



Dear Friends,

The phrase that jumps to mind: “Failure to plan on your part, does not constitute an emergency on my part.” Yet, here we are.

Under enormous pressure, Gary Graves, the Secretary of the General Conference, has finally given some information to the heads of delegations. His timeline constitutes an emergency. **All delegate information (name, address, phone, picture ID, etc.) and housing preferences are due this Friday, February 23, 2024.** He sent his long-awaited email at 1 pm Central time on Friday, February 16. (Never mind that Monday is a national holiday in the US.) One delegation chair in the US who reached out to me had this to say to their delegation: **“This is a ridiculously tight time frame for returning this. Please reply asap.”** (Emphasis theirs.)

**Delegates: If you have not received notice from the head of your delegation about submitting your personal information and housing preferences, please reach out to them immediately!**

Here is part of Grave’s Feb. 16<sup>th</sup> letter. It reads like a list of excuses, when in fact, he is detailing why he should have been planning in a more proactive manner.

"Dear Annual Conference Secretaries and Chairs of Delegations in the Jurisdictions,

"As you can no doubt imagine, we have received thousands of communications over the past 7 years [*sic*. It has been less than 4 years since postponement.] which have in some way reported, certified, changed, inquired, adjusted, advanced, assigned, removed, disqualified, questioned, or in some other way impacted the Certificates of Election which were originally submitted way back when we began preparation for the original dates of the 2020 General Conference. There have been Judicial Council Decisions and Memorandums, personal opinions, legislative agendas, and other ways in which advice and direction have been given as to how the impact of the postponement due to the pandemic and related visa acquisition impossibilities should be considered as plans have moved forward to the postponed General Conference being held this year in Charlotte, North Carolina...

"...It is with this large number of changes in mind that we come asking you for your assistance to be sure we have the most accurate information in place as we finalize logistical details...

"We also know the realities of moving, buying new phones, weddings, resignations, disaffiliations, funerals, commissioning and ordinations, getting new email accounts, and any other number of circumstances which result in outdated data. Therefore, in acknowledgement of these impacts and the reality of our humanity (appropriate for Lent), we ask that you give attention to the pages of attachments which are part of this package."

### Here are 5 major problems:

1. With four years of challenges, waiting until 65 days before the event to confirm the name, address, phone number, and picture ID of the 862 delegates is irresponsible. I have only been to 6 General Conferences, so forgive the comparisons. The delegate information is always collected after annual conference elections the summer before General Conference. That way, a list of actual delegates is published in the ADCA. Now we know why Volume 3 of the ADCA (which was released late) did not have an updated list of delegates—because they don't know who we are. Which means, we do not know one another to do our work together.
2. Graves also confesses he has not even checked with annual conferences to make sure he has the right contact information. **"For some of you, we do not have a current chair of delegation** or there may have been a change in annual conference secretary of which we are not aware. If one or either of you have [*sic*] received this in error **or didn't receive it**, please let us know immediately so we can update our records and issue the packet to you or your successor." (Emphasis mine.) This should have been requested months ago! And, by the way, if you did not receive it, how exactly will you let him know?
3. Housing preferences were sent out as early as November ahead of previous General Conferences. Assuming everyone turns in their housing preferences this week, Graves has given his staff until March 15 to issue housing assignments. That is only three weeks from Friday and exactly 5 weeks before the start of General Conference. This is one of the most complicated tasks for GC staff and this timeline gives zero leeway to fix normal problems that always arise.
4. Flight scheduling information was also sent out as early as November ahead of previous General Conferences. According to Graves, Flight scheduling information will not be sent out until March 1. Please note, that he will not even have a complete list of delegates—and clarity of who is driving and who is flying—until February 23. And one week later, his staff will have entered all that information and sent out flight scheduling information? If scheduling does not

begin until March 1, how many weeks will it take to schedule 800 flights—half of which are international? We should all be concerned about the scheduling and financial stewardship of not buying flights further in advance.

5. **THIS IS THE BIGGIE!** The biggest impact of this poor planning will be felt by delegates from outside the US. Traveling to another country with flights and hotels, particularly to a country where you speak a different language, is hard enough, even with adequate planning. This is poor hospitality. But Graves cited in his letter that “visa acquisition impossibilities” are also a major concern. And yet, according to UM News, as many as 20% of delegates in Africa did not have a letter of invitation as of last week--a letter required to apply for a visa. I understand that the number of missing letters is dwindling, but one delegate in Africa reported to me today that their interview for a visa is scheduled for **September 2025!** This happens every General Conference and it sometimes takes members of the US Congress and/or US Senate sending a letter to the US consulates to give people expedited interviews. Who is doing this work?

I pray that this General Conference comes together in the best possible manner. I can tell you I am nervous—and I am not alone. There is so much riding on this General Conference. Travel, housing, and food chaos could limit the quality of work we are able to do—and the legitimacy of whatever work we accomplish. The planning timelines are so tight there is no room for error. Let’s pray for no error.

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In Christ,  
Rev. Dr. Mark Holland  
Executive Director, Mainstream UMC  
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Notes:

Read a previous article about General Conference

Disorganization: <https://mainstreamumc.com/blog/general-conference-disorganization/>

Here is the UM News story about General Conference

Concerns: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/concerns-mount-about-general->

[conference-prep](#)

Only recently was the updated list of petitions released—477 pages of reading bliss. You can find that here: <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2020-advance-daily-christian-advocate>

Here is the website for General Conference: <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2020> (It is still officially called GC2020 because it was postponed.)

Here is a good piece for GC newcomers from UM News: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/a-beginners-guide-to-general-conference>



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