

## UNITED METHODIST QUESTIONS

SIX: When will the delegated conferences meet and who will be the delegates?

### *Introduction*

At their meeting in April 2021, the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church made decisions that could impact multiple activities in the mission of the church. The Bishops seem poised to lead the deeply divided denomination. Yet they recognize their limits. A news release reported their recent decisions with transparent modesty about their actual authority.<sup>1</sup>

Some differences remain in the Council of Bishops, and many questions linger. Will any jurisdictional conference be called to a special session to retire or to elect Bishops? How many Bishops may be reassigned by the jurisdictional conferences? What influence might Bishops, individually or collectively, try to use in regard to the “Protocol” proposals? How many Bishops are planning to leave The United Methodist Church for a breakaway denomination?

Collectively the Council of Bishops oversees The United Methodist Church. Individually each active Bishop presides over one or more annual conferences in an Episcopal Area.

But Bishops, individually and collectively, have limited authority over matters on which they offered interpretations in the last week of April 2021. The Constitution gives the Council of Bishops authority to call the General Conference into a special session and to set dates when all jurisdictional conferences shall convene. Church law gives a College of Bishops power to call a special session of its jurisdictional conference. Bishops can convene meetings.

But they cannot control meetings. The United Methodist Bishops must lead the church without being in control of the church. In fact, the only place they can even cast votes is within the Council of Bishops itself. And nothing besides the appointments they fix is final.

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<sup>1</sup> April 30, 2021 ([www.unitedmethodistbishops.org](http://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org))

The Judicial Council, if asked, could overrule any interpretation the Council of Bishops offers on a church law. And—without being asked—the Judicial Council constitutionally must rule on the legitimacy of any Bishop’s decision of law made while presiding at a conference.<sup>2</sup>

Church laws are enacted by majority votes at a General Conference, where Bishops have no vote and can speak only if asked. Any United Methodist—including a Bishop—can submit a petition to the General Conference in the hope it will be enacted into law. But Bishops do not participate in deciding what becomes church law. Besides lacking a vote at General Conference, Bishops cannot vote at jurisdictional, central, or annual conferences. They cannot vote in electing the Bishops whose liturgies of consecration they lead or in approving clergy to be ordained.

A Bishop presides at a liturgy for ordaining clergy but cannot vote in annual conference sessions that decide who will be ordained. A Bishop appoints persons to places of ministry but cannot vote in annual conference sessions that decide which persons are eligible to be appointed. Bishops, as a collective Council, certify the results of aggregated votes from annual conferences on the proposed amendments to the Constitution that the General Conference has passed, but Bishops cannot vote on whether to approve such constitutional amendments. They attend all the delegated conferences but do not send voting representatives to the delegated conferences.

The spring 2021 meeting of the Council of Bishops was indeed important. Its outcomes show how the Bishops interpret the Constitution and laws of the church that apply to delegated assemblies—the General Conference, as well as the jurisdictional and central conferences.

However, the United Methodist Bishops lead what they cannot control and oversee what they cannot command. So, who decides what laws will be enacted, which clergy will be Bishops, and where Bishops will be assigned? In addition, when will these decision-makers meet?

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<sup>2</sup> Division Three, Article VII, published as ¶ 51 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

### ***Part One: When Will the Delegated Conferences Meet?***

Among the governing bodies of The United Methodist Church are delegated assemblies called the central conferences, the jurisdictional conferences, and the General Conference. In its Constitution, the church has established that the delegates are chosen by the annual conferences, with clergy and laity voting separately for the clergy and lay delegates. Church law defines how many delegates an annual conference may send to the assemblies and when the elections of the delegates can occur. The Constitution and church law direct the setting of dates when they meet.

But neither the Constitution nor the laws of the church anticipated a global pandemic that delayed the delegated assemblies. The jurisdictional and central conferences have not met. The General Conference, set to meet in May 2020, has been postponed twice. And a special session, called for May 8, 2021, was canceled. The Commission on the General Conference now says the General Conference will convene for ten days in late August 2022.

