

# Proceedings

## Afternoon Proceedings for April 23

RAYMOND TRAPP (Worship and Music Director): All are here together in this place. My name is Raymond Trapp, and I am serving as worship and music director. Myself and the amazing worship team that I have been blessed with have prepared for this time in body, spirit, and mind, as you have. We have prayed for you, and we know that you have prayed for us. So now as we come together for this sacred time, we pray that Jesus will meet us all at our point of need. I invite you to stand as you are able and sing together to the glory of God.

*(music)*

*(applause)*

ROBERT LOPEZ (Rio Texas): In the knowledge of all we have been, and the hope of all we will become, we invite you to remember and respond in your heart language, "You are God." In the stillness—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the unknowing—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the hoping—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the fear—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the brokenness—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the grieving—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the living—amen?

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the losing—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the finding—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the frustration—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the relationships—Come on, help me, church—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the joy—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In the solitude—

ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: In community—

LOPEZ WITH ALL: You are God.

LOPEZ: Yesterday, today, and always. All together—

LOPEZ WITH ALL: You are God!

LOPEZ: Hallelujah!

*(music)*

*(applause)*

DOUGLAS LOCKLEAR (Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina): Let us pray, you that are able to stand, if you would stand as we go to our creator in prayer.

Creator God, this is the day that you have made. Let us be glad and rejoice therein. We give you thanks for health and strength. We give you thanks for life and love. We give you thanks for salvation. Now we want to give you thanks and honor for allowing us to be here. As you said to Moses, we're standing on holy ground. We ask, Lord, that you help us. We want to give you thanks for this congregation that is gathered here that comes from the four corners of the world. Some by air, some by boat, by buses, trains, and automobiles. We thank you for traveling grace.

And, God, we offer ourselves to you today as the singers were singing about the fire, let it burn in our bosoms. We remember our leader John Wesley, that day at Aldersgate, he felt the strange warming in his heart. God, help us to feel that during this time of celebration and business and worship, Father.

We want to give you thanks for North Carolina, the great state that we're in, the Tar Heel State. Thank you for Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, for hosting this event. Oh, what a glorious time our hearts have already felt and we are looking for the best yet to come. And, God, again, we thank you for all those that come from the north, for those that come from the south, those that traveled from the east and from the west. God, add your blessings upon it. We watched TV and we watched the newscast and things that sometimes hurt us, but we're reminded of that great declaration that the psalmist David said to us, in his holy scriptures in Psalm 46 and verse 1, You're our refuge; you're our strength; in the time of our troubles, you are there with us. You will never leave us or forsake us.

And now, God, we ask you blessings upon the remainder of this day and the days that are following as we celebrate as United Methodists in the strong arm of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen and amen.

ALL: Amen.

*(music)*

*(applause)*

KATIE DAWSON (Iowa): Will you join with me in prayer?

Risen Lord, help us to feel your presence in this moment as we open our hearts and ears to your word. Allow your Spirit to transform our understanding so we can hear your message in a new way. In the name of the one who is God we pray. Amen.

BISHOP THOMAS J. BICKERTON: Hear now the word of God, from Psalm 46: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. God makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Friends, this is the word of God for the people of God.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

BISHOP BICKERTON: This is the word of God for the people of God.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

BISHOP BICKERTON: This is the word of God for the people of God.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Let us pray. God of grace and God of glory, we give you thanks for bringing us to this space—long anticipated space, for safe travels, for seeing one another's faces, for an opportunity to begin this General Conference in worship, to hear your holy word as its read and proclaimed. We are grateful people. Lord, in these moments we ask for an indwelling of your Holy Spirit to fall upon this place, to give us a sense of peace, wisdom, courage, and direction. And in these moments I would pray a personal prayer that either through me or in spite of me, you might speak to your church today. This is our prayer in the name of Christ. Amen.

Last year I had the distinct privilege of being at the Texas Annual Conference. Where is the delegation from Texas?

*(applause)*

There they are! At the invitation of Bishop Harvey, I went to Texas but I went with a degree of anxiety and uncertainty. Maybe even a bit of fear and trembling. You see, the Texas Annual Conference had just lost 53 percent of its churches due to disaffiliation. I had no idea what to expect. What would the mood be? How would they be approaching such grief and trauma? What I encountered was for me truly one of the highlights of the last couple of years. What I discovered very quickly was that everyone in that room wanted to be in that room.

*(applause)*

Every single time I or another speaker made some reference to The United Methodist Church, people applauded.

*(applause)*

On some occasions when someone would say, "I am proud to be a United Methodist," people stood up and gave rousing moments of affirmation. They wanted to be in the room! And then on the second day a proposal came to the floor at the Texas Annual Conference. It came from a younger group of clergy and laity from all spectrums; they were conservative, they were moderate, and they were progressive. It was a proposal entitled, "That We May Be One." "TWiMBO" they called it. Now I am not a big "whereas" person. For over forty years, I have been worn out by "whereas, whereas, whereas, whereas, whereas, therefore."

*(laughter)*

But these whereases, they sounded more relevant, more meaningful, and more in tune with what was needed in the moment than I had ever heard. Listen to them: "Whereas we are recovering from a season of conflict, division, power politics, and competitions; whereas though this kind of culture may have benefitted a few, it has not served us well as a whole and has left us divided, fractured, and dismayed rather than united, focused, and hopeful; whereas those remaining affirm our faith in Jesus Christ and renew our commitment to the Scriptures and the historic creeds of the Church; whereas it is a new day with the opportunity before us to shed our old ways of being, to repent of our sins, and to embrace the revival that the Spirit of God is stirring in our midst—and now here you go—therefore, we propose to move forward in a spirit of hope and embrace a season of reformation. Therefore, we commit to the revitalization of The United Methodist Church.

