



February 25, 2021

To: Secretary of the General Conference
Business Manager of the General Conference
Chairperson of the Commission on the General Conference
Annual Conference Secretaries
Heads of Delegations to the 2020 General Conferences or successors

From: Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey
President – Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Subject: Special Session of General Conference

The Council of Bishops hereby issues a call for a Special Session of the General Conference per Division Two - Section II - Article II of The Constitution of The United Methodist Church (¶14 of The Book of Discipline (2016)).

The Special Session of the General Conference will be held May 8, 2021 and shall be convened online.

This call is issued to gain a quorum in order to:

- a. Suspend the rules (2/3 vote) to allow for the utilization of paper ballots in acting upon twelve (12) disciplinary amendments to be effective upon the announcement of the results of the balloting on Tuesday, July 13.
- b. To explain the voting procedures and deadlines for submitting paper ballots related to the matters stated within the call.
- c. To adjourn the Special Session with the results of the balloting announced on Tuesday, July 13.

In accordance with ¶511.4.d., to “assure full participation of all General Conference delegates,” all decisions will be limited to approval of the use of paper ballots and confined to the designated twelve (12) amendments to the Book of Discipline.

The special session of the General Conference shall be limited to acting upon the following items needed to authorize administrative functions for the continuation of the mission and ministry of the Church during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. To suspend the rules by a two-thirds vote that would interfere with allowing the following twelve (12) disciplinary matters to be moved, seconded, and then without debate be voted upon using a mailed ballot (deletions are indicated by strike-through/new language is indicated by underlining), the results of such votes to be effective upon announcement on July 13, 2021:

Amendment to Comply with Decision 1383

ITEM #1

¶354. *Involuntary Leave of Absence....*

4. Involuntary leave of absence shall be approved by two-thirds vote of the clergy session of members in full connection with the annual conference. Members of the Cabinet, Board of Ordained Ministry, Conference Relations Committee, and Administrative Review Committee shall not vote in the Clergy Session on recommendations for involuntary leave of absence (¶354), involuntary retirement (¶357.3), administrative location (¶359), or involuntary discontinuance from provisional membership (¶327.6) Involuntary leave shall be approved annually upon written request of the district superintendents and shall not be approved for more than three years in succession.

General Conference Issues

ITEM #2

¶ 506. *Meetings & Quorum – a)* In the event it is determined by the Commission on the General Conference, in consultation with the Council of Bishops, that due to war, political upheaval, natural disaster, disease outbreak, travel restrictions or other development that makes it probable a quorum of delegates cannot be present for the session of General Conference, the Commission on the General Conference, in consultation with the Council of Bishops, may authorize the session to be held, in part or in whole, electronically. In the event it is determined that the General Conference will be held electronically, the Commission on the General Conference shall use all reasonable means to ensure the opportunity for participation by all delegates in the business of the conference.

Central Conference Issues

ITEM #3

¶542.2. Each central conference shall meet within the year succeeding the session of the General Conference at such time and place as the central conference itself or its bishops may determine for the purpose of electing bishops when vacancies occur and for attending to other matters as required; provided, however, that in the event of any war,

political upheaval, natural disaster, disease outbreak, travel restrictions or other development that, in the sole determination of the College of Bishops, makes it probable that a quorum of delegates cannot be present for the session, the College of Bishops may postpone the scheduled Central Conference to a later date or authorize the session to be held, in part or in whole, electronically. In the event it is determined that the central conference session will be held electronically, the College of Bishops shall use all reasonable means to ensure the opportunity for participation by all delegates in the business of the conference. The central conference has the right to hold such adjourned sessions as it may determine. The sessions of said conference shall be presided over by the bishops. In case no bishop is present, the conference shall elect a temporary president from among its own members. The bishops resident in a central conference or a majority of them, with the concurrence of the executive committee or other authorized committee, shall have authority to call an extra session of the central conference to be held at the time and place designated by them. The central conferences may meet within six months after the ratification of the votes taken at the 2021 special session for the purpose of determining whether to elect new bishops for the next quadrennium as *in the number presently* authorized by the 2016 General Conference upon the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and if so, how many of the authorized number of bishops will be elected. The central conferences are further directed to make their determination as to whether to elect new bishops and, if so, how many of the *presently* authorized number of bishops will be elected in the context of missional potential and changes in episcopal areas, including, but not limited to, the financial resources available to support the bishops elected and the long-term sustainability and financial stewardship of resources resulting from such elections. The last two sentences of this subparagraph 4 shall be automatically deleted upon the adjournment of the next regular session of the General Conference.

Retirement of Bishops

ITEM #4

¶406 *Assignment Process* – 1. *Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy* - ... The date of assignment for all bishops is ~~September 1~~ shall be no later than sixty days following the adjournment of the jurisdictional conference. ...

ITEM #5

¶408 *Termination of Office - ...*

1. *Mandatory Retirement - a)* A bishop shall be retired ~~on August 31 next following the~~ sixty days following the adjournment of the regular or special session of the jurisdictional conference if the bishop's sixty-eighth birthday has been reached on or before July 1 of the year in which the regular or special jurisdictional conference is held.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, every bishop who shall have attained age seventy-two shall automatically be retired sixty days following his or her birthday, subject to being specially assigned pursuant to ¶ 406.3 or ¶ 408.1d.

b) A bishop in a central conference shall be retired at a date no later than ~~three months following the~~ one year following the adjournment of ~~General Conference~~ the regular or special session of the central conference, if the bishop's sixty-eighth birthday is reached on or before the opening day of his or her scheduled regular or special conference effective on January 1, 2016. ~~This action becomes effective at the adjournment of General Conference 2016.~~ Notwithstanding the foregoing, every bishop who shall have attained age seventy-two shall automatically be retired sixty days following his or her birthday, subject to being specially assigned pursuant to ¶ 406.3 or ¶ 408.1d.

