



A Report by Rev. Kathy Talley from Reconciling Ministries Network's "Connection 2020"



As usual with RMN's events, the worship and music were both outstanding. This time the big focus was on preparation for General Conference, Annual Conferences, and Jurisdictional Conference. I found it helpful to learn the latest from the progressive perspective, and that's what I want to share with you.

General Conference (GC): A number of delegations, including Virginia, have asked that the matter of the separation of the UMC be considered in the first few days of GC. In particular, a request has been made for the legislation to enact the Protocol (the mediated, signed agreement for separation without lawsuits made by key progressives, centrists, and traditionalists) to be heard by a "Committee of the Whole" on one day and then for a formal vote on their recommendation by the GC the next day. In addition, others have asked that the Christmas Covenant (which separates the United States into its own region) be considered the day before the Protocol is considered. That sequence definitely seems best to me.

Three Additional Issues RMN hopes will come before the GC in its first week:

- 1) Adoption of the proposed Global Social Principles
- 2) Removal of the LGBTQ Prohibitions from the post-GC UMC Book of Discipline
- 3) Establishment of 21st Century Commission to guide the post-GC UMC into a future freed up from the "isms" (racism, sexism, heterosexism, colonialism, etc.) of the past that continue to haunt us

Now we await the decision of the Commission on GC's "Think Tank" regarding how best to process legislation at the 2020 GC.

Side Issue: Traditionalists may leave the UMC for the creation of two new denominations, and a group of 17 traditional bishops are meeting with the WCA in the hopes of resolving their differences, such that the WCA would be the only new traditionalist denomination. Time will tell.

Annual Conference: Assuming that the Christmas Covenant and the Protocol are approved by General Conference (and granted that is far from certain) and assuming that the Virginia Conference votes in June to stay in the UMC (expected, but not certain) then no local church who wants to stay in the UMC will have to take a vote, unless 20% of the membership request one. That means that Centenary will likely not have to vote.

Other Annual Conferences will likely vote this year to either remain in the UMC or to leave. Others will delay voting until next year. Local churches who disagree with their Conference will have to vote. Ministers who disagree with their Conference will have to move to another Conference. I am not going to get into all those possibilities here, but I will be happy to answer questions individually.

Jurisdictional Conference: In the Southeast, up to 5 bishops will be elected. That number could be reduced, based on General Conference decisions regarding the separation of the UMC. Because of the progressive/centrist sweep of delegates last year, this could be the year to elect all progressive/centrist bishops in the Southeast. That would dramatically change the Jurisdiction's character (for the better, I would say.) The other really important business will be the election of new members of the General Church Boards and Agencies. Again, last year's sweep could make the election of progressive/centrist delegates not only possible, but likely.

As I reread what I've written, I am keenly aware that it is probably both too cryptic and too long, all at the same time. I can summarize it all in this way, I left Nashville hopeful and encouraged about the future of our United Methodist Church.