*(applause)*

Therefore, we will work for a culture marked by compassion, courage, and companionship. It was a call in Texas to move forward. A call to work together. A call to reclaim, revive, and renew The United Methodist Church. And it came from the spectrum—conservatives, moderates, and progressives—all speaking with one voice. Now I want to tell you, when that proposal came on the floor, it wasn't nitpicked or micromanaged. You see, when you've been through the mill, so to speak, you realize that healing the whole means a

whole lot more than a certain point that you feel like you just have to make it a mic. And you know what, the darn thing passed!

*(applause)*

In fact, it passed unanimously. The crowd rose in affirmation, and there was applause from most people in the room. I say most because the others who weren't applauding couldn't wipe their tears and applaud at the same time. This was a decision that was based on resolve. Don't you tell us that we don't believe in Scripture!

*(applause)*

Don't you tell us that we don't believe in the doctrine of the church!

*(applause)*

And Lord have mercy, don't tell us that we don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*(applause)*

And do not, do not ever claim that we in this room do not believe in the power of the Holy Spirit.

*(applause)*

I will applaud with you.

*(applause)*

This was a decision based on commitment. We have got to rebuild the church and we've got to do it together. It was a decision based on the foundational understanding of connectionalism and an awareness of the absolute necessity of accountable relationships, grace-filled unity nurtured and fertilized with a commitment to being connected together.

It was a decision of deep belief. God is not through with this thing called The United Methodist Church.

*(applause)*

And it got me to wonder about us. By the way, where have you been in the last five years? What have you been up to? A lot of water has passed under the bridge since this church has gathered in this venue. And I got to ask you a question: Do you want to be in this room?

*(applause)*

Are you willing to move forward in a spirit of hope and embrace a season of reformation?

*(applause)*

Are you committed to the revitalization of The United Methodist Church?

*(applause)*

Are you here to work for a culture marked by compassion, courage, and companionship? And it causes me to genuinely ask, and this is as genuine as I can be: If you can't agree to that, what are you doing here anyway?

*(applause)*

Maybe, maybe, just maybe, you're in the wrong place. Because my sense is that we are here not only because we love our United Methodist Church, we are committed to moving it forward with renewal, revival, and a reclaimed sense of purpose. And if you are not committed to that, a positive narrative of who we are and where we are going, you might just be in the wrong place. And perhaps, just perhaps in love we might just ask you with integrity that you just leave us alone to do our work.

*(applause)*



We don't have any time for negative narratives and personal agendas. We don't have any time for vendettas and last gasp jabs. Friends, we got work to do. Are you ready to do it?

ALL: Yes!

*(applause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Over the course of the last year, I've had this amazing opportunity with several others in this room to meet with nearly every single one of our United Methodist missionaries. They are not only keenly aware of the financial and administrative shifts that are necessary in a church that's encountered massive change, they are also keenly aware of poverty, global migration, human suffering, gun violence, child abuse, and warring madness everywhere. And you know what those missionaries are doing with the reality of a church that's dealing with declining resources? They aren't waiting on us! They've already pivoted to deconstruct colonialism. They have already initiated bold measures to create safe places for migrants. They have already put their lives on the line because of someone somewhere who needs life, a sense of hope in the midst of their feeling that their lives are in the balance. They need extravagant love. They need grace beyond grace from a church who cares about them. They are our representatives, and they are not waiting for us to catch up to them with a piece of legislation. They are in the distance motioning us to get on board with where they are going, and follow the lead that they're setting, a lead that's based on call and conviction and sacrifice and love.

Some of you in this room know that I absolutely love the essence of Romans 8:28. You know it: All things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to God's purpose. Lately, I've wondered. What if we had been able to meet in 2020? I really don't spend much time thinking upon it, to be honest with you, because my sense is that that meeting would have been chaotic, toxic, and typical; maybe even more so than General Conferences in the past. And I actually think it's OK that we have had a delay in our meeting. We are a completely different church than we were four years ago.

(applause)

And I believe four years later the stage is set for us to embark on the next chapter of our life together. A bit of dust has settled, and we can see that there is a future with hope and possibility. But, but, did I say, “but”? Our tendencies will still rise to the surface if we don’t hold them in check. You see, when you are traumatized, and we have been traumatized, it’s easy to create a narrative of blame. It’s all their fault. And the finger-pointing begins. It’s easy. Let’s point the finger at previous General Conferences—they couldn’t get along. Let’s point the finger at those who have disaffiliated—it’s all their fault we have less resources to work with. Let’s point the finger at the bishops or the Judicial Council or someone else in authority—Why didn’t they make a different decision? Let’s point the finger at those who disagree with us—If they’d just think like we do, the church could make some of these decisions that we need to make. It’s easy. But what good does this backward posture achieve anyway? Pointing the finger is not going to get the job done these next two weeks. And maybe, just maybe, perhaps we might point the finger at ourselves for a change. Especially if we can’t get our act together. We’ve got to get our act together. Right here, right now in Charlotte, this is the time to refocus the church for the future, lay out the beginnings of our next expression, and find a way to decide that different people from different cultures with different theological persuasions can be the body of Christ in unity and respect and love.

(applause)

That’s what I love most about our church. Our diversity is who we are as The United Methodist Church. But it’s like Francis Asbury said in *Causes and Cures of Heart and Church Division*, quote, “You are generous with yourselves and strict with others when you should be strict with yourself and generous with others.”

We have just come through this glorious season of Easter and the resurrection. On Easter Sunday, we read every year that the followers of Jesus could not recognize him, whether it was Mary or those on the Emmaus Road or the disciples who were hiding in the bushes. But when they did recognize

him, it was a point of revival and renewal. You see, before the disciples could point the finger and blame, Jesus broke the cycle of trauma with his presence. Hm! Huh! I wonder.

