UMC, you can transfer your membership to a congregation that is part of The GMC. This is done by contacting a pastor of a GMC congregation who will request a transfer of the membership via their process of accepting new members.
- If you are seeking membership by profession of faith, you will need to contact the pastor of a GMC congregation who will make the decision whether to receive you as a member, following baptism if you are not already baptized.
- Unlike in The UMC, if a GMC pastor decides that you should not be admitted as a member, the pastor's decision can be appealed to the Pastor Parish Relations Committee. This provision is included in the TBDD but not the DBDD.
 - References: ¶ 316 TBDD and ¶ 406 DBDD

What if I want to retain my membership in The UMC?

- If you are a member of a congregation that has decided to remain with The UMC, your membership will remain with The UMC.
- If you are a member of a congregation which has decided to affiliate with The GMC, you can transfer your membership to a congregation within The UMC.

This is done by contacting a pastor of a UMC congregation who will request a transfer of the membership via their process of accepting new members.

- References: *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation*.

Will I remain a full member of a GMC congregation until I decide to transfer, withdraw, or die?

- Not necessarily. Unlike in The UMC there is a new category of membership, the “inactive member” referenced in both the *TBDD* and the *DBDD*.
- If you are deemed “negligent” in your responsibilities as a member, you could be involuntarily placed on an inactive roll and, if you do not show a renewed commitment to your membership vows, you can be removed from church membership after a specified number of years. In the *TBDD*, it is two years; in the *DBDD* it is three years.
 - According to the *TBDD*, inactive members are “suspended from serving on church committees or voting on church matters during that time.”
- References: *TBDD* ¶320 and *DBDD* ¶ 409

If I am a layperson and sense a call to a form of ministry, may I become a Certified Lay Minister?

- Yes, both the *TBDD* and the *DBDD* continue the category of Certified Lay Minister.
- References: *TBDD* ¶ 402 and *DBDD* ¶ 502

Part II - Questions for Clergy

How do I become licensed and ordained in The GMC?

- To become a candidate:
 1. You must meet with your local pastor or presiding elder to inquire about candidacy.

2. You must have been a member in The GMC for at least one year.
 3. You must complete a background check and a credit check.
 4. You must be recommended by a two-thirds secret ballot vote of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee
 5. You must be approved by a simple majority vote of the Charge Conference.
- To continue as a candidate:
 1. You must, following approval by the local congregation, spend a minimum of six months in discernment which shall include a supervised internship or employment in a ministry setting.
 2. During this time you shall:
 - a. Among other things, complete a guidebook, a mentoring process and participation in a small group experience with other candidates.
 - b. Have a secondary school diploma or its equivalent.
 - c. Complete a bachelor's or master's level course work in Methodist doctrine, history, discipline and basic Bible.
 - d. Undergo a psychological evaluation
 - e. Pass a deacon's level knowledge examination in doctrine, history, discipline and Bible
 - f. Write a statement dealing with your call to ordained ministry and submit this to the conference board of ordained ministry.
 - To proceed on to ordination as a Deacon:
 1. You will be asked to answer the historic questions all Methodists were asked to answer specified in the *TBDD* and the *DBDD*

2. You will be interviewed by the board of ordained ministry and asked to answer the questions specified in *TBDD* and the *DBDD*
 3. You will then be recommended to the annual conference by a two thirds vote.
 4. If approved by the annual conference by a two-thirds vote in executive session and approved by the bishop (something that is different from The UMC) you will become a full member of the annual conference and ordained a deacon.
 5. As a full member of the conference, deacons can vote on all matters except the ordination and conference relations of elders, however, a deacon not under appointment is classified as inactive and shall have no voting rights in the conference except for the provisions of *TBDD* ¶ 416.
- To proceed on to ordination as an Elder:
 1. You may be appointed while a deacon as a pastor of a local church.
 2. Once appointed to a local church, you will be able to be ordained elder when you have:
 - a. Served for at least two years as a deacon,
 - b. Completed the educational requirements at an approved institution which may be: 1) the Course of Study, 2) BA in the practice of ministry, 3) joint BA and M.Div., 4) M.Div. or, 5) MA or equivalent in the practice of ministry,
 - c. Passed an advanced level examination in doctrine, history, discipline, and Bible
 - d. Been interviewed and recommended to the annual conference by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Ordained Ministry
 - e. Been approved by a two-thirds vote of the elders of the annual conference in Executive Session and approved by the bishop (again, new from The UMC).

