

mission that the Church of Jesus Christ is called to, continues; and we will still have ministry to do in the name of Jesus.”

Bishop Webb affirmed that no matter how the United Methodist Church changes, he will continue to “equip leaders to help their congregations become disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

Continue to pray for the United Methodist Church as we approach February 23.

#### Resources to help you prepare for Special Session of General Conference

- Visit <http://bit.ly/SS2019videos> to see a four-part video series about Special Session, featuring Bishop Webb.
- Visit <http://bit.ly/SS2019PowerPoint> to see the Powerpoint presentation that Bishop Webb used at the six regional gatherings this fall, which explain what to expect at Special Session
- Visit <http://bit.ly/UMC3plans> to see an overview of the three plans that will be presented at Special Session—this



is a useful chart that outlines the similarities and differences between the three plans

#### Do you still have questions?

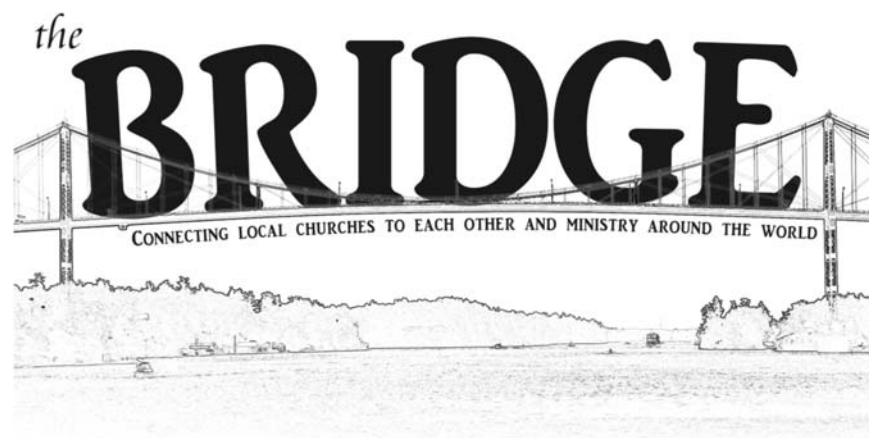
What's the difference between a called General Conference and the one to be held in 2020? Why is the Commission on the Way Forward and not the Council of Bishops submitting the report to General Session? What are the differences between the One Church Plan, the Connectional Conference Plan, and the Traditionalist Plan? Are these some of the questions you have as we approach the Special Session of General Conference to be held from Feb. 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri?

Visit <http://bit.ly/SS2019FAQ> to find out the answers to these questions and dozens of others on the Upper New York Conference's Special Session of General Conference FAQ page.

*The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit:*

**[www.unyumc.org](http://www.unyumc.org)**

To learn about the Upper New York Conference Delegation to the Special Session of General Conference visit: <http://www.unyumc.org/about/meet-the-delegates-of-special-session-of-general-conference>



The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.

## A look inside!

What to expect at the General Conference Special Session

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# What to expect at the General Conference Special Session

Forty-six years—that is how long the debate on human sexuality has been taking place in the United Methodist Church. The 2016 General Conference gave a specific mandate to the Council of Bishops to lead The United Methodist Church in discerning and proposing a way forward through the present impasse related to human sexuality and the consequent questions about unity and covenant.

After this mandate was given, the Council of Bishops called for a Special Session of General Conference to be held Feb. 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Mo. and appointed laity and clergy across the United Methodist Church to form a 32-member Commission on a Way Forward. This Commission was put in charge of creating a report of recommendations to present to the Special Session of General Conference.

After over a year of meetings and collaboration, the Commission on a Way Forward presented a report to the Council of Bishops in May of 2018 with two possible recommendations to present at

the Special Session of General Conference. These plans included: The One Church Plan, The Connectional Conference Plan. The Council of Bishops then asked for the Traditionalist Plan, which was an option in an earlier draft of the report to be added back into the report, leaving three possible Church models.

## Outlining the report to be presented at the Special Session of General Conference

At six regional gatherings about Special Session held across Upper New York (UNY), UNY Area Resident Bishop Mark J. Webb explained to attendees that the One Church Model, “provides a form of unity that gives Conferences, churches, and pastors the flexibility to uniquely reach their missional context without disbanding the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church.” The One Church plan would allow churches and Conferences to decide whether to perform same-gender marriages, and Bishops will have the freedom to decide whether to ordain practicing LGBTQ persons.

The One Church Plan would allow elders to transfer churches or Conference if they are not in agreement with the church’s or Conference’s stance. In other words, all appointments are guaranteed despite their stance. If clergy decide to leave the denomination, they will be given what they already

have vested in their retirement, but no more.

Bishop Webb used an analogy of an umbrella to describe the Connectional Conference Plan. He said, “The Connectional Conference plan creates this big umbrella that reflects a unified core that includes shared name, logo, doctrine and services, but under this umbrella, the Connectional Conference creates three values-based Connectional Conferences that have distinctive definitions of accountability, contextualization and justice.”

The Connectional Conference plan allows various parts of the UMC to follow their understandings of human sexuality without breaking unity completely by forming three Connectional Conferences: Traditional, Unity and Progressive. Current US Jurisdictional Conferences would be replaced with three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology including perspectives on LGBTQ ministry (i.e. progressive, unity, and traditional). Each Connectional Conference could have its own *Book of Discipline*. Each Connectional Conference could also have its own policies regarding LGBTQ weddings and ordination and could set its own standards for ministerial credentialing and list of approved schools/seminaries.

The Traditionalist Plan maintains the current language and stance of the *Book*



of *Discipline*. However, it allows Annual Conferences or any group of 50 congregations to form a self-governing church if they are in “irreconcilable conflict for reasons of conscience with the doctrine or moral teachings and requirements of *The Book of Discipline* on the issues of human sexuality.

At its most recent gathering in October, the Judicial Council ruled that both the One Church Plan and the Traditionalist Plan contain provisions that have constitutional problems. Proponents of each plan are working to correct those constitutional issues.

## Praying beyond Feb. 23-26

Bishop Webb said, “We need to be praying for February 23 through 26, but do you know the date that I am more interested in?...February 27<sup>th</sup>, February 28<sup>th</sup>, and March 1<sup>st</sup> because no matter what happens at this Special Session of General Conference, there is one thing that does not change and that is that the Church of Jesus Christ continues and the



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