



UNITED METHODISTS OF GREATER NEW JERSEY

Frequently Asked Questions

Where in the USA and abroad are the approximately two dozen conferences located who are also looking at the model GNJ is proposing? I am wondering if their diversity along theological and other lines are similar to GNJ. -*Elaine Wing, Calvary Dumont UMC, Palisades*

UMNews has reported regularly on what various conferences are considering. Two stories that point to actions of annual conferences include: “Church Future Focus of Annual Conferences” from May and a July article “Conferences Mull Denominations Future”. The UMNews website also has links to the reports from all annual conferences after their sessions this spring and summer and a helpful search bar to find other information.

Whether the “facilitators” are paid or not, they will need resources. From what line item will those funds come from? -*Creed Pogue, West Millville UMC, Delaware Bay*

We have only just started the process of identifying facilitators and congregations who would like to start a facilitated process. Some people we have identified to serve as facilitators have indicated they will donate their time. Some congregations will be willing to subsidize the costs for a facilitator. If we need to use conference funds for facilitation we will work with CF&A and report out the line items and costs.

What was the collection rate on September 30, 2019 compared with September 30, 2018? -*Creed Pogue, West Millville UMC, Delaware Bay*

The collection rate on Sept. 30, 2018 was 53.08%. The collection rate on Sept. 30, 2019 was 51.55%

The report says that all United Methodist Churches are bound to uphold the standards of the Book of Discipline. However, it also indicates that individual churches are currently and, in the future, will be allowed to disregard the Book of Discipline in certain conditions. Am I correct in my interpretation? If so, who would approve those variances and how would it be any different from current circumstances? -*Bill Beaver, St. Paul’s UMC, Brick, Northern Shore*

The GNJ Way Forward Team recognizes the authority of The Book of Discipline. Yet, the team also recognizes that congregations have convictions about their ministry, who they are to be in ministry with and who God calls them to be. The team invites congregations to develop covenants about how they will be in ministry with God, one another and with the community. All covenants will be different. There will be covenants in compliance with the Book of Discipline. There may be covenants in which congregations take authority to develop ministries with the LGBT community that are not in compliance with The Book of Discipline.

What is the definition of a “covenant” as it is being used in the report and once a covenant is formulated, how will its provisions be binding on the conduct of a church, on clergy, on laity, and on our bishop and cabinet? -*Bob Costello, Wesley, Petersburg UMC, Cape Atlantic*

A biblical covenant is an agreement between two people or groups of people or between a person and God. A covenant is not a contract, or policy, or law. A covenant is how people will be in relationship with



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one another and God regarding an aspect of their common ministry or engagement with one another and the community. The GNJ Way Forward Team is inviting people to covenant for how they will be in ministry and thrive. For some congregations this will include how they will be in ministry with the LGBTQ community. The covenant is an agreement with those who will be doing the ministry together. It is not with GNJ or the bishop or the cabinet. It may include aspects of the pastor's ministry but it is not mandatory that the pastor engage in the covenant or be bound by the covenant unless the pastor agrees to the covenant.

Many congregations reported their congregation was not in agreement about how to be in ministry with the LGBTQ community. The covenanting process allows all people to come to the table and all voices to be heard in order to discern a way forward within a congregation.

The covenanting process is Wesleyan as John Wesley believed to be mature disciples of Christ included the joining of believers in a covenant "to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul." Duet 10: 12-13 (Wesleyan Covenant Service)

Covenants also have Biblical precedence. Christ makes covenant with us, in turn we make it with one another. Heb 10:15-25

The clergy, the cabinet and the bishop are not called to make covenants in the report and any covenants are not binding on the bishop, cabinet or GNJ. A congregation's covenant is binding on how the congregation will be in ministry with one another and the community.

The sample covenant presented on page 5 of the GNJ Way Forward Team Report is very helpful, but only reflects one point of view. It would have been even more helpful if alternative sample covenants representing several points of view were presented in the report. Could such sample covenants be presented at the Special Conference Session on October 26th? -Arun Thangaraj, Middletown UMC, Northern Shore

There are no sample covenants advocated by the Way Forward Team. If a congregation is going to create a covenant to be in ministry with LGBTQ community, the report suggests a list of items that to be included in their covenant. Because each covenant will be unique to the congregation, sample covenants are not being provided but it is anticipated that frameworks will be developed that congregations may use.

