

[The following is an excerpt from a document written by Adam Hamilton. He serves as the Senior Pastor of the Church of the Resurrection UMC in Leawood, Kansas. Pastor Hamilton is among the leaders of the UMC in the U.S. exploring directions and options in response to the Special 2019 General Conference.]

An Update on the Denomination

For those interested in the latest news about the United Methodist Church, I wanted to give you some of the latest information from across the denomination...

In the United States, the UMC is divided into 54 regional bodies called annual conferences. Resurrection is a part of the Great Plains Annual Conference (though our Downtown and Blue Springs campuses are also associated with the Missouri Annual Conference). Every pastor and a layperson for each pastor gather for three or four days in their annual conference each May or June. The annual conference season is just concluding. Among the things that happened at this year's annual conferences was the election of new delegates to next May's General Conference.

The elections this year were widely seen as a referendum on last year's special General Conference and the policies approved there, continuing exclusionary language and policies for LGBT persons. Last year's delegates were elected in 2016. This year, it is estimated that 73% or more of the U.S. delegates just elected are persons who oppose the Traditional Plan that was passed last year. There were also resolutions passed in more than a dozen annual conferences opposing the plan (including Great Plains). This is not surprising. United Methodists in the United States are heavily centrists and the Traditional Plan did not reflect our values regardless of how we interpret scripture related to same sex marriage. It's not that we all agree in our interpretation of scripture, but most U.S. United Methodists agree that it's okay to disagree and still remain one church and that there needs to be space for pastors, churches and annual conferences to interpret scripture differently.

It's important to note that, just because 73% of American delegates oppose the Traditional Plan and the current policies of the Discipline does not mean they can overturn the policies approved last year. To do that would require a willingness on the part of some African delegates and others to recognize where the U.S. church is and to make room for their American colleagues. Conversations over the next two months will be aimed at seeing if that is possible or if Africa joins the conservative caucuses in wanting to dissolve the UMC.