3. These requirements must be completed within seven years
 4. Like deacons, elders may vote on all matters that come before the annual conference, except those elders not under appointment who shall be classified as inactive and shall not have voting rights except as provided for in *TBDD ¶ 416*.
- References: *TBDD ¶¶ 403 - 410 and DBDD ¶¶ 503 – 510*

If I am already a clergy person, how do I affiliate with The GMC? • If you are a clergy member of an annual conference that decides to affiliate with The GMC, you will be able to affiliate with The GMC after you “affirm the doctrines and Social Witness set forth in the TBDD and agree to abide by its Discipline.”

- If you are not a clergy member of an annual conference that decides to affiliate with The GMC, or if you are a pastor in another denomination, you can request a transfer to The GMC. This request is made to the Transitional Leadership Council (TLC). You will be expected to explicitly “affirm the doctrines and Social Witness set forth in the TBDD and agree to abide by its Discipline.” The TLC may delegate the responsibility for considering these requests to another body. If the recommendation of that body is negative, an appeal can be made to the TLC which can overturn that negative recommendation by a two-thirds vote.
- References: *TBDD ¶ 417*

If I am a clergy person in The UMC and want to continue to serve within The UMC?

- If you are a clergy member serving in an annual conference that decides to remain with The UMC, you will automatically remain in The UMC.
 - If you are a clergy member serving in an annual conference that decides to affiliate with The GMC, you must make a request to stay within The UMC. It is unclear where this request will be made, but likely to the District Superintendent.
 - References: *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation*
- If I am a retired UMC clergy person and transfer to The GMC, what is my status?** • According to *TBDD ¶ 416*, there is no mandatory retirement in The GMC, but you may request and receive “Senior Status”.

- You retain your right to voice and vote if:
 - you are within seven years of the effective date of your joining with The GMC, or the end of your last appointment, whichever is later, and provided you notify the conference secretary of your intention to participate in the annual conference. You must do this at least ninety days before the conference.
 - you are under appointment by the bishop at least one-quarter time.
- Otherwise, you have voice but no vote in the annual conference.
- Clergy in Senior Status may be elected as delegates to General and Regional Conferences and may serve on conference committees, commissions, and boards.
- *DBDD ¶ 517* includes different provisions in this situation.
 - Retired clergy not under appointment have no vote in matters before the conference, cannot serve as delegates to General Conference and cannot vote in selecting those delegates.
- References: *TBDD ¶ 416 and DBDD ¶ 517*

How will appointments be made in The GMC?

- If a congregation and the pastor serving that church both transition to The GMC, that appointment is maintained.
 - If a vacancy occurs, the bishop and cabinet, following consultation with the pastor and the congregation through the pastor parish committee, will make the appointment. In the end the bishop fixes the appointment.
 - Since there is no guaranteed appointment in The GMC (*TBDD ¶ 512*), the bishop is under no obligation to appoint either an elder or a deacon.
- If the bishop decides not to appoint either an elder or deacon the bishop is required to provide a written statement explaining the reasons.

- Clergy not appointed by the bishop of their annual conference are free to seek an appointment in another annual conference.
- Those clergy who do not receive an appointment will be considered as inactive.
- A detailed process for clergy appointments is described in DBDD, ¶¶ 520-522. **This should be read carefully as it deviates significantly from the current UMC process.**
 - References: *TBDD ¶¶ 509 – 514 and DBDD ¶¶ 520-522*

Will my pension be affected by any decision that I make?

- At present, the understanding among most who consider this question is that no one's pension will be affected by a decision to stay with The UMC or move to The GMC. Whatever benefits accrued and vested will remain in place. Similar pension plans will continue through Wespith.
 - However, future benefits, as is the case now, will be dependent on decisions of General Conferences regarding pension plans, appointment, salary, and the ability of a local congregation to make payments to the program.
- Since according to *TBDD ¶ 512* there is no guaranteed appointment, a pastor could transfer to The GMC and then not be appointed. If that is the case, the pastor's pension would be affected.

How will bishops be selected in The GMC?

- In The GMC, bishops will be elected for twelve year terms, with a possible two-year extension for missional purposes according to *DBDD ¶605*.
- In the interim between the formation of The GMC and the first General Conference, the Transitional Leadership Council will have the authority to approve transfers of bishops from The UMC or other autonomous Methodist Churches. This process will include "an explicit written affirmation of the doctrines and Social Witness set for in the TBDD and an agreement to abide by its discipline"
- Although the first General Conference will set the process for electing bishops, under the current proposal in the *DBDD ¶603*:

- Each annual conference may nominate two elders for consideration and the Secretary of the General Conference will develop a ballot consisting of these nominees.
- From this ballot the GC will elect an episcopal pool consisting of not fewer than the number of annual conferences. A 60% majority shall be required to be elected to the pool.
- When a vacancy occurs, the episcopal committee of the annual conference shall conduct a search from the pool. When a selection is made, it shall be ratified by The Council of Bishops and the General Episcopal Committee of The GMC by a simple majority. A bishop cannot be selected to serve their own annual conference unless by a 2/3 waiver granted by The General Committee on Episcopacy.