Could it be that seeking Jesus at General Conference—really actively seeking Jesus at General Conference—might actually break the cycle of trauma? What's that line we use? "The lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Have mercy on us." Could it be?

Friends, we've been through quite a lot together. It's been really difficult these past four years to engage in the kind of conversations that have emerged since we were last together. There've been conversations that have been filled, absolutely bursting with accusations, and others filled with stark realities. We've had conversations about COVID, post-COVID, declining sustainability, disaffiliation, racism, exclusion, conversations that have been, at times, moments in our lives that have gutted our souls, and lessened our hope.

But I believe—I believe this is a seminal moment. Seminal is defined as "a work, event, moment, or figure that strongly influences later developments." This is our seminal moment; our opportunity to say, "Enough is enough". It's time to move forward as a denomination with a new sense of purpose, a new energized vision, and a new sense of energy that will enable us to do this in the long haul.

Look at it. We have declining resources. It's a reality. But, it's an opportunity to refashion the work of the church in a way that honors the struggle on all levels. While charting a course for a new way to define church in the future. We are different than we were, and we can make a decision right here right now in Charlotte that we will honor, we will honor the distinctiveness of the unbelievable context and regions out of which we do ministry and not expect everyone to do it our way.

We, in this space, have an opportunity. We have drawn a line in the sand for fifty-two years now about how we include or exclude others. But friends, the water of life has eroded the line.

*(applause)*

We have a wonderful opportunity to live a sacramental theology that says even though we do not agree all the time, everyone is welcome at our table and affirm that all means all.

We are great proclaimers, but here in Charlotte we can integrate our beliefs with our actions with principles that not only minister to a broken world, but also attract missing generations of young people who long for a church that not only says what it believes, but actively practices it with conviction and joy.

We have a rich history. But we have a chance here in Charlotte to dream about what God is calling us to more than worship the way it's always been. This can be, this is our moment. Do you want to be in that room? I pray that you do. But if you're in this room, I think you need to be prepared to get on board of a train that is moving on down the track to a new day for what it means to be The United Methodist Church.

But there are some reminders, some gut checks that will need to be done these next few days. You see, there's someone in the audience, I believe, who is actually convinced that the revival of The United Methodist Church will happen with a piece of legislation. That a renewal will happen in a business session. "Oh, that was a nice sermon, but when are we going to get to the proposals? That's why I came to Charlotte." Here's the real proposal: How about we decide that we will invite the Holy Spirit to access this space? And we will seek a new conversion of our hearts that will allow legislation to be a branch on the tree of revival and not the source of the revival that we need.

*(applause)*

And why don't we decide to live out the real understanding of who we are as United Methodists? A people who boldly proclaim that it is absolutely essential that we live out of a model of extravagant love, seasoned with an unmerited and amazing grace. Because you see, there's someone in the audience that, any minute we start talking about this material in front of us, who will immediately seek the mic. and begin to question motives, make harsh accusations, and even dare to suggest that we go back to the way it was before.

But here's the real question to ask: Do you really want to go back there? Back to a church where words like racism, sexism, restrictive language, colonialism, decline, and disaffiliation have literally dominated most conversations that we've been a part of for the past four or five years?

"Yesterday was better than the pursuit of the sanctified life in the future." Really? Is that where you want to go? You see, these tendencies exist in this room. Human tendencies of privilege. Human emotions of anxiety. Human hesitations of fear. All of this suggests that maybe our primary work in this space is about our motives. And maybe our preparation should be more about asking, "How is it with your soul?" more than asking, "How is it going with your legislative committee?"

I really believe that the theme of this General Conference got it right all along. Remember, a few years ago it used to be, "Be still... and know that I am God." We shortened it for a variety of reasons, I think, but one of them was because during the pandemic everything was shut down, and we were really still for a long time, and we couldn't act. So, the word was, we've been still long enough, it's time to get busy again. Human tendencies again. Our theme is, "Know that I am God." But I got to tell you that I prefer the original one. Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still—Be still and know that I am God."

It's a simple statement, friends, that speaks of a very deep reality, a simple requirement that in midst of a changing earth and a rapidly changing culture, in the midst of trembling mountains and roaring waters, in the midst of gun violence and warring madness, even in the midst of a changing church, human answers just don't work. They've never worked. And have only been temporary solutions. But you know how we are—we get ahead of steam, going, and, well, God gets lost in the frenzy.

To be still and recognize in every moment—every moment—that God is in this place. To do that is to recognize that this really is a call for the ultimate cease fire. A cease fire, as Clinton McCann Jr. writes, might best be defined simply as, "Stop it!"

*(laughter)*

Just stop it! Stop the nonsense of the war. Stop the violence of yet another mass shooting. Or, even just stop the hamster wheel of how we've been going about this work, and realize that God is here, available to calm our fears, focus our priorities, and guide us into the promised land of a new day.

*(applause)*

I understand. We've shortened the theme to, "...and know that I am God." But, I still prefer the "be still" part, to be honest with you. You see, even when you're in the midst of a critical moment in life, a critical time; when you're called upon to be your best self, a seminal moment when a decision you make will impact the future... There's just never been a bad time to be still, and know that God is in this space.

In the heat of the moment, and my God I've seen plenty of those heated moments. In Baltimore, Seattle, Louisville, Denver, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Ft. Worth, Tampa, Portland, and St. Louis—in the heat of the moment, humanness steps up to the plate, and it brings an anger and an anxiety and a fear. And as we begin here in Charlotte, don't let it get too far from your mind.