But there are many uncertainties about that. No one knows if the Minneapolis Convention Center, the intended site of the General Conference, will be able to accommodate a few thousand people for such a meeting then. No one knows if delegates from annual conferences elsewhere in the world will be able to enter the United States, or if they will be able to return home after some weeks in the United States, or if they will be quarantined before and/or after General Conference meets. No one knows if a hybrid session—with some delegates inside the Convention Center and other delegates elsewhere—will be feasible, or if the technical logistics and ecclesiastical politics will block a synchronous assembly with delegates at multiple sites. There is urgency. A decision about convening the General Conference in August 2022 will have to be made early in 2022.

In the midst of all this, individual Bishops have announced decisions to retire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, in ¶ 408.1-3 and ¶ 524.3e, may preclude this unless the jurisdictional conferences meet.

Meanwhile, other questions and uncertainties surround the possibility of convening the jurisdictional and central conferences. The five jurisdictional conferences are within the United States. So, except for an individual delegate who happens to reside or work abroad, travel to the site of a jurisdictional conference would not be an issue. Many central conferences, though, have delegates from multiple countries. Gatherings in large public assemblies might still be a problem for a while, at least for some central and jurisdictional conferences. And there are other issues.

The Constitution establishes that central conferences cannot meet prior to the General Conference and must meet within the year thereafter.<sup>4</sup> Church law declares that specific dates for convening central conferences shall be determined by each central conference or by the bishops of each central conference.<sup>5</sup> So central conference sessions face additional delays.

Meanwhile, convening the jurisdictional conferences has become a hotly contested issue.

The Constitution establishes that all five jurisdictional conferences shall convene on the same date and that the date shall be set by the Council of Bishops. The Constitution does not link the date for convening jurisdictional conferences to a meeting of the General Conference.<sup>6</sup> The only church law about a convening date affirms what the Constitution establishes.<sup>7</sup> Hence, it is both constitutional and lawful for the Council of Bishops to declare a date—even a date before the next General Conference—when all five jurisdictional conferences in the United States shall assemble for regular sessions. However, that applies only to convening the regular sessions.

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<sup>4</sup> Division Two, Section V, Article III, published as ¶ 30 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 542.2. A central conference may also hold what this paragraph calls “adjourned sessions.”

<sup>6</sup> Division Two, Section IV, Article IV, published as ¶ 26 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

<sup>7</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 517. Prior to the creation of The United Methodist Church in 1968, The Methodist Church did specify in its *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church 1964* (see ¶ 520) that the jurisdictional conference “shall meet within the twelve months succeeding the meeting of the General Conference.” But that law was not continued in the legislation of The United Methodist Church when the merger occurred in 1968, and it has not been added since that time.

Individual jurisdictional conferences can also convene when called to special sessions. A provision of church law that authorizes calling “a special session”<sup>8</sup> names two bodies that may issue such a call. One is a jurisdictional conference:<sup>9</sup> the delegates can call a special session and define what will be on the agenda; but they would actually have to be in a session to call one. The only other body that can call a special session is a jurisdictional College of Bishops, whose call would define the only business to be transacted in the special session.<sup>10</sup>

That church law has a long legislative history. The College of Bishops has always been able to call a special session of a jurisdictional conference. Legislation authorizing it was part of the reunion in 1939, when jurisdictional conferences were created.<sup>11</sup> The General Conference of The Methodist Church in 1964,<sup>12</sup> in its last regular session before a merger with the Evangelical United Brethren formally occurred, amended the law by inserting a sentence that is now ¶ 521.2. Except for minor changes, such as formatting in the use of italicized and upper case fonts, the text of this church law has remained unchanged for nearly six decades.

Despite the persistence of the legislation that currently exists as ¶ 521.2 in the 2016 *Discipline*, many leaders of The United Methodist Church seem confounded by it. Some insist incorrectly that jurisdictional conferences cannot meet until the General Conference has met first. Others insist that a special session of a jurisdictional conference cannot be called for the purpose of electing a bishop unless a vacancy has occurred in the College of Bishops “within twenty-four months of the episcopal assumption of presidential leadership of that area.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 521.

<sup>9</sup> This was added in 1964. See the *Journal of the 1964 General Conference of The Methodist Church*, vol. I, p. 695, and vol. II, p. 1350. See also *Daily Christian Advocate*, vol. VII, no. 12, May 9, 1964, p. 634.