ITEM #6

¶408.2 *Voluntary Retirement -*

f) The dates specified in ¶ 408.1 and 2(a) and (c) notwithstanding, between sessions of the jurisdictional conference or central conference any bishop who attains the age and/or number of years of service specified in those sections may, upon the member's own request and with the approval of the College of Bishops and jurisdictional committee on the episcopacy, be granted the retired relation *ad interim*, with applicable pension or retirement plan or program. The retirement shall be effective on the date of the approval of the College of Bishops and the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy.

Issues Related to GCFA & the Budget

ITEM #7

¶805.6.b. General Council on Finance and Administration Organization

The council shall submit to each quadrennial session of the General Conference budgets of estimated income and expense for the four years of the ensuing quadrennium. In the event the regular session of the General Conference is postponed or cannot be held as scheduled, the budget approved at the last regular session of the General Conference shall be extended until such time as the General Conference can convene. ...

ITEM #8

¶806.1 ... It shall submit to each quadrennial session of the General Conference, for its action and determination, budgets of expense for each of the general funds of the Church, as listed or defined in ¶ 810.1, and such other general funds as the General Conference may establish. It shall also make recommendations regarding all other funding considerations to come before General Conference. Actual receipts for each fund for the quadrennium then ending shall be the basis for all budgeting procedures and comparisons for the upcoming quadrennium. In the event the regular session of the General Conference is postponed or cannot be held as scheduled, the budget approved at the last regular session of the General Conference shall be extended until such time as the General Conference can convene.

...

Annual Conference Issues

Item #9

¶603.7 – The annual conference at the first session following the General Conference or jurisdictional conferences (or if it may desire, at the last session preceding the General, jurisdictional, or central conferences), utilizing such nominating procedure as the annual conference shall determine, shall elect a secretary and statistician to serve for the succeeding quadrennium. In the event the regular session of the General Conference is postponed or cannot be held as scheduled, then the annual conference may elect the secretary and statistician at any annual conference following the date originally scheduled for the regular session of the General Conference and such person shall serve

until the longer of the date of adjournment of the first annual conference following the next regular session of the General Conference or the annual conference meeting four years after the election. ...

Item #10

¶619 – *Conference Treasurer/Director of Administrative Services* – Each annual conference, on nomination of its council on finance and administration, shall at the first session of the conference after the quadrennial session of the General Conference or jurisdictional conference, or at such other times as a vacancy exists, elect a conference treasurer or conference treasurer/director of administrative services. The treasurer or treasurer/director of administrative services shall serve for the quadrennium or until a successor shall be elected and qualify. In the event the regular session of the General Conference is postponed or cannot be held as scheduled, then the annual conference may elect the treasurer or treasurer/director of administrative services at any annual conference following the date originally scheduled for the regular session of the General Conference and such person shall serve until the longer of the date of adjournment of the first annual conference following the next regular session of the General Conference or the annual conference meeting four years after the election. ...

Item #11

¶635.1 – *Conference Board of Ordained Ministry* – 1. Each annual conference at the first session following the General Conference, shall elect for a term of four years, a Board of Ordained Ministry. In the event the regular session of the General Conference is postponed or cannot be held as scheduled, then the annual conference may elect the members of the Board of Ordained Ministry at any annual conference following the date originally scheduled for the regular session of the General Conference and such persons shall serve until the longer of the date of adjournment of the first annual conference following the next regular session of the General Conference or the annual conference meeting four years after the election. ...

Item #12

¶637.1 – Conference Committee on Episcopacy – 1. There shall be a conference committee on episcopacy elected quadrennially by the annual conference at the session following the General Conference. In the event the regular session of the General Conference is postponed or cannot be held as scheduled, then the annual conference may elect the members of the Committee on Episcopacy at any annual conference following the date originally scheduled for the regular session of the General Conference and such persons shall serve until the longer of the date of adjournment of the first annual conference following the next regular session of the General Conference or the annual conference meeting four years after the election....

Following this matter, the Special Session will adjourn to allow delegates to vote on the foregoing twelve (12) disciplinary matters via mailed ballots. All ballots will be required to be post-marked by June 21, 2021, and the results of the vote on the twelve (12) disciplinary matters will be announced by the Commission on the General Conference on or before July 13, 2021.

Based on the Judicial Council's canons of interpretation, ¶ 14, Article II of the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline should be interpreted to mean that the delegates for a special session in 2021 would be those persons elected by the annual conferences as delegates to the 2020 General Conference. Likewise, the phrase "or their lawful successors" in ¶14 should be construed to mean that persons elected for the postponed 2020 General Conference are the delegates to a special session of the General Conference in 2021.

The Secretary of the General Conference will be in communication with annual conference secretaries regarding delegate information. The Commission on the General Conference and the Business Manager of the General Conference will develop and forward additional information regarding the logistics of the special session of General Conference at the appropriate time.

The Council of Bishops encourages the entire church to continue in deep, unceasing prayer for the Church and the world in this difficult time of the COVID-19 pandemic.