

## Overview

On January 3, 2020, a group of 16 United Methodist leaders released a proposal for the separation of The United Methodist Church, called “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation” (Protocol). The group consisted of individuals representing diverse theological perspectives and advocacy groups affiliated with the Church, including laity, pastors, and eight bishops from around the world. They propose restructuring the Church by separation as the best means to resolve the long-term disputes within the Church over LGBTQ clergy and marriage. The proposed Protocol aims to end the impasse by creating a pathway for traditional-oriented churches to leave and form a new Methodist denomination, and thereby “allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person” (1).

The Protocol is an agreement unanimously supported and signed by the 16 leaders involved. The agreement was reached on December 17, 2019 through a negotiation process, facilitated by a mediator, with input from others who served as consultants and advisors during the process. A few basic tenants of the Protocol agreement are as follows (1, 2, 3):

- A new traditionalist Methodist denomination will be formed; other denominations may be formed as well.
- The UMC will continue after separation.
- A total of \$25 million is to be paid to the new traditionalist Methodist denomination; \$2 million is to be held in escrow to help other potential Methodist denominations; and \$39 is to be allocated to help strengthen communities historically marginalized by the sin of racism in the governance and decision-making of the Church—Asian, Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander ministries.
- Annual conferences may join a new Methodist denomination, by majority vote.
- Local churches may choose a different denomination than that of their Annual Conference and retain their property, assets and liabilities.

The Council of Bishops, Wesleyan Covenant Association, and Reconciling Ministries Network have endorsed the Protocol agreement.

## Quick Facts

**The Protocol agreement is not a done deal.** To become binding and implemented, the proposed Protocol and legislation incorporating its terms will have to be presented to and adopted by the delegates to the 2020 General Conference in May. Furthermore, the Protocol is not the only proposal about the structure of the UMC to be presented at the 2020 General Conference. A comparison of proposals from various groups is available on the Wisconsin Conference website (3).

**A vote or decision is not required by the local church at this time.** Between now and the 2020 General Conference, the local church does not need to take any official action on the proposed Protocol.

**If the Protocol is adopted, a vote may be required by the local church.** Local churches may vote to align with any new Methodist denomination formed in accordance with the Protocol. Local churches which desire a different affiliation than its Annual Conference may conduct an affiliation vote to consider a different affiliation. If a local church does not vote, it remains a part of the Methodist denomination selected by its Annual Conference (2).

## Actions for the Local Church at this Time

Local congregations are invited to participate in informational exchange sessions which will be held throughout the Wisconsin Annual Conference during the upcoming months. The sessions will be conducted by the Wisconsin Delegation to the General and Jurisdictional Conferences. See schedule and additional information at [WisconsinUMC.org/GeneralConference](https://www.wisconsinumc.org/GeneralConference).

Bishop Jung has asked every Wisconsin United Methodist to do the following things (4):

- Pray. “Pray for the church and its leaders. Pray for your own congregation, and for all the congregations that will be impacted by these decisions. Pray for grace in all our actions. Pray for The United Methodist Church as it moves forward and pray for the new Methodist denomination and affiliates that will emerge.....”
- Talk. “Beyond talking to God, talk to each other. It is my prayer that all congregations will create space and time for the community of faith to come together for conversation, prayer, discernment, and honest exploration...”
- Be reflective, not reactive. “Reactivity makes us look for problems, to key in on what we don’t like and what we disagree with. I ask us all to make a conscious effort to work together for good, to see possibilities, and to prepare for a grace-filled, kind and compassionate way forward.....”

## Resources

1. Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation (Protocol Statement). Available at: <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/websites/www/pdfs/signed+umc+mediation+protocol+statement+-2020.pdf>
2. Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation FAQ, UMC News, January 3, 2020. Available at: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/protocol-of-reconciliation-and-grace-through-separation-faq>
3. Comparison of Proposals to General Conference 2020, General-Conference-UMC-Plans-Chart-V6. Updated 1/7/20. Available at: <https://wisconsinumc.org/401-connections/conference-news/enews/local-state-news-4/5529-comparing-plans-headed-to-gc2020>
4. Reflection from Bishop Jung on the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation. January 5, 2020. Available at: <https://www.wisconsinumc.org/connections/conference-news/bishops-corner/soul-food/5520-reflection-from-bishop-jung-on-the-protocol-of-reconciliation-grace-through-separation>