<sup>10</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 521.4. See also *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church 1960*, ¶ 523

<sup>11</sup> *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church 1939*, ¶ 432.

<sup>12</sup> See *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church 1964*, ¶ 520.

<sup>13</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 521.2.

### *Confounded by Law*

Part of the reason that people are confounded by the law is its grammatical complexity. It is poorly written, rhetorically troublesome, and unrevised since 1964.

Nobody appears to dispute that a College of Bishops can call a jurisdictional conference to a special session by a two-thirds vote of the College. Nobody appears to deny that the opening portion of the law—its main clause—says the College of Bishops “shall have authority” to call a special session with a two-thirds vote. Nobody appears to disagree that the College of Bishops has broad discretion deciding “when necessary” circumstances require calling a special session.

But ¶ 521.2 is one long sentence with two subordinate clauses following its main clause. The relationship between the main clause and the subordinate clauses is one source of trouble.

The first subordinate clause says that if a vacancy occurs in the episcopal leadership of an area “by reason of death, retirement, or other cause within twenty-four months of the episcopal assumption of presidential supervision of that area,” the jurisdictional College of Bishops “may by majority vote” call a special session “for the purpose of electing and consecrating a bishop and of considering any other matters specified in the call.” The second subordinate clause says, “in such case,” the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy may recommend altering episcopal assignments “of one or more of the previously elected bishops.” Both subordinate clauses are grammatically inferior to the main clause, and the second one is also inferior to the first one.

These subordinate clauses add permissions—but not mandates—to the main clause. They let the College of Bishops use an accelerated timetable for calling a jurisdictional conference to a special session by a simple majority in specifically designated circumstances. And they allow the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy to recommend changing multiple episcopal assignments, besides the one in which the vacancy occurred, in those specifically designated circumstances.

Both subordinate clauses are explicitly permissive. They use the word “may” in regard to options that a College of Bishops and a jurisdictional committee on episcopacy could exercise.

But these subordinate clauses do not void the mandate in the main clause of ¶ 521.2. It remains mandatory that the College of Bishops “shall have authority” to call a special session by a two-thirds vote. It remains mandatory that the judgment about whether to call such a special session and what to specify in the call<sup>14</sup> resides with the College of Bishops, whose two-thirds vote makes a judgment, “when necessary,” that a special session should be convened.

Within the grammatical complexities of ¶ 521.2, the subordinate clauses must be seen as additions to the main clause—not replacements of the main clause. They permit actions in named circumstances: one lets a simple majority of the College of Bishops set an early date for a special session within thirty to ninety days under the specified circumstances; the other lets a committee on episcopacy recommend to the delegates multiple changes in assignments of bishops, when the circumstances named in the first subordinate clause occur.

Though one part of the problem with ¶ 521.2 is its grammar, the major problem lies in its interpretation. Some interpreters say the subordinate clauses annul the main clause. Others say the subordinate clauses give permissions that could override the main clause.

The correct grammatical and logical reading sees the details in the subordinate clauses as additions—not amendments—to the main clause. Notwithstanding the grammatical complexities of ¶ 521.2, the two subordinate clauses must be interpreted as supplements, not as substitutions. The first subordinate clause does not change the size of the two-thirds majority in the College of Bishops mandated for calling a special session. It says a simple majority of the College “may” vote to use an accelerated timetable in certain situations, not that a two-thirds vote is unneeded.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 521.4.

### *A Recent Special Session*

The main clause in ¶ 521.2 is still the mandatory part of the law. Permissive additions to the mandate do not nullify the main clause, which controls the College's call to a special session. This interpretation of ¶ 521.2 is not just a matter of deductive reasoning. It includes a precedent from the Southeastern Jurisdiction.

In its regular 1996 session, the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference elected Cornelius L. Henderson to the episcopacy and assigned him to the Florida Area. At the regular session in July 2000, his assignment to the Florida Area was continued for another quadrennium. Then, in December 2000, fifty-one months after his "episcopal assumption of presidential supervision" for the Florida Area, Bishop Henderson died. The College of Bishops called the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference to a special session in February 2001 for the purpose of electing a bishop to fill the vacancy created by Bishop Henderson's death.