Could we review the "75 pilot expressions of Methodism, including three possible options for churches to consider", that were initially worked on by the team? -Arun Thangaraj, Middletown UMC, Northern Shore

Based on what we heard from the people of GNJ through the listening sessions, focus groups and survey, the GNJ Way Forward Team decided to modify their original plans. They are not recommending three expressions of Methodism or pilots for congregations to consider.

If I decide not to perform same sex weddings and my neighboring Methodist church does... how am I protected from lawsuits? – Elizabeth Ealie, Vineland UMC, Delaware Bay



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Pastors are not required to perform same gender weddings even if others decide to do so. In other denominations some clergy are and others are not. The separation of church and state protects clergy from being mandated to perform same gender weddings.

What is expected to be accomplished at the Lincroft special meeting on Oct 26? – *Lori Price, Stanhope UMC, Skylands*

The Special Session will provide clarity about the report, the Way Forward Team's reasoning, and how congregations can move forward to thrive in ministry and be faithful to their convictions.

What further action is expected of a church that has already voted to be a Reconciling Congregation? – *Patricia Gritzan, Moorestown UMC, Capital District*

There are no expectations for congregations to develop covenants. Covenants are voluntary. If a congregation already has a covenant or understanding that they feel is guiding them into the future, it is not necessary to develop a new covenant.

What additional provisions will be required in the covenant between a church and the GNJ Conference besides the church affirmations? – *Patricia Gritzan, Moorestown UMC, Capital District*

Covenants are made within congregations and not with GNJ. They are covenants about who the congregation is called to be and how they are called to be in ministry with each other and their community. The GNJ Way Forward team is not asking congregations to make covenants with the conference.

Why is the Disaffiliation process not consistent with the disaffiliation process approved by the General Council vote in February 2019? – *Patricia Gritzan, Moorestown UMC, Capital District*

The disaffiliation process for congregations is aligned with the legislation that was passed in February 2019 and the subsequent Judicial Council ruling in April 2019. This UMNews article provides a thorough overview of the issues.

Why did the Commission not seek to discern, making use of Wesleyan methodology (Scripture, Tradition, Experience, Reason) the will of God for his people on the issue of LGBTQ ordination and marriage? – *Robert Barnshaw, Almonesson UMC, Gateway South*

Scripture, reason, tradition and experience were a part of each meeting the team gathered.

Does the representation on the way forward team reflect the conference's make-up? – *George Miller, FUMC Cape May Court House, Cape Atlantic*

Yes. Church size, location, theology, ethnicity, laity and clergy, young people and senior adults were all part of the team.

How does the Way Forward team plan on protecting clergy from complaints? – *Chris Miller, the UMC of Absecon, Cape Atlantic*

No one can guarantee complaints won't be filed. This will be talked about further at the special session.



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Are we covenanting to not hold trials for complaints on human sexuality as an Annual Conference? –
Jaemyoung Lee, Wesley UMC, Raritan Valley

The annual conference is not making a covenant. Congregations are invited to make a covenant.

Are congregations and clergy protected from trials in GNJ only if they go through this covenanting process recommended by the Way Forward Team? –
Jaemyoung Lee, Wesley UMC, Raritan Valley

No. This will be addressed further at the special session.

How would the plan be implemented should there be a change in our episcopal assignment in 2020? –
Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Capital

The Way Forward Team invites congregations to develop covenants. It is not dependent on Bishop Schol. While Bishop Schol participated in the meetings, he did not direct the outcome. The Way Forward Team developed its report and decided to move in a different direction from the original vision.