If we're not careful, it'll happen again. It's nothing new, really. Isaiah mentioned it way back in the Old Testament in chapter 30, verse 15: "Repentance and rest is your salvation," Isaiah wrote. "Quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."

It's just not our natural inclination.

But being still, just praying a breath prayer that says, "Remove me from me and fill me with you," it'll change your speech. It'll change your perspective. To be still is to have the "aha" moment that God is still here, with a river whose streams make this city glad.

Oh, I long for a moment or two of euphoria these next two weeks in Charlotte, when all of a sudden we realize that there is a God who is in this place, who in the midst of the dry desert of who we were has just offered a river, whose streams make The United Methodist Church glad again. Friends, out of adversity comes an awareness, a sense of purpose, a calling if you will,

a conversion if you might, that causes a change of direction and a new resolve to be the people of God.

There was a group of people, a chosen people, they wanted to go back to Egypt because they couldn't see the promised land. There was a man, a man named Moses, who could only focus on his stuttering and could not see the role that God called him to play. There were disciples, disciples of Jesus who had just had—they just had—to see it before they could believe it and know that the Spirit would give clarity to them if only they trusted, in a moment where voices came together in a time of Pentecost.

You see, we're in that very same posture, friends: We're eager, but we're hesitant; we're hopeful, but we're cautious; we're aspirational, but we're not very self-confident; trusting, but, eh, not so. We wonder how this group will function together. What will the road forward actually look like? How will it all work out? And in the back of our minds we know exactly how it will work out. Unless we decide right here, right now, that this time it's going to be different. A TWIMBO moment *That We May All Be One*.

In 1930 the United States found itself in the middle of a Great Depression. Factories were shut down, farms and homes were lost to foreclosures, mills and mines were abandoned, and people went hungry. At the very same time, the world found itself caught in between two world wars, where the tendency was to kill rather than to communicate. It was a time of great fear, anxiety, and tremendous uncertainty, a time when the personal struggle was so deep that any movement for change or any drive for justice seemed to be too much to bother with. It was in the midst of those days, where the possibility of the future seemed bleak, and the answers from human mouths seemed far too inadequate, it was a movement that started. It was called the social gospel, and it began to take root.

It was a movement that recognized the plight of the poor. One of its champions was the great preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick. Amid all of the upheaval, Fosdick wrote the words to this wonderful hymn.

God of grace and God of glory,  
on thy people pour thy power;  
crown thine ancient church's story;  
bring her bud to glorious flower.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
for the facing of this hour,  
for the facing of this hour.

Cure thy children's warring madness;  
bend our pride to thy control;  
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,  
rich in things but poor in soul.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,  
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,  
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

General Conference, we, too, are stuck in the middle, in the midst of a tussle of what was versus what will be. There are directions to discern, decisions to make, that just might set the course for who we are called to be for such a time as this.

It's sobering because our history hasn't helped us gain much confidence. It's daunting because with a substantial drop in resources, it's going to be different than it was before. It's humbling because our human tendencies so easily kick in, and before we know it, harm has once again been done. God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power!

Friends, the answers we seek are not possible on our own. We know the opportunity in front of us, but what is the right direction, the right move to make? It just cannot be about what I think or what I need. It must be about renewing and reviving this United Methodist Church of ours and creating a posture where we can receive the power of God to do exceedingly abundantly more than any of us could ever dream of or imagine.

*(applause)*



O God, on thy people pour thy power. Crown thine ancient church's story.  
Well, to be honest, some of our ancient story doesn't deserve to be crowned.

*(laughter)*

This church of ours has been far too racist, far too sexist, far too harmful in our ability to open our doors to all. We've been far too colonial, far too elite in our approach to ministry. In other words, there have been plenty of mistakes made. But somehow the church has survived, and somehow gifted people have been called to leadership, and somehow, even in the middle of our warring madness and our selfish, wanton gladness, where we have been rich in things and poor in soul, we have made it thus far on the journey.

We have a theology that's highly relevant, a mission that reaches out to those who need help in the moment, and provide health to those who do not have an opportunity to gain it. And we have a social gospel that believes in advocating for the poor, the disenfranchised, and those on the margins. This is our story, this is our song. O God, crown thine ancient church's story; bring her bud to glorious flower.

There are buds of possibility all around us. God isn't through with us yet. But the real question is, Are we through with us? Church as we know it just cannot be the same. The world is racing past us, believing with every single passing day that we are more irrelevant than the day before, in the midst of unprecedented setbacks and facing unnecessary changes that frighten us. But in the midst of it all, here we are, positioned to set the course for the future. It'll take fertilizing and watering and pruning. It will take the sunlight of God's love and the tender care of the gardeners entrusted with its care. But with the power of God at work, these buds can indeed find their way from seed to brilliant bloom. O God, bring her bud to glorious flower. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.

Before every sermon I preach, I fill my head and my heart with the very same prayer, spoken repeatedly before I ever open my mouth. Those words are these: "O God, remove me from me, and fill me with you. O God, remove me from me, and fill me with you." It's a discipline that genuinely desires that

human words might somehow find divine expression, and I offer that to you today. As we embark on these next several days, may our prayer be a similar one: Remove us from us, and fill us with you. Remove us from us, and grant us wisdom. Remove us from us, and grant us courage for the facing of this General Conference.

Friends, this is our moment. This is our time, a seminal moment. This is our time, a providential time. This is our opportunity, an unprecedented opportunity for the facing of this hour, for the living of these days, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal, that we fail not one another or God.

This is our moment to serve the one that we adore. Are you ready?

ALL: Yes.

BISHOP BICKERTON: What do you say? What do you say we do it right this time for the glory of God? May it be so, may it be so! Amen.

*(applause)*

*(music)*

LARRY WHITEHEAD (Indiana): You may be seated. I invite you to be in an attitude of prayer as we turn our hearts to God.