The special session convened on February 26, 2001, and elected Timothy W. Whitaker to the episcopacy. He was assigned to the Florida Area.

The only basis upon which the College of Bishops could have called a special session in 2001 to elect a bishop is the provision of church law in the main clause of ¶ 521.2. By a two-thirds vote, the College of Bishops determined it was "necessary" to have an episcopal election in order to care for the vacancy prompted by Bishop Henderson's death. The provision in the subordinate clause regarding a vacancy within twenty-four months could not possibly have been applicable, since Bishop Henderson had assumed "presidential supervision" of the Florida Area more than four years previously. He had been continued for a second quadrennium in Florida in 2000, but his "presidential supervision" in Florida had begun on September 1, 1996. He had not been assigned anywhere else. His "presidential supervision" in Florida was continuous.



As the 2001 election of Bishop Whitaker demonstrates, the College of Bishops “shall have authority” to call a special session of the jurisdictional conference for the purpose of electing one or more bishops “when necessary.” The main clause in ¶ 521.2 defines how a College of Bishops shall have authority to call a special session—namely, when it has a two-thirds vote to do so.

The permissive options in the subordinate clauses may be exercised when circumstances allow. But the permissive options do not overrule the mandate in the main clause of the law.

### ***Part Two: Who Will be the Delegates?***

The prospect of extended delays before the next regular sessions of the jurisdictional conferences and the General Conference elevates the need to clarify who the delegates will be. The possibility that a special session could be called in one or more jurisdictional conferences adds to the anxiety. Some bishops have urged the annual conferences in their areas to conduct another election of delegates, though the Council of Bishops seems not to embrace that view.<sup>15</sup>

These discussions involve principles in church polity and practicalities in church politics. According to the Constitution,<sup>16</sup> annual conferences elect the delegates: clergy members of an annual conference elect clergy delegates; and lay members of the annual conference elect lay delegates. Also, according to the Constitution,<sup>17</sup> the General Conference has legislative authority to determine methods that shall be used to set the numbers of delegates who will represent each annual conference at central and jurisdictional conferences and at the General Conference.

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<sup>15</sup> In their April 2021 meeting, the Council of Bishops said they understand that delegates elected for 2020 will be the delegates to the jurisdictional and central conferences and to the General Conference, when they occur.

<sup>16</sup> Division Two, Section VI, Article II, published as ¶ 33 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

<sup>17</sup> See Division Two, Section II, Article III (published as ¶ 15) and Division Two, Section IV, Article III (published as ¶ 25) in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

By its constitutional authority, the General Conference has enacted legislation that covers elections of delegates. It appears in ¶¶ 502 and 515 of the 2016 *Discipline*. In addition, Judicial Council Decision 592 says that the General and jurisdictional conference delegates are “elected without instruction,”<sup>18</sup> meaning an annual conference cannot tell its delegates how to vote.

The key legislation that concerns scheduling elections of delegates appears in ¶ 502.3.

Delegates to the General Conference shall be elected at the session of the annual conference held not more than two annual conference sessions before the calendar year preceding the session of the General Conference.

Since all General Conference delegates also are delegates to their respective jurisdictional and central conferences, the schedule for electing jurisdictional delegates is covered by ¶ 502.3.

To be clear, according to the Constitution,<sup>19</sup> the annual conferences control the election of delegates. The General Conference has enacted legislation defining the ways that the annual conferences shall exercise their constitutional authority in the delegate elections. In compliance with that legislation, annual conferences could elect delegates to the 2020 General Conference at their annual conference sessions in 2019, 2018, or even 2017, since “the calendar year preceding the session of the General Conference” would have been 2019 and since (barring extraordinary circumstances within an annual conference) an annual conference session as early as 2017 could have satisfied the terms of ¶ 502.3.

In fact, what appears to have happened is that some annual conferences elected delegates in 2018. Many other annual conferences elected delegates in 2019.