What is the current representation on the Way Forward Team? How many on the team represent the Progressive beliefs, Centrist beliefs and Traditional beliefs in our Conference? –
Tom O’Hearn, St. Paul’s UMC Brick, Northern Shore

The GNJ Way Forward Team is a diverse group of leaders that include the Board of Laity, Board of Global Ministries, Board of Trustees, Board of Ordained Ministries, Connectional Table, Council for Finance and Administration, Local Ethnic Concerns Committee, Reconciling Ministries, United Methodist Men (UMM), United Methodist Women (UMW), The Wesleyan Covenant Association, and Youth Council.

In previous communications from the Way Forward Team mention was made of “developing up to 75 pilot expressions of Methodism,” including three possible options for churches to consider. Why did the Way Forward team drop developing these three options for the Special Annual Conference’s consideration? –
John Scharf, Morristown UMC, Skylands

The GNJ Way Forward Team held listening sessions, facilitated focus groups and conducted a survey to get feedback from the people of Greater New Jersey and to learn what concerned our congregations. They learned that most people in GNJ:

- want to remain united
- want people to be able to live their convictions
- want to continue our mission, ministry and services together
- have questions about why we would move into pilots or a different expression
- want support and an outside facilitator to assist with conversations about human sexuality within their congregation.

Based on these learnings, the GNJ Way Forward Team changed the direction of their work together. There will not be pilot groups or different expressions. Churches will be invited to develop a covenant about their present and future ministry. Covenants will not be the same. They will reflect different contexts and understandings and each will reflect God’s calling to serve the congregation and to be in ministry with the people in the community.



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Did the Way Forward Team or the Bishop receive any communication from churches and/or caucuses that if the three possible options were developed, especially the expression allowing churches to pilot a progressive LGBTQIA+ expression, that the church(s) or caucus would possibly withhold full payment of their ministry shares? – *John Scharf, Morristown UMC, Skylands*

Four churches communicated that they are withholding shared ministry. The cabinet has been in conversation with the congregations. We anticipate they will give their fair share.

Has GNJ contributed its full requested amounts of the apportionments to the General Church so far for 2019. It was shared with me that GNJ is behind on its contributions compared with last year at this time? – *Derrick Doherty, Middletown UMC, Northern Shore*

GNJ continues to faithfully make payments for its General and Jurisdictional apportionments. To the General Church, we are giving what is received from the congregations. Through September, GNJ has received \$1,203,522.00 from GNJ congregations for General Church apportionments and has paid \$1,203,522.00 to the General Council on Finance and Administration. For the past few years GNJ has been paying its apportionments in one-twelfth increments. Congregations are now giving most of their shared ministries in November and December and as a result, the Council on Finance and Administration agreed to pay in 2019 at the rate we receive shared ministry from our congregations. We anticipate giving 100% as congregations increase their giving.

The September Financial Commitment Report indicates that only \$810,979.34 (33.15%) was received as of September 30th from GNJ toward general church apportionments while the answer to the FAQ submitted by Rev. Doherty says that \$1,203,522 was received and sent to GCFA. Can clarification be provided on that difference? -*Creed Pogue, West Millville UMC, Delaware Bay*

The third quarter payment of \$392,543.00 was not made in time to be reflected in the September report. It will be reflected on the October Financial Commitment Report which reconciles with the \$1,203,522.

If 100% of local churches in GNJ do not submit 100% of the Shared Ministry Funds by year end, what are the conferences plans for our General Church and Jurisdictional apportionments? – *Derrick Doherty, Middletown UMC, Northern Shore*

GNJ will continue to make payments for its General and Jurisdictional apportionments as they are received from congregations. We anticipate giving 100% as congregations increase their giving.

In the event that The United Methodist Church continues to follow the traditional plan, will the Greater New Jersey conference honor that plan moving forward? – *Sandy Callahan, Friendship UMC Monroeville, Delaware Bay*

All churches within The United Methodist Church are bound to uphold the standards of the Book of Discipline. There are churches within GNJ that do not follow all of The Book of Discipline. We work with each congregation individually to address issues and concerns and will continue after January 1, 2020 to work with each congregation that may for conscious sake or biblical interpretation or for other reasons do not follow The Book of Discipline as we have done over the years.



