

Towards the Future

Authors: the active Bishops in Europe (Alsted, Khegay, Rückert, Streiff)

A) Timeline 2021 to 2024/25

The Protocol and the GC2020 postponed to August 29 to September 6, 2022

Here are some of the main decisions that may come out of the postponed General Conference in 2022:

- The petition on the Protocol has a good chance to be adopted (with or without amendments), and it does not need constitutional amendments.
- There may be unknown adjustments to the Protocol, beyond changes in the timeline because of the postponement of General Conference to summer 2022; there is ongoing discussion about “re-negotiating” the Protocol, but as European bishops we see this as a dangerous play where there will not be a better solution in the end than the compromise of the Protocol.
- As no one can say what stance a “post-separation UMC” will take and how “centrist” or “progressive” it will be, it creates anxiety on what it means to remain in such a continuing UMC; the three of us who want to remain in a continuing UMC (Alsted, Rückert, Streiff) have issued a statement “Our Commitment” in February 2021 on how we want to lead the UMC into the future.
- Among other important petitions before GC: Some version of creating a US regional conference (petitions submitted by the Connectional Table and by the “Christmas Covenant”) may be adopted and with it might come consequences on the adaptation rights of CCs and/or on more regionalization; but such other petitions will need constitutional amendments.
- Other legislation (e.g. on tenure of bishops; provisional annual conferences; General BOD; apportionments, etc.) may be adopted that potentially affects central conferences in Europe.
- GC may bring financial changes in a new budget for the Episcopal Fund
 - Potentially less support from the episcopal fund – perhaps lower or no office allowance and less housing allowance

This document “Towards the Future” is based on possible consequences of the adoption of the Protocol “Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring”. The last two paragraphs of the preamble of the Protocol say:

“We envision an amicable separation in The United Methodist Church that would provide a pathway to new denominations of the Methodist movement and a restructuring of The Methodist Church. These new denominations, though separate, will continue the rich heritage of the Methodist movement, while being free to share their respective witnesses for Christ unhindered by those with whom they have been in conflict.

We envision the post-separation United Methodist Church will strive to create a structure of regional conferences to facilitate ministry adaptable to regional contexts, and we further envision that the post-separation United Methodist Church will repeal the Traditional Plan and remove all other restrictive language related to LGBTQ persons. Not all traditional United Methodists may choose to separate from The United Methodist Church and join a New Methodist Denomination. We envision the Post-Separation United Methodist Church will strive to be a place where traditional United

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Methodists can continue to serve. As any separation occurs, we will release one another through the terms of this Protocol to joyful obedience to Christ's call on our lives.” (Petition on a new ¶ 2556.1a)

This document **“Towards the Future”** and those related to it (see next paragraph) uses our best guess as European bishops how the timeline in the published version of the Protocol will be adapted due to the postponement of General Conference. Instead of the term “post-separation UMC” used in the Protocol, we will hereafter use the term “continuing UMC”.

Between 2021 and the postponed Central Conferences 2022/23

The four active bishops will continue all over the time up to the postponed central conferences 2022/23 to meet regularly online for coordinating their work. Here are three important elements:

- Out of the feed-back from the Executive Committee meetings in March 2021, the four active bishops propose a preparatory working group for envisioning the future cooperation in Europe **prior** to the postponed General Conference (see part B below).
- Together, the four active bishops have prepared and updated a document with information and options for those who choose to leave the UMC (see part C below and the document *“On Separation from The UMC”*).
- Together, the four active bishops have prepared and updated the motion of a Task Force to be established **after** General Conference on a continuing UMC in Europe. The mandate will be submitted to all three central conferences in 2022/23 (see part D below and the document *“Task Force Mandate”*)

The four bishops reserve time for an online attendance at a session of each of the Executive Committee meetings. The dates of Executive Committee meetings up to the central conferences in 2022/23 are:

- CC-NE&EA: ExecCom March 24-25 2022
- CC-CSE: ExecCom Oct. 21-24, 2022, probably superintendents meeting in March 23-27, 2022, perhaps with additional online ExecCom;
- CC-Germany: ExecCom (“Kirchenvorstand”) November 12-13, 2021; March 25-26, 2022

Postponed Central Conferences 2022/23 - Dates and important issues

All four bishops plan to be present in person at each other’s central conferences in 2022/23. The dates of the postponed central conferences are:

- CC-CSE: November 16-20, 2022 (with election of successor to Bp. Streiff);
- CC-Germany: Nov 22-26, 2022 (with re-election of Bp. Rückert);
- CC-NE&EA: March 15-19, 2023 (with episcopal elections)

Important issues at each central conference will be:

- Adaptations to the Book of Discipline
- Episcopal elections or re-elections
- Possible vote on separation from the UMC in a CC (needs a 2/3 majority according to the Protocol);
- Prepare and/or review the document with information and options for those who choose to leave the UMC (see part C below)
- Authorizing motion in each CC to establish a common task force for the continuing UMC (see part D below)