Creator, you are our refuge and strength. Your presence helps us in trouble. Lord, we turn to you with all our needs. Our world is in tumult. There are so many problems that we cannot solve. There's war and injustice. There's hunger and illness. There's pain everywhere we turn. We are tired. We're afraid. But we trust in your wisdom and guidance. So hear now the prayers for our world as we pray in silence.

*(silent prayer)*

ROMONICA MALONE-WARDLEY (Texas): Our communities are in fear. Terrorist attacks. Mass shootings. Kidnappings. Sexism. Racism. Ageism. Ableism. Homophobia. Genocide. We see violence everywhere. Countries at war. People

at war. We crave your peace. Give us the strength to resist evil in every way that it presents itself. Lord, hear our silent prayers for peace.

*(silent prayer)*

WHITEHEAD: Our leaders need guidance, Lord. Those from the smallest villages to the largest countries. We ask for your wisdom for those who hold office so that they may use their power to advocate for justice. Lord, hear now the prayers for our leaders.

*(silent prayer)*

MALONE-WARDLEY: We need your healing. Our bodies are broken. Many struggle with mental illness and addictions. Many live with chronic disease and pain. Cancer has affected every family. Malaria, Ebola, AIDS, COVID-19, and many other illnesses run rampant throughout our communities and our world. God, grant your wholeness, O Lord.

*(silent prayer)*

WHITEHEAD: Your church is in trouble. Wake us up, Lord. Revive us and remind us of your commission. Shake us out of our apathy, and show us the world as you see it. Help us to be the hands and feet of Christ upon earth, and hear our prayers as we pray for your church.

*(silent prayer)*

MALONE-WARDLEY: Our denomination is transitioning. We need your guidance, we need your wisdom. As we gather in this place, we call upon the Holy Spirit to move among us. Be present at our conversations, and be with us in our disagreements. Help us to treat each other with love and respect. Let us offer our silent prayers for this time at General Conference.

*(silent prayer)*

WHITEHEAD: We praise you, Lord, for who you are.

BOTH: We exalt you, and we give you thanks. For you are our Lord. We believe and we trust in your wisdom. Amen.

XIMENA A. DIAZ (New York): I want to invite you to stand up wherever you are. This is our time of offering, and we bring our offerings of time, and service, and gifts, and wisdom, and witness, and love. So, I want to invite you to pick up your offering and bring it up; bring your hands up—offer whatever you bring to God. We invite you to offer, and as you posture yourself, on a place of offering to God, we say together, Lord, we have heard the word, we have spoken our love for you. And now we offer ourselves to you. Take our time, our service, our prayers, our weakness, and our gifts, spiritual or financial, use them all to build your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

As you are going into Communion today, you're going to have an opportunity to bring your financial offerings, and these financial offerings are going to go to Pilgrimages of Peace and the repairs of Cherokee and Greensboro, the Gary Wayne Locklear Mission Endowment, and Children, Poverty, and Violence. Our offerings are going to be received.

*(music)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Christ invites to his table all who repent and come to receive. Every color of the earth, every corner of the globe, old or young, you are welcome. Able to come on your own two feet, needing the help of canes or crutches, prosthetics, or the strong arm of a neighbor, or needing the elements brought to you. You are welcome. However you have been created, and however you choose to express yourself, you are welcome. If you feel worthy, you are welcome. If you feel unworthy, Christ Jesus welcomes you to this table. Friends, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Gracious and loving God,

ALL: We confess that we often forget who you are. We rely on our own perceptions and we stop looking for your wisdom. We get comfortable in our own spaces, and we don't respond to what you are calling us to be. Forgive us, we pray. Center us in your love and presence. Show us the way of grace and peace. Ignite our hearts so that we may be your church. Open our minds

so that we may be ready to welcome the gifts of others and free our souls so that we may know that yesterday, today, and always, you are God. Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Siblings in Christ, hear the good news. As we move ever onward toward perfection, we can be assured that God is an ever patient and loving God, who, though we fail, will never let us fall. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

ALL: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: May God be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: We invite you to lift your hearts to our creator.

ALL: We lift our hearts to God.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Let us give thanks to the God that is.

ALL: We rejoice and give thanks to you, God Almighty.

BISHOP BICKERTON: It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you and bask in your presence, loving God, creator of heaven and earth, in the stillness before time, there was only your heartbeat.

BISHOP DANIEL O. LUNGE: (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) In stillness, before time, there was only your heartbeat. In its rhythm planets found their orbit. Nature found its tempo, and life found its source. You rejoiced in creation and called it good. You embraced your people, wrapping us in your love and offering to us a perfect and eternal relationship.

BISHOP GASPAR J. DOMINGOS: (*simultaneous interpretation from Portuguese*) (*indecipherable*) instead of the sin and the way of death (*indecipherable*). God

is continuously calling us back to you, inviting us to lay aside our failings, still our souls, and remember that you are God.

BISHOP BICKERTON: To all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

*(music)*

BISHOP MANDE MUYOMBO: Infinite God of the cosmos, you surpass all understanding. Intimate God of our souls, you bless us beyond comprehension. You sent your Holy Son to take human form, living and breathing as one of us. He came to earth serving, teaching, and healing, showing us how to fully love, and through his infinite love for you, he reminded us once again of your intimate love for us, revealing to us how to know you and how to know that you are God. His relationship to humanity renewed humanity's relationship with one another and with you. Yet humanity would betray you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: On the night he would give his life for all he loved, Jesus took bread. Offering leavened hope, he gave thanks to you, broke it, and passed it among the twelve saying, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup. Again giving thanks to you, he passed it among them, saying, "This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for all. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." And so, in remembrance of these mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

*(music)*

BISHOP CYNTHIA FIERRO HARVEY: When nothing existed but chaos, you swept across the dark waters and brought forth light. In the days of Noah, you saved those on the ark through water. And after the flood you set in the clouds a rainbow. And when you saw your people as slaves in Egypt, you led them to freedom through the sea. Their children you brought through the

Jordan to the land which you promised. And in the fullness of time, you sent Jesus, nurtured in the water of a womb. And he was baptized by John and anointed by your Spirit. He called his disciples to share in the Baptism of his death and resurrection to make disciples of all nations. So it is in that spirit that we remember the gift of water.