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<sup>18</sup> Decision 592 was issued on April 25, 1988, in regard to an action taken by the North Carolina Annual Conference that sought to require evidence of a prospective delegate’s voting record on ordination, *et. al.*, as a condition of one’s being elected as a delegate. The Judicial Council ruled that an annual conference has no such authority. Although the Decision explicitly refers to General Conference and jurisdictional conference delegates, a logical inference is that the Decision also applies to central conference delegates.

<sup>19</sup> Division Two, Section VI, Article II, published as ¶ 33 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

However, the dates of the elections became a lot more than merely matters of scheduling. In February 2019, the General Conference convened in a special session, received a report from the Commission on a Way Forward, and approved numerous legislative petitions that reflected a point of view known as the “Traditional Plan” on matters of human sexuality. By the time annual conference sessions convened in May and June of 2019, the actions of the General Conference in its special session had an impact on the elections of clergy and lay delegates. Some conferences elected younger, progressive delegates. Their elections could mean that the bishops chosen at the next jurisdictional conferences may be progressives in their attitudes toward human sexuality.<sup>20</sup>

When the five jurisdictional conferences did not meet in July 2020 as scheduled, no new bishops were elected. Now the debates regarding the plans to convene jurisdictional conferences are entangled with debates about elections and retirements of Bishops, as well as with a possible progressive shift in the episcopacy. Some United Methodists—including a few Bishops—insist that the delegate elections in 2019 are no longer valid. They say that plans to convene delegated assemblies in 2022, in light of ¶ 502.3, require a new round of delegate elections.

Politically, the annual conference clergy and laity who worked to elect some progressive delegates in their annual conferences fear that this view is a tactic to deprive them of their rights to vote on electing bishops in the jurisdictional conferences and on passing legislation at the next General Conference. Whether such suspicions are properly placed is in dispute. But the decisive matter remains the constitutional and legislative requirements for the elections of delegates. The annual conferences control who the delegates will be when delegated assemblies convene.

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<sup>20</sup> Greg Huffman is an attorney from Boone, North Carolina, who was elected in 2019 as a lay delegate from the Western North Carolina Annual Conference. He reflected not only on the impact of the February 2019 General Conference on his own annual conference delegate elections but also on a study of other delegate elections in the annual conferences in the United States. In a letter he posted on July 12, 2019, he offered his judgment that the results of the delegate elections will mean that those delegates whom he labels “Centrists/Progressives” will be in control of the political process in the jurisdictional episcopal elections. They will be the delegates who “select bishops going forward,” he wrote.

In order to understand the issue, it is essential to determine the proper way to identify the delegated assemblies of the General Conference (that is now set to convene in August 2022) and the jurisdictional conferences (that are now set to convene in the fall of 2022 but could occur in a special session sooner). If delegates convene in Minnesota in August 2022, will they be attending a “2022 General Conference” or the delayed “2020 General Conference”?

### *A Polity Puzzle*

Puzzling situations test the patience of us all. And polity puzzles in the church become at times a test of faith, causing us to wonder why we cannot simply love the Lord and live without writing church laws. We can, as long as we choose to own no property, select no leaders, teach no doctrine, celebrate no rituals, shape no behaviors, share no message, or make no decisions. In fact, United Methodists have chosen to own property, elect leaders, study scripture, conduct rites, commend behaviors, preach the gospel, and decide which steps to take in mission. So, we put in place a polity for implementing those choices. And it is filled with puzzling imperfections.

Consider the label for the next scheduled global delegated assembly. Will it be the 2022 General Conference or the 2020 General Conference? The answer is reached not by looking at a calendar but at the Constitution.

The General Conference shall meet once in four years at such time and in such place as shall be determined by the General Conference or by its duly authorized committees...A special session of the General Conference, possessing the authority and exercising all the powers of the General Conference, may be called by the Council of Bishops, or in such other manner as the General Conference may from time to time prescribe, to meet at such time and in such place as may be stated in the call. Such special session of the General Conference shall be composed of the delegates to the preceding General Conference or their lawful successors, except that when a particular annual conference or missionary conference shall prefer to have a new election it may do so.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Division Two, Section II, Article II, published as ¶ 14 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*.

Within this Article in the Constitution are three elements to highlight.

