

UNITED METHODIST QUESTIONS

FOUR: Can the Jurisdictional Conference session occur before the General Conference meets?

There is no constitutional mandate, nor is there any legislative requirement, that a session of the jurisdictional conference must wait for the General Conference to meet. Nor is there any law or requirement that they must meet within the same calendar year.

The jurisdictional conferences could meet in person as soon as such assemblies are feasible in the United States under health regulations, even though the General Conference is not scheduled to gather until late August 2022. They could be convened, either in regular sessions or in special sessions, before or after the General Conference meets.

One has to keep in mind, however, the mandate in the Constitution that all five of the jurisdictional conferences must convene on the same day and that the convening day has to be determined by the Council of Bishops.¹ Notably, the global Council of Bishops has to set the convening date. The only way for jurisdictional conferences to meet in a regular session is for the Council of Bishops set a date for them all to convene. Thus, Central Conference Bishops (who will not even attend the meetings unless they happen to be invited to be present as guests at one or more jurisdictional conferences) have a vote on the convening date. Whether their votes may block jurisdictional conferences from meeting prior to General Conference is unknown. In any case, the Council of Bishops, in their April 2021 meeting, affirmed that the jurisdictional conferences will meet in November 2022.

Paragraph 521.1 in the *Discipline*, to be sure, allows any jurisdictional conference to schedule a special session. However, that jurisdictional conference would have to be in session in order to do so.

¹ The Constitution, Division Two, Section IV, Article IV published as ¶ 26 in *The Book of Discipline 2016*.

Any jurisdictional conference could be called to a special session by a two-thirds vote of the College of Bishops in the jurisdiction. The jurisdictional College would also have control of the agenda for such a special session, if they called it.

For any jurisdictional conference, the major item of business is the election of bishops.

If jurisdictional conferences were to meet before General Conference and elect bishops, that could create complications for the Council of Bishops. A newly elected bishop is a bishop of the church at the moment of election. The new bishop ceases to be a clergy member of an annual conference and becomes a member of the Council of Bishops. If jurisdictions elected bishops before General Conference, they would immediately begin voting on items that the Council of Bishops sends to the General Conference, such as nominations for the Judicial Council.

There might be other reasons to delay having jurisdictional conferences meet and elect bishops. Some candidates for the episcopacy use General Conference as a platform to advance their candidacies. They seek roles as chairs of the Legislative Committees, for example, giving them opportunities to demonstrate their leadership abilities.

The jurisdictional conferences could meet without any relationship to the meeting dates of the General Conference. But jurisdictional conferences must rely on the Council of Bishops to set a convening date for the regular sessions and on a College of Bishop to call a special session. Those groups may have their own reasons for wanting the jurisdictional conferences to occur after—not before—the General Conference convenes.

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