*(pouring of water)*

And the reminder that in our own Baptism, you have called us and empowered us to be your church. So we ask you to pour out your Holy Spirit on this gift, this gift of the water. Amen.

Let it be, let this water be a reminder of our baptismal covenant. So today, let's remember those waters yet again. Remember your Baptism. You are not forgotten. Remember your Baptism and be thankful.

*(speaking in Spanish)*

So through your Son Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, all glory and honor is yours, Almighty God, now and forever.

*(music)*

CHOIR: Amen, Amen, Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: We say together in our heart language the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. Let us pray.

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the glory, forever. Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Friends, because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body. For we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a

sharing in the body of Christ. Amen. And the cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ. Amen.

Friends, come and receive the blessings of God. The table is set... and you have to deal with these! I must say that these little cups have almost caused me to lose my religion several times the last five years.

*(laughter)*

And I would invite you to use a prayer of discipline as you receive the bread and the cup. The prayer of discipline may be, "O Lord, as I remove or try to remove this bread from this cup, remove me from me and fill me with you." May it be so. The table is set. Come let us remember the presence of Christ in our midst.

*(music)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Eternal God, we give you thanks for the gift of your presence in this place at this table and with all those together at this moment. May this gift of Communion give us the strength to be your people united in you. We are because you are God. Amen.

Friends, may now that God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus; the Great Shepherd of the sheep. By the blood of the eternal covenant equip this General Conference with everything good that you may do God's will, working in and through us that which is pleasing in God's sight. Through Jesus Christ, to whom all the glory is given forever and ever. And all God's people said:

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: And all God's people said...

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: And all God's people said...

ALL: Amen!



*(music)*

GARY GRAVES (Secretary of the General Conference): And let the people of God say...

ALL: Amen.

GRAVES: Folks, we will need just a few moments as we transition from our worship time into our working time. If you will stay near your seats, just have a standing break. As soon as we're ready to go, we will let you know. Please don't go too far; it won't be that long. We don't want you to get up an escalator and not be able to get back or for the Fire Marshall to get in your way. We will take care of that. So please don't go far; remember what you need is probably in the room.

BISHOP BICKERTON: *(indecipherable)* prayer. Would you greet Bishop Stith.

*(applause)*

BISHOP FORREST STITH: Thank you, and indeed I'm honored.

Let us pray. "And are we yet alive to see each other's face. Glory and praise to Jesus' gift for his redeeming Grace." O Lord our God, with these words of Charles Wesley over 200 years ago, we offer ourselves again to thee. As we have come together once again on this auspicious and amazing General Conference of 2024, we give thanks for your amazing grace. It's been a long time coming since we last each other face-to-face. We've been up. We've been down—sometimes almost to the ground. But always our souls have been heavenly bound.

We thank you for those pastors who have kept their hands on the plow in spite of all things against them. For laity who have been resilient amidst forest fires and floods and hail and storms and all manner of circumstances. For Bishops amidst trials and tribulations who have kept their focus on the one who is Jesus the Christ. We thank you for the congregations all around us who have grown weary; and for you, church universal, whose light and life have been a sign of goodness for us and to all parts of the world. As leaders of this

church, we thank you for those who have led us these past several years as bishops of your United Methodist Church—especially our current president, Thomas Bickerton, and the future, yet-to-be [president], Tracy Malone. Now, o Lord, bless this coming together, this propitious moment of General Conference 2024, that the light of your lighthouse shine on us. And as we conference together, pray together, sing together, and decision together, our *(indecipherable)* and our souls may be bound in thine; that we may do what we say these two weeks that is pleasing to thy sight. And to thy world, that it may know—that all may know—who we are and whose we are, and that we are those who give our power to the Holy Spirit that gives us peace and reconciliation and good news through Jesus Christ our Lord to the end of all time. And now, o Lord, preserve thy power divine to full salvation here, again in Jesus' praises we join, and in his sight appear. Through Jesus Christ the Alpha, the Omega, the beginning, and the end. Amen.

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP STITH: And Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you, Bishop Stith.

It's my pleasure to introduce to you the other members of my triad back-up team, this afternoon. Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, the bishop of the Texas Annual Conference, and Bishop Eben Nhiwatiwa, the bishop of the Zimbabwe area.

*(applause)*

And it is my joy to introduce to you the person who's seated to my right. I'd like for you to welcome Mr. Maurice Henderson, our parliamentarian.

*(applause)*

We've been working with Maurice for months and have already benefited from his wisdom and his expertise, and we welcome him to our body.

I want to call on the secretary of the General Conference, Gary Graves, to report on the roll call and the setting of the bar for the conference. Gary, welcome.

GRAVES: Thank you. As I've said before, it is good to be with you in this place after quite a bit of time of preparing. So thank you for joining us here in Charlotte to conduct the business of the church. In accordance with Section 1A of the Plan of Organization, the Record of Attendance shall be made in writing to the secretary of the General Conference by: first, the secretary of the Council of Bishops for the bishops; the secretary of the Judicial Council for that body; the executive secretary of the Connectional Table (now known as the chief connectional ministries officer) for all general secretaries; the chairperson of each annual conference delegation for its membership; and the chairperson of each delegation for concordat affiliated autonomous Methodist and United churches.