First, the General Conference must meet quadrennially in which is commonly called a “regular session.” The time and place for convening this quadrennial meeting shall be set by the General Conference itself or by a committee it creates, and that committee is understood to be the Commission on the General Conference.<sup>22</sup> Neither the Constitution nor the legislation in the *Discipline* allows the Commission on the General Conference to cancel a quadrennial session. The authority of the Commission involves only the time and place. Therefore, the Commission can constitutionally decide when and where the 2020 General Conference will be convened. But the Commission cannot constitutionally declare the meeting in August 2022 (or any other date) to be anything else except the quadrennial 2020 meeting.

Second, the only body with authority to call a special session of the General Conference is the Council of Bishops. Although the Constitution empowers the General Conference to add some other way to authorize calling a special session, it has not done so. Nor has it granted such authority legislatively to the Commission. So, the only authority which the Commission on the General Conference can exercise, regarding the time and the place for the General Conference to meet, involves the regular quadrennial session.

Third, if a special session of the General Conference were called, the delegates chosen by an annual conference for “the preceding General Conference” represent the annual conference at the special session, unless an annual conference decides to have a new election. If the special session that the Council of Bishops had called for May 8, 2021, had been convened rather than canceled, then delegates attending the special session would have been the ones chosen for “the preceding General Conference,” namely the 2020 session.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 511.

For a regular session of the General Conference, church law provides that the timing of delegate elections by the annual conferences is linked to “the calendar year preceding the session of the General Conference.”<sup>23</sup> The next regular session will be the 2020 General Conference, no matter when it assembles. The preceding calendar year is 2019. Therefore, the delegates elected by the annual conferences for the 2020 General Conference, whether they were elected in 2019 or 2018, will represent the annual conference at the 2020 General Conference, whenever it is on the calendar. And that appears to be the way the Council of Bishops interprets the regulations.

### *Conclusion*

The decisions about the dates when the delegated conferences of The United Methodist Church will meet do not rest with single, central authority. The General Conference will meet in its 2020 regular session at the time and the place determined by the Commission on the General Conference. The General Conference could also meet in a special session at any time and place decided by the Council of Bishops, whose authority includes the power to call a special session. The central conferences will meet within a year after the regular General Conference session at times and places that each central conference, or its College of Bishops, shall determine. The jurisdictional conferences will all convene on a date set by the global Council of Bishops, with no regard for the dates when the General Conference meets. Also, any individual jurisdictional conference could be called into a special session by the College of Bishops for that jurisdiction, if two-thirds of the Bishops in that College vote to call it.

Regardless of when such delegated assemblies actually do convene, for a regular session or a special session or both, the delegates will be the ones whom the annual conferences elected for the 2020 General Conference or whom they will elect if they choose to have another election.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, ¶ 502.3.

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church offered helpful interpretations of the Constitution and of the church laws on the matter of delegates. The way they interpret the Constitution and legislation is important. But it is not final. If an annual conference were to ask the Judicial Council for a declaratory decision on the legitimacy of the interpretation expressed by the Council Bishops, and if the Judicial Council were to decide it has jurisdiction to review such an interpretation, the position taken by the Council of Bishops could be overruled.

Despite such an action, each annual conference will decide whether the delegates elected previously for the 2020 General Conference will be their delegates. Any annual conference may choose to have a new election of delegates for the 2020 General Conference, whenever it meets. A Bishop who presides at an annual conference can neither order a new election of delegates nor prevent a new election from occurring. Most likely, the delegates whom the annual conferences previously elected for the 2020 General Conference, as well as for the jurisdictional and central conferences, will be attending the delegated assemblies when they meet.

Of course, the larger schismatic pressures within United Methodism continue to simmer. Any clergy member who withdraws from membership in the annual conference would lose her or his seat as a delegate, and any lay member of a local church who personally leaves The United Methodist Church or whose local church disaffiliates from the denomination would also lose her or his seat as a delegate. The only things which are reasonably certain are what the Constitution and the laws of The United Methodist Church currently establish and stipulate. That still leaves plenty of time and space for United Methodists to continue feeling confused.

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May 24, 2021