

SUMMARY OF THE DIRECT PLAN:
BIRTHING NEW EXPRESSIONS
OF UNITED METHODISM

Draft: July 5, 2019

This proposal represents a two-stage plan to bring into being new expressions of Methodism for the sake of expanding the mission of The United Methodist Church in new ways and to new constituencies. The United Methodist Church would birth a new Traditionalist expression of United Methodism that would maintain a global structure and a new UM Next expression of United Methodism that would allow for a U.S. central conference. (Note that the names used in this proposal are placeholders for whatever names the various expressions would choose.) All groups would offer a generous spirit and a blessing to the others, as we walk our separate ways.

Both expressions would be permitted, but not required, to continue to use the name “The United Methodist Church” with an appropriate modifier to distinguish the two entities. Both would be permitted, but not required, to use the cross and flame logo, with modification for purposes of distinguishing the two entities. GCFA would have the continued responsibility to administer the name “The United Methodist Church” and the trademarks of The United Methodist Church during a transitional period.

The Traditionalist UMC would develop its own Book of Discipline, structures, polity, and finances. It could borrow from the current UMC Discipline whatever provisions it desired. It would maintain the current stance of the Discipline regarding the practice of homosexuality. It would be an autonomous Methodist Church that would be part of the World Methodist Council and the Pan-Methodist Commission. The continuing relationship between the Traditionalist UMC and the UM Next UMC would be governed by a negotiated concordat agreement after the new expressions are formed.

The UM Next UMC would develop its own Book of Discipline based on the current one at its first General Conference, with the prohibitions against same-sex weddings and the ordination and appointment of self-avowed practicing homosexuals removed. At that inception, it would provide for a US central conference governance structure and further define its stance related to ministry with and inclusion of LGBTQ persons, along with discerning whether there is a need for a separate Progressive expression. Such a Progressive expression could be formed at the same time as the other two expressions by one or more annual conferences or by a group of 50 or more local churches, or it could be formed out of the UM Next UMC at a later time.

Annual conferences and local churches in the U.S. would decide by majority vote which of the two new expressions to align with. Such a vote shall occur whenever 15% of the delegates to an annual conference or 15 percent of the average worshipping attendance of a local church request such a vote. Annual conferences shall administer an advisory referendum prior to their vote on

the matter, wherein every professing member of a local church in the annual conference is given a chance to vote, using their local church as the polling place (to ensure the membership status of those voting) where ballots are cast for the options the annual conference is considering. Referendum ballots would be tabulated at the annual conference level and would not be counted at the local level, so that no local church would know how its members voted in the referendum (to avoid local divisiveness). The results of the referendum should guide the decision of the annual conference.

Local churches in annual conferences that align with the Traditionalist UMC could decide by majority vote to align with the UM Next UMC. Local churches in annual conferences that align with the UM Next UMC could decide by majority vote to be part of the Traditionalist UMC. Annual conferences in the U.S. not voting to join another expression would align by default with the UM Next UMC. Annual conference boundaries would be redrawn and new annual conferences formed by the jurisdictions in the UM Next UMC and by the General Conference of the Traditionalist UMC to incorporate local churches whose annual conference has affiliated with another expression.

Any annual conference or group of 50 local churches could withdraw to form another new expression of United Methodism different from the main two. Individual congregations could also decide to simply withdraw from The United Methodist Church and become independent.

U.S. annual conferences whose lay equalizing members are either elected by district conferences or randomly assigned to different local churches would not have to divide their assets with the minority group. U.S. annual conferences whose lay equalizing members are selected in any other way would be required to divide the annual conference assets proportional to the professing membership of each expression formed out of that annual conference if the affiliation vote is less than 75 percent in favor of one expression.

Central conferences, their annual conferences, and/or their local churches would align by default with the Traditionalist UMC, unless 15 percent of the delegates to a central conference or annual conference or 15 percent of the average worshipping attendance of a local church request a vote to align with the UM Next UMC or become autonomous. It is envisioned that Africa, Eastern and Southern Europe, and possibly part or all of the Philippines would potentially align with the Traditionalist UMC. Western and Northern Europe would potentially align with the UM Next UMC. Some individual congregations in Europe might choose to align with a different expression than their annual conference chooses.

