

May 2020 Laity Minute

The General Conference has been postponed due to recent events stemming from the coronavirus. Before the cancellation, it was scheduled to be located in Minneapolis, MN, on May 5-15. This is a time when the United Methodist Church and its 862 delegates from around the world will convene, as we do every four years, to discuss and debate the issues of the church. For now, the conference is rescheduled to 2021.

If you have ever had the chance to watch the General Conference, I'm sure you know some of it can be.....well, boring. There are all kinds of petitions and other pieces of legislation which may not be very interesting to most people. Then again, there are debates which are guaranteed to be extremely fascinating and enlightening.

As many of us know, this conference has the controversy of the church split hanging over it. There are plans. There are plans for the plans. There are plans about the plans in case that plan does not work. There are charts and diagrams to try to keep it simple. Regardless, I plan on streaming the Conference on my iPad as much as possible, just as I did in 2016 and again for the Special Conference in 2019. I encourage you to watch as much as you can as it shows our church in action.

Through all of the controversy of this General Conference, we cannot forget some of the other petitions which will be discussed and possibly voted upon. At the next Conference, the United Methodist Women will bring forth four pieces of legislation to be included in the Book of Resolutions. The UMW is a strong presence at the Conference and is deeply involved with legislation of the church. They are present in legislative committees and are voting delegates.

The four petitions that will be brought forth at the Conference by the UMW are:

- Children's Sabbath – placing observance on the church calendar (October)
- The Girl Child – church recognition of the unique challenges girls face (education, health, etc.)
- The Status of Women – women's equality (economic, violence, education, media, etc.)
- Voting Rights Protection in the U.S. – help ensure voting rights and civic participation for all people

As a side note, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) of the UMC will also bring forth several pieces of legislation which include items about gender, sexual misconduct in the church and eradication of sexism in the church. Yes, our church still has some problem-solving to do. For example, female clergy make \$.84 on the \$1.00 compared to male clergy.

If you watch the Conference, there will be things with which you truly agree. You may actually stand up and start clapping! There will be times you'll find yourself yelling at the screen as if you were watching a UT football game. As I have watched, I have been overjoyed. At other moments, I have been deeply saddened. I will never forget the 2019 Conference where I watched in real time and as people reacted to the results of the most controversial vote. I've not seen anything like it.

My guess is that General Conference 2021 (or whenever it is) will live up to the expectations so many have set for it. All I can say is get educated about it the best you can and have your game time jersey ready.

Peace,

Kelly

General Conference website: <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2020>

UMW Legislation: <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/gc2020>

GCSRW Legislation: <https://www.gcsrw.org/GeneralConference/Legislation.aspx>