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Annual Conferences in 2023

- The document on separation (see part C below) highlights important issues to be dealt with in case of separation of an annual conference.
- In 2023, there may be a vote on denominational affiliation (if different from journey taken by CC); no AC has to vote, but each AC shall vote if at least 20% of AC-members ask for a vote for separating from the Central Conference (57% majority of AC-members required according to Protocol);
- Possibility, that at least 20% of AC-members at the regular session in 2023 ask for a vote, but that the AC calls for an extraordinary session for preparing, deliberating and deciding on the question.
- Whether at the regular session or at an extraordinary session, it is strongly recommended that each AC in Europe decides before end September 2023 whether it remains in a continuing UMC. Those who remain in a continuing UMC will have to elect their member(s) to the European wide “Task Force for the continuing UMC” (see part D below). Even if the Protocol may allow for a later voting in the ACs, the bishops strongly recommend that decisions be made by end September 2023, at the latest.

B) A preparatory Working Group to study the Future of Methodism in Europe prior to the postponed General Conference

Background

As there will be an additional year with the second postponement of General Conference to 2022, and most likely a very narrow time window between the postponed Central Conferences 2022/2023 and the following General Conference, we have found it timely and prudent to create a preparatory Working Group to envision how we would see the common future of Methodism in Europe.

Mandate

The preparatory Working Group for the future of Methodism in Europe shall have the following mandate:

- a. The purpose of the preparatory Working Group is to prepare for the work that will need to happen in Europe following the General Conference in September 2022 with a perspective towards a common vision for all branches of Methodism in Europe.
- b. The Working Group will assume its work in the fall of 2021 and end its work before the opening of the General Conference in end August 2022.
- c. The Working Group will meet online.
- d. The Working Group shall study the petitions to General Conference that may significantly affect The UMC in Europe, including but not limited to “The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation and Restructuring” and “The Christmas Covenant”, as well as other important developments in Methodist churches in Europe.
- e. The Working Group shall discuss and give recommendations on the three documents, prepared by the bishops and discussed at the Executive Committee meetings in March 2021: “Towards the Future”, “A Task Force Mandate for the Continuing UMC” and “On Separation from the UMC.”
- f. The Working Group may decide to study and discuss other matters that it deems relevant to its purpose.
- g. The Working Group will give an interim report to the executive committees of the three European central conferences-in the spring of 2022.

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- h. The Working Group will deliver a final report of its findings and recommendations to the executive committees, the annual conferences and the General Conference delegates in Europe before August 1st, 2022.

Composition and organization of the Working Group

- a. Two members from each of the three German annual conferences, elected by the annual conference or its church council.
- b. One member from each of the other annual or provisional annual conferences, elected by the annual conference or its church council.
- c. The four active bishops.
- d. One observer from the British Methodist Church and one observer from the Irish Methodist Church.
- e. It is recommended that members are elected from among the members of the executive committees.
- f. An annual conference can decide to leave the Working Group or to join the Working Group at any time in the process.
- g. A bishop, named by the active bishops, serves as facilitator.
- h. A secretary, without voice and vote, will be added to the Working Group.

C) On Separation from the UMC

A document called *“On Separation from the UMC”*, submitted to the Executive Committees for perfection, explains some generalities linked to the present *Book of Discipline* and to the Protocol. It will be sent as information to all three Executive Committees of the central conferences with the request to update it with the information that is additionally needed for the specific central conference. An updated and enlarged document with the specifics should be submitted to each central conference.

- Each central conference, through its executive committee or officers, is asked to prepare individually a documentation on what it means for an annual conference to remain in or to leave the “Post-separation UMC” according to the Protocol, with at least the following elements:
 - Regulations for transition period (including clergy, local churches, official roles in general level of the church, assets, etc.)
 - Episcopal oversight during transition
 - Administrative consequences of separation
 - Financial consequences of separation
 - Ecumenical consequences of separation (within Methodist family and larger ecumenical bodies)

D) On the continuing UMC and the creation of a Europe-wide Task Force

A document called *“Task Force Mandate”*, submitted to the central conferences, is related to those annual conferences that will remain in a continuing UMC. After the decisions of the Central Conferences in 2022/23 and the Annual Conferences in 2023, a continuing UMC in Europe will look different from today. The separate document “Task Force Mandate” unfolds in more detail the common challenges for a

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continuing UMC in Europe and how to address them pro-actively. Among the important changes after the adoption of the Protocol at a General Conference in 2022 will be:

- Reduction in number of annual conferences
- Reduction in number of clergy
- A central conference may not be able to remain a central conference with the right of electing its own bishop
- All central conferences remaining in a continuing UMC should create a common Task Force for submitting a common plan for the continuing UMC, its central conferences and episcopal areas.