No payments by local churches to address unfunded pension liability or extra apportionments would be required, except that congregations that withdraw to become independent would need to provide for their share of the annual conference pension liabilities. Congregations becoming independent would have no share in the denominational assets. The window for annual conferences and local churches to change affiliations would remain open at least through December 31, 2028, but only the early deciders would have a role in the formation of the new

expressions. Annual conferences and local churches that take a vote on affiliation would have to wait four years before taking another vote on potentially changing their affiliation.

Wespath, UMCOR, and UMW would be spun off as independent 501(c)3 organizations with their assets and liabilities and their own self-perpetuating boards of directors and would be able to serve any expression that desired to receive services from them. The General Commission on Archives and History, along with its financial reserves, would be given to a United Methodist institution (e.g., a seminary). All other agencies would become part of the UM Next UMC with mutually agreed upon initial funding, subject to whatever restructuring that new denomination does. Such agencies could also contract to serve other expressions formed in this process. All other net assets of the boards and agencies of the UM Church shall be placed in a shared asset pool to be distributed equally to the two new expressions. If a Progressive or other expression forms at the same time as the other two expressions, its percentage would be deducted equally from the other two based on its proportion of the global membership of The United Methodist Church at the time the new expressions are formed.

Institutions owned or affiliated with an annual conference would follow that annual conference into a new expression, unless the institution changes its affiliation according to its own bylaws. Institutions or property owned or affiliated with a jurisdiction would flow into the expression the majority of annual conferences in that jurisdiction choose to affiliate with, unless the institution changes its affiliation according to its own bylaws.

Clergy and bishops would decide which expression to align with. By default, they would remain part of their annual conference in whichever expression their annual conference affiliates, unless they request to affiliate with a different expression. Transitional appointments in other expressions would be possible. Annual conference pension liabilities would be reassigned to the new expressions and pension promises would be protected.

The two new expressions formed from this process would receive an equal allocation from the restricted and unrestricted assets of the general church agencies (with the exception of Wespath, UMCOR, Archives and History, and UMW) at the time of inception, after setting aside for each agency an agreed upon amount for initial operation. If a Progressive or other expression forms at the same time as the other two expressions, its percentage would be deducted equally from the other two based on its proportion of the global membership of The United Methodist Church. Assets would be distributed as much as possible by mutual agreement and negotiation, with an arbitration board making the final distribution.

Passage of the plan would also implement a moratorium on all complaints and disciplinary proceedings related to violations of the Book of Discipline over clergy performing same-sex weddings, bishops and annual conferences ordaining as clergy practicing LGBT persons, or clergy who are self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

The second stage of the process (targeted to Fall 2022) would involve the UM Next UMC having a special General Conference to remove all such prohibitions and further define its stance related to ministry with and inclusion of LGBTQ persons. That special General Conference would also restructure the UM Next denomination in light of the annual conferences and local churches that are no longer part of the UM Next UMC, as well as implementing a U.S. central conference governance. Representation would be elected by those annual conferences choosing to affiliate with the UM Next UMC and also by groups of local churches and clergy that form in areas where their annual conference affiliates with the Traditionalist UMC.

The second stage of the process would simultaneously involve the Traditionalist UMC holding its inaugural General Conference to adopt a Constitution and Book of Discipline that would govern the work of that denomination. Representation would be elected by those annual conferences choosing to affiliate with the Traditionalist UMC and also by groups of local churches and clergy that form in areas where their annual conference affiliates with the UM Next UMC.

Possible timeline:

- July 1, 2021 – deadline for annual conferences in both the U.S. and central conferences to take an initial vote regarding with which expression to affiliate. Annual conferences not taking a vote by this date would have their affiliation frozen in the default option until after January 1, 2023.
- March 31, 2022 – deadline for local churches to take a vote on affiliating with a different expression than the one chosen by their annual conference. Local churches may vote on a different affiliation any time after their annual conference's vote and do not need to wait until July 2021. Local churches not taking a vote by this date would have their affiliation frozen in the default option until after January 1, 2023.
- Fall 2022 – inaugural Traditionalist UMC General Conference, special UM Next UMC General Conference, and inaugural meetings of any other expressions desiring to be formed out of this process to adopt governance structures
- January 1, 2023 – effective date of all new United Methodist expressions
- December 31, 2028 – ability to change affiliations would expire, except for any process of withdrawal provided by any of the United Methodist expressions