We're going to set the bar of the conference at this time as well. The bar for this General Conference will be the tables in sections A, B, C, and D. And for those on the stage when there are delegates who are up here. Delegates have been assigned to the appropriate numbered tables and will be voting and seated accordingly. Only delegates and reserve delegates who are seated for the full duration of the General Conference are authorized to sit at the delegate tables throughout the events. Reserve delegates who are being seated temporarily will need their authorization form to be issued a voting card and to be seated in the place of the delegate for a short period of time.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you, Gary. I want to recognize Sara Hotchkiss, our business manager, who is going to give us some information about General Conference, and included in that will be some information regarding some emergency procedures in case we need them. Sara? Afternoon, Sara.

SARA HOTCHKISS (Business Manager of the General Conference): Thank you! I love the stepstool, still. So, I want to briefly talk about some information that'll be helpful for you. We have marshals, convention center staff, and security that are checking badges. Please be courteous to them and follow their instructions. No electronic recording by either video or voice may be made of

any portion of the General Conference unless specifically authorized in order to maintain the integrity of all the performance licenses. Please stop by room 103 to request permission.

The rules of the General Conference also have specific instructions on the permission of distributing literature at the tables of the delegates. Please do not distribute materials on the tables unless authorized to do so. In terms of emergency procedures—this will sound familiar from this morning—we have emergency medical technicians on site. Please let a staff member, volunteer, or other personnel know if you need assistance. Again, please do not dial 911. There are many entrances to the building; the emergency medical technician and building staff will instruct emergency services when to come in the building and where. If an emergency situation occurs, please follow the instructions of the General Conference staff or the Charlotte Convention Center staff, as well. Thank you so much.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you, Sara.

I'm now honored to introduce to you two of my colleagues who have been working so hard to prepare for our time here in Charlotte. Bishop Kenneth Carter, the resident bishop of the Charlotte area, and Bishop Connie Shelton of the Raleigh area, have been shouldering the load to get us ready for General Conference, and they're going to bring greetings to us this afternoon. Would you welcome Bishop Carter and Bishop Shelton.

*(applause)*

BISHOP KENNETH H. CARTER: Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm Bishop Ken Carter, the resident bishop of the Charlotte Episcopal Area. I'm here with Bishop Connie Mitchell Shelton, the resident bishop of the Raleigh Episcopal Area. We want to welcome you to Charlotte, North Carolina. We begin with the acknowledgement that we are on the land of the Catawba people. We are honored and privileged to host visitors from around the world and to introduce you to this place we call home. Our Charlotte area host team is excited to show you the best of this metropolitan area. Can we give a round of applause for the local host team?

*(applause)*

Charlotte, also known as the Queen City, was founded in 1768. It has emerged as a center of banking and finance. Charlotte's cultural significance has grown over the years with a thriving arts and music scene. The city and our immediate vicinity boast numerous museums, galleries, and theaters, making it a cultural center in the region. Charlotte is also home to the NFL's Carolina Panthers, the NBA's Charlotte Hornets, Major League Soccer club Charlotte FC, and the Triple-A baseball Charlotte Knights. We trust that everyone here gathered for what promises to be an historic conference will be blessed by the city of Charlotte and by the warmth and beauty of the state of North Carolina.

BISHOP CONNIE M. SHELTON: Thanks to the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church, our two conferences share many statewide and worldwide ministries and initiatives. The most significant is a mission to areas greatly affected by the disaffiliation of churches and the planting of new faith communities. This initiative is a collaboration between our two annual conferences and the Duke endowment. The second is the lighthouse church movement, composed of more than two hundred local churches that have publicly claimed their identity as United Methodists open to all people. Other shared ministries have included Congregations for Children, Project Agape in Armenia, creation care, a prayer vigil in support of this General Conference, and, most recently, shared service and hospitality in support of you, the delegates sent from across the world to do this important work during these two weeks of General Conference. We are excited to live into one body nourishing North Carolina, where we are fighting food insecurity by creating new feeding ministries or strengthening existing ones with an outward representation of our continued commitment to the United Methodist connection. So you can join this mission initiative and support a local feeding ministry by dropping canned food in the collection boxes outside the convention center.

BISHOP CARTER: We are thrilled to have several churches from the Western North Carolina Conference participating in worship and other events throughout the next two weeks, such as the choir from Providence United

Methodist Church, which you just had the pleasure of hearing during opening worship, and the choir from Williamson's Chapel United Methodist Church, who will perform at a later service. Expressions of Praise, a liturgical dance team from St. Mark's United Methodist Church, will also bless us with a performance, as will their choir. Several United Methodist churches in Charlotte have a significant history in this city and are integral to the community here. Among those closest to this convention center are First United Methodist Church, St. Mark's, Myer's Park UMC, Hawthorne Lane UMC, and Dilworth UMC. The Charlotte metro area has a membership of approximately fifty thousand United Methodists, and the local churches here are diverse in ethnicity, culture, language, and size. We hope you will worship with one of our local congregations this coming Sunday. Visiting United Methodist bishops, clergy, delegates, and honored guests from around the world will preach in churches across the Western North Carolina Conference, including nine churches here in Charlotte. You can find a list of all those churches and who will preach at [welcometogc.org](http://welcometogc.org).

**BISHOP SHELTON:** As we spend our next few days together and you do your work of navigating petitions and numbers and votes, may we discern the movement of the Holy Spirit and join God's dreams for The United Methodist Church and the world. Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to use this General Conference as a means of grace, to make disciples of Jesus Christ so that God, through us, may transform the world.