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Are we thinking of forming our own separate GNJ Methodist denomination? – *William Noll, Hamilton UMC, Northern Shore*

No.

On January 1, 2020, what will all clergy members be required to state/accept if they are to remain clergy in good standing with the denomination? What are the ramifications for clergy who take a vocal/written position that disagrees with those denominational requirements? –*Dave Delaney, St. Paul's UMC, West Deptford, Gateway South*

Joe Monahan from Medford UMC prepared an analysis of the legislation and its status from General Conference 2019 and the subsequent Judicial Council Rulings. [Click here to read.](#)

What is the goal of GNJ Way Forward Team?

The GNJ Way Forward Team believes congregations, leaders, mission partners and the people in communities have similar hopes: to grow spiritually, to belong and be in community and connection with one another, to be mission-minded and purposeful, to contribute their experience and talents, to be free of judgement of and from others, to do well in our congregations and ministry, to live without fear and to have a voice.

The GNJ Way Forward Team affirms and will continue to plan a way forward that supports our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ and grow vital congregations to transform the world.

The goal is:

1. To work with our congregations to identify objectives, opportunities, challenges and structures that support their efforts to thrive.
2. To renew and create new connections with one another through ministries and mission.

The GNJ Way Forward Team was affirmed by a special session of annual conference in March 2019 to find a path that recognizes that GNJ has disciples who embrace the passage of the traditional plan at General Conference and disciples that are hurt and in disagreement with the denomination's plan concerning ministry with the LGBTQI+ community.

When did the GNJ Way Forward Team begin?

The GNJ Way Forward Team was affirmed by a special session of annual conference in March 2019 to find a path that recognizes that GNJ has disciples who embrace the passage of the traditional plan at General Conference and disciples that are hurt and in disagreement with the denomination's plan concerning ministry with the LGBTQI+ community.

How many members are on the team?

There are 36 members, which includes members from both laity and clergy and representatives of the diversity within GNJ.



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What is the Traditionalist Plan?

The Traditionalist Plan, which was passed at the Special General Conference in March 2019, maintains our global United Methodist teaching on human sexuality. It increases the penalties associated with ordaining clergy and same sex marriage to include a one year suspension for a first offense and a termination of membership/loss of orders for a second offense. It goes into effect January 2020.

Will something change at the 2020 General Conference?

No one can predict the outcome of the 2020 General Conference, but legislation will not change the hearts and minds of United Methodists or heal the great divide that exists within the denomination over issues involving ministry with LGBTQI+ individuals and more deeply, differences in biblical interpretations.

What are other conferences doing about this a way forward?

Many conferences remain divided along regional and theological lines. Approximately two dozen conferences are looking at models similar to GNJ and are eager to see our early results and conversations.

What about the other plans being discussed in the denomination?

Various groups within the denomination are discussing options for the future of the church. Some of these may come before the 2020 General Conference. Two of the more widely discussed options are:

1. UMC Next is a group of United Methodists who are proposing to keep the denomination intact, to remove the language in The Book of Discipline that are harmful to and exclusive of LGBTQI persons and to provide greater regional and contextual autonomy through new expressions.
2. The Indianapolis Plan is a group of both traditionalist and progressive United Methodists who developed the Indianapolis plan that would maintain the denominations current stance on ministry with LGBTQI persons and birth a separate centrist/progressive United Methodist Church which would practice immediate and full inclusion of LGBTQI persons and would retain the general church agencies.

What is the Reconciling Ministries Network?

The Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) are United Methodists working for inclusiveness and the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church to transform our Church and world into the full expression of Christ's inclusive love. RMN works for full equality in membership, ordination and marriage for God's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children.

What is the Wesleyan Covenant Association?

The Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA) connects spirit-filled, orthodox churches of Wesleyan theology and their members. Its members share a common understanding of the Wesleyan doctrine and a desire to adhere to the Scripture and two thousand years of Christian tradition.



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What is Uniting Methodists?

Uniting Methodists is a movement of Christ-centered, hope-filled, holiness-seeking United Methodists, uniting to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We challenge in love that which divides, and we offer to all people God's saving grace that transforms the world.