

United Methodist Church (UMC) General Conference Report

Contact Name and Details	Dr Daleep Mukarji, Chair of the Global Relationships Strategic Oversight Sub-Committee
Action Required	For Information
Resolution	35/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To report to the Council on behalf of the Global Relationships Strategic Oversight Sub-Committee on the Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church (UMC) which took place on 23-26 February 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.
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UMC General Conference Report

1. At its meeting on 7 March 2019, the Global Relationships Strategic Oversight Sub-Committee received a report from the delegation from the Methodist Church in Britain (MCB) attending the UMC General Conference in February 2019.
2. The report has been produced by the four MCB delegates (listed at the end of the paper). The Global Relationships Strategic Oversight Sub-Committee approved this report, which is now shared with the Council.

Report from Special Session of the UMC General Conference

3. A Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church took place 23-26 February 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.
4. The Conference was called to explore how the UMC could find a way forward in its debate over human sexuality. A Commission on a Way Forward sponsored by the Council of Bishops had produced three church plans.
5. The One Church Plan, which allowed for individual conferences to apply contextual changes to the core of the Book of Discipline, was supported by the majority of bishops. A Connectional Plan allowed for three Connections to serve progressive, traditional and moderate groupings respectively. The Traditional Plan reinforced the current Book of Discipline which excludes openly LGBTQIA from ministry.
6. The Conference began with a day of prayer which helped to remind everyone present of the wider context of the whole church family and encompassed and recognised the very different points of view. It was evident in the morning that there was a reluctance to name the issue that was being considered in the Conference and so, in the afternoon there was specific acknowledgement of the presence of LGBTQTI+ Methodists and an assurance that they were "seen".
7. The fact that many delegates are working in their second language even when translation is provided (into one of 4 languages) added an extra and complicating dimension to the work.
8. The first indication of the likely outcome of the debate was when the business of the Conference was prioritised for the Legislative Committee. It was clear at this stage that the traditional plan had majority support, though it was not a substantial majority. It was also clear (unsurprisingly) that some of the Central Conferences were strongly in support of the traditional plan and that the balance of opinion and of cultural perspective in the UMC has and is shifting as membership in North America is shrinking and membership in other parts of the world is growing. The perspective of delegates was also clearly influenced understandably by the political situation in their home countries. Although the One Church Plan (OCP) allowed Central Conferences to come to their own decision about issues of inclusion, this was either not recognised or it was considered too dangerous even to be part of a denomination where some were able to include, welcome and affirm the ministry of LGBTQTI+ siblings.
9. The Legislative Committee passed only the traditional plan along with a number of motions around disaffiliation and pensions. The Monday session ended with many people feeling very upset and this would have been the case whichever way things had gone.

10. As was expected, a minority report came to the Conference when it was convened the following morning on Tuesday. The minority report sought to bring the One Church Plan back to the table. In introducing this the proposer was trying to help delegates to understand that the plan did not force anyone to do anything they did not wish to do. The problem was that, for many, this was not about individual choice but about the nature of the church. The difference in theological understanding and a refusal by some to accept the possibility of different interpretations of scripture was a significant.
11. By Tuesday afternoon, it was very clear that, despite some impressive filibustering, we were in the midst of a church going into schism. This was a very uncomfortable and disturbing place to be. All the attempts to hold together were falling apart and polarisation was increasing along with the violence of the debate. There were crowds in the gallery, the majority of whom appeared to support the One Church Plan which was not surprising as the Conference was being held in North America.
12. The role of the MCB delegates was often to listen, to offer support and to attempt some input to the conversation.
13. There was much that was painful in this division and inability of the General Conference to support the ministry of the LGBTI community, and the majority of the US church; much that will not be resolved before the Church's Judicial Council meets in April to consider the constitutionality of the Traditional Plan, or indeed before the next General Conference in May 2020.
14. This Connexion remains in a concordat with the UMC and this is important for both Churches. We think it is important that we retain close connection especially with the Methodist family in Western Europe and North America.
15. The General Conference meets for the new Quadrennium in May of 2020. These conversations will continue there and in light of this, it seems wise that we continue forward with the delegation that has been part of this called session of the Conference, namely the Revd Dr Andrew Wood, the Revd Ruth Gee, Ms Megan Thomas and Mr Doug Swanney.

*****RESOLUTION**

35/1. The Council receives the report.