• References: *TBDD ¶ 516 and DBDD ¶603 and DBDD ¶605*

Will there be District Superintendents or Presiding Elders in The GMC? • Each district of an annual conference is expected to consist of 20 to 30 churches and shall be led by a Presiding Elder, who may be retired clergy member or who may serve a local church, for a term to be set by the first General Conference. It is currently recommended to be twelve years.

- According to the proposed DBDD, When the Presiding Elder position is vacant or about to be vacant, the District shall meet and select a pool of three clergy by a 60% majority, with at least one cross-cultural or one female candidate in the pool. The bishop will appoint the next Presiding Elder from that pool.

• References: *DBDD ¶614 and TBDD ¶506*

Part III - Questions for Congregations

How will a congregation join The GMC or stay within The UMC? • *The UMC Book of Discipline* (2019 addition ¶ 2553) includes a specific process for a local congregation to leave the denomination, if it chooses to leave before the General Conference approves The Protocol.

- If General Conference adopts the Protocol and it is judged constitutional by the Judicial Council:
 - If a UMC local church is a part of an annual conference that has decided to affiliate to The GMC that church will automatically become part of The GMC and does not need to take a vote to do so. If that local church wants to remain with The UMC it will need to hold a charge conference and take a vote to remain.
 - If that local church is a part of an annual conference that has decided to remain in The UMC, that church will automatically remain in The UMC and does not need to take a vote to do so. If that church wants to join The GMC, it will need to hold a church conference and take a vote to join The GMC.

What is expected of a congregation regarding The GMC's doctrine and discipline?

- Congregations which for reasons of conscience are unable to adhere to The GMC's doctrine and discipline are encouraged to affiliate with another denomination.
- If a congregation does not adhere to The GMC's doctrine and disciplines and does not leave The GMC voluntarily, the *TBDD* specifies steps which need to be taken to try and bring the church into conformity. If these actions do not result in adherence, the Transitional Leadership Council will have the authority to remove the church from The GMC.
 - Reference: *TBDD* ¶ 351

Who will own local church property in The GMC?

- Since there is no trust clause in The GMC, each local church will own its property and will be subject to the various laws of the legal authority under which they are or are not incorporated. Depending on local incorporation, a variety of legal responsibilities may be left to the local congregation under this plan.
- While the absence of a trust clause may sound initially attractive, the legal implications of this should be considered carefully by local congregations.

- There is no mention of the Trust Clause in the proposed DBDD to be submitted to the first GC. This leaves the status of the trust clause unclear to the status of the Trust Clause for congregations that align after the DBDD is adopted.
- Reference: *TBDD ¶ 902 and no mention in the DBDD*

If our church joins The GMC, can we continue to use the cross and flame? • No, the Cross and Flame can only be used by United Methodist Churches. *The United Methodist Book of Discipline ¶807.10* states that the cross and flame logo can only be used by official United Methodist institutions. The GMC will not be one of those institutions. Depending upon the current branding used by a congregation removing the cross and flame could be complicated and there may be an emotional toll to pay for congregation members who are attached to the cross and flame.

- References: *UMC BOD 2016 Paragraph 807.10*

If our church joins The GMC, can we continue to use our UMC Church name?

- No. Church names will need to remove the “United Methodist” or “UMC” from their names. This will include all documents including signs, bank accounts, charters, incorporation paperwork, deeds, and any other items that bear “UMC” or similar on them.
- In making these changes, it will be important to follow the specific provisions in state and local laws and to follow the guidance of a local attorney.

If our church joins The GMC, are there other legal issues which need to be considered?

- If there are, hopefully the Annual Conference will outline the specific changes which are needed in each locale.
- Because this amounts to a legal transfer between two annual conferences, each being a legal entity, there may be state and local legal implications which an attorney should help a congregation address.

Will we still be required to pay apportionments?

- The UMC will continue to use the apportionment model for connectional funding, using the formula adopted by each Annual Conference.
- The GMC outlines their process for connectional funding in the *DBDD ¶349*. In this paragraph, it will be recommended that each local church will pay 1.5% of its operating expenses to The GMC general church and 5% to The GMC Annual Conference. Failure to pay this in full can result in a church being disaffiliated from the Global Methodist Church per *DBDD ¶ 354*
 - References: *DBDD ¶349 and ¶ 354*

Can the congregation be removed from The GMC against its will? • Yes, kind of. The Global Methodist Church states a process in the *TBODD ¶ 351 and ¶ 354* in which a church can be removed from the denomination against their will.

- There are two ways this can happen.
 - Not paying connectional funding (apportionments).
 - Consistently advancing doctrines and engaging practices not in conformity with the *TBDD*
- If this happens the church will be required to immediately pay their unfunded pension obligation.
 - However, *The DBDD* does not include these provisions.

Could there be a time when a church in The GMC would not have a pastor? • Under the present appointment system in The UMC, every church is guaranteed a pastor, unless in rare exceptions, there is a need to appoint an interim pastor.

- Due to the provision in *TBDD ¶509-510* there could be circumstances in The GMC where a church may be without a pastor. The details remain undefined at this time.

Part IV – Closing thoughts on GMC and Homosexuality

While the position of The GMC is well documented, it is important to shed extra clarity here as churches, clergy, and laity begin to make decisions. The

GMC uses similar language for inclusion but the meaning of those words is very different than the current UMC usage of the language.

What is The GMC's view concerning non-traditional expressions of human sexuality?

- Although it is not specifically mentioned in the *TBDD* and the *DBDD*, persons practicing non-traditional expressions of human sexuality may be excluded from full affirmation and participation in The GMC by provisions in the *TBDD* and *DBDD*.
- Inclusion:
 - The *TBDD* "Called to Inclusiveness" includes ¶ 306:

"Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the spiritual life of the Church and its service to the community and the world. Therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, or gender (defined throughout this *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline* by a person's immutable biological traits identified by or before birth). ... Similarly, inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons who meet the requirements of our *Book of Doctrines and Discipline* in the membership and leadership of the Church at any level and in every place."

 - Although this paragraph indicates that inclusiveness denies any form of discrimination based on "race, color, national origin, disability, or gender", it fails to include a host of other considerations such as marital status, family structure, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation and by implication permits The GMC to discriminate based on those factors. Other paragraphs throughout the *TBDD* and *DBDD* do the same!
 - This paragraph also defines a person's gender as the "person's immutable biological traits identified by or before birth" and thereby specifically discriminates against transgender and intersex people.
 - Reference: *TBDD* ¶ 306
- Human sexuality and Marriage:

- The *TBDD* “Our Witness to the World” includes ¶ 202.7: “We believe that human sexuality is a gift of God that is to be affirmed as it is exercised within the legal and spiritual covenant of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman.”
- This provision has the effect of denying the affirmation of loving, committed persons practicing non-traditional expressions of human sexuality and declares that same gender marriage is not to be affirmed.
 - Reference: *TBDD* ¶ 202.7
- Chargeable Offenses:
 - The list of chargeable offenses includes the following language for both clergy and laity in *DBDD* ¶ 902.1g and *DBDD* ¶ 902.2g: “Engaging in sexual activities outside the bonds of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman, including but not limited to sexual abuse or misconduct, the use or possession of pornography, or infidelity;”
 - The effect of these provisions will exclude many persons practicing non-traditional expressions of human sexuality people from joining The GMC or being ordained in The GMC without being charged for being who they authentically are. The GMC also makes being part of a same gender marriages a chargeable offense.
 - The list of chargeable offenses includes the following for clergy in *DBDD* ¶ 902.1d: “Promoting doctrines or practices, or conducting ceremonies or services, that are not in accord with those established by the _____ Church;”
 - This provision clearly make it a chargeable offense for clergy to perform same gender marriages.
 - References: *DBDD* ¶ 902.1 and ¶ 902.2

Conclusion

In addition to the issues surrounding human sexuality, both clergy and laity should consider the following significant polity issues:

1. Strict adherence to all parts of The GMC Doctrine and Discipline.
2. The appointment process, especially the possibility that there will be no guaranteed appointment,
3. The status of retired (“senior”) clergy in The GMC,
4. The status of the episcopacy,
5. The question of church membership, including the “inactive roll,”
6. The ambiguity about a “trust clause,” and the legal implications of that for a local congregation.
7. The complications of name changes and logos

Again, for a detailed understanding of these issues, please consult the relevant paragraphs of the TBDD and the DBDD

Links for Reference

UMC website: www.umc.org

GMC website: <https://globalmethodist.org/>

LMX website: <https://www.thelmx.org/>

Transitional Book of Doctrines and Disciplines:
<https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/>

Book of Doctrines and Disciplines:
<https://wesleyan covenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Doctrines-and-Discipline-Version-1.pdf>

UMC Book of Discipline with 2019 additions:
<https://cdn.cokesbury.com/images/community/cokesburyportals/2016boderrata.pdf>

If you have other questions, would like more information, or would like to invite us to share this document with your congregation please contact us directly at rmnwpa@gmail.com

All versions of this document are hosted in the resources section of the Western PA Reconciling Ministries website: www.rmnpa.com