**BISHOP CARTER:** As we focus on the theme from Psalm 46:10, "and know that I am God," may we listen well and know that God guides our every decision.

**BISHOP SHELTON:** Jesus Christ invites us to bear witness to the breadth of his church, where, through Baptism, we are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation. And as our Holy Communion liturgy so beautifully said, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

**BISHOP CARTER:** And on behalf of the United Methodists in the city of Charlotte and across the state of North Carolina, we look forward to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in this space. Amen.

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP CARTER: And we pray that in this space, as we conference together, and in all of our encounters with all of the people who will support our lives and serve us in our hotels and all around us, that we will claim the words that we pray: Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. Thank you.

*(applause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you, Bishops Carter and Shelton. I now [welcome] Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, General Secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race, and Dawn Wiggins Hare, General Secretary of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, to address the General Conference on the role of monitoring. Would you welcome Dawn and Gio?

*(applause)*

DAWN WIGGINS HARE (Alabama-West Florida): Good afternoon, friends.

GIOVANNI ARROYO (Baltimore-Washington): *(repeats greeting in Spanish)*

WIGGINS HARE: My name is Dawn Wiggins Hare. My annual conference is the Alabama- West Florida Annual Conference.

*(applause)*

I am a laywoman who is a White older adult—I know it's true, hard to believe—and I am the General Secretary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Also known as GCOSROW.

ARROYO: My name is Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo. My annual conference is the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

*(applause)*

That's right. I am an adult, Latin-X clergy person, and I am the General Secretary of the General Commission on Religion and Race also known as

GCORR. On behalf of our agencies and every member of The United Methodist Church, we thank you for your time, dedication, preparation, and willingness and perseverance to serve as a delegate to this General Conference.

WIGGINS HARE: GCORR and GCOSROW are working agencies. We're serving you and the church during this General Conference as mandated by the Book of Discipline. We will have two monitoring groups, each with a distinct focus as we strive for beloved community. We will share our learnings through reports in the Daily Christian Advocate and in our daily monitoring reports during plenary.

WIGGINS HARE: GCOSROW has the responsibility for monitoring for gender inclusion.

ARROYO: And GCORR has the responsibility for monitoring racial inclusion through our institutional equity lens that will look at the process and structure of our work as delegates.

WIGGINS HARE: At this time we'd like for our monitors to stand. They'll be over to the right here. Would you give them a round of applause, church. These are volunteers serving in the ministry of monitoring.

*(applause)*

ARROYO: The monitors assigned to your legislative committees will be introduced to you by the presiding bishop during the organizing of the committee. They will have assigned seating. Be sure to identify them and introduce yourselves.

WIGGINS HARE: These monitors will be observing which persons will be called upon to speak; the manner in which each speaker show respect for one another. And they'll be reporting their findings to you.

ARROYO: In accordance with the Book of Discipline, to ensure proper data collection for racial and gender inclusion—as we engage in holy conference—that creates space for all persons, and to respectfully understand the diversity of lived experiences and opinions, we ask that when you are a speaker that



you state your name, annual conference, your status as lay or clergy; and if you feel comfortable, provide your racial, ethnic, tribal, and gender identity. You may also advise the monitors of your age category and if you are a person with a disability.

WIGGINS HARE: The Interagency Sexual Ethics Task Force of The United Methodist Church, which consists of members from across the general agencies and annual conferences, has created a code of conduct for this General Conference with the following guiding principles for use in holy conferencing:

Love

ARROYO: Justice

WIGGINS HARE: Kindness

ARROYO: Accountability

WIGGINS HARE: Integrity

ARROYO: Respect

WIGGINS HARE: Dignity

Remember friends, monitoring is not policing. It is challenging us to have self-awareness and inviting us to care for others. In addition to these guiding principles, be mindful of the following boundaries.

ARROYO: Personal Space: We are a diverse body with differing levels of comfort in social situations. As we'll recall during COVID-19 protocols, we learned the concept of social distancing. Personal space can cause others to feel concerns for safety or feel intimidated. Honor each other's personal space. Do not touch another person without permission, including hugging.

WIGGINS HARE: Language: Be respectful of the choice of language that is used. Including avoiding exclusively male language for God. Be conscious of inferred power dynamics. For example, if titles are used for one group of

people, they should be used for everyone. Violent language, threats, gestures, harassment, sexualized language, or innuendo is never allowed and will not be tolerated.

ARROYO: Spiritual: As we engage in the diversity of opinions throughout our deliberations, I am reminded of John Wesley's statement, "Think, and let think". As delegates, we have different perspectives. Let us be respectful even when we disagree, as it honors God and builds community.

WIGGINS HARE: Finally, should you have a concern or complaint that you have been or that you have observed someone else being a victim of any form of harassment, including sexual harassment, you should report that incident to the secretary of general conference at the Office of General Conference in room 103. Also, know that our monitors, they are here to assist—they're the helpers. And they will be direct you with reporting and walk alongside you should it be needed.

ARROYO: Friends, if you see something...

WIGGINS HARE: Say something...

ARROYO AND WIGGINS HARE: ...to a monitor!

*(laughter)*

WIGGINS HARE: May God's spirit reign among us.

ARROYO: *(repeats in Spanish)*

BOTH: Amen.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much. If you'll now turn your attention to the screens, we have a message from United Methodist Communications:

*(video playing)*

*(applause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: We are so grateful to United Methodist Communications. They do such an excellent job and represent us so well and grateful they are providing the expertise to spread our church in a new way of evangelism.

If you have your agendas, you'll notice that on our agenda there is this thing called, "The Journey from 2016 to Now". I think that's going to happen tomorrow and not today and the rewording is "The Pathway for Our Next Expression." So if you're keeping track of the agenda, we haven't jumped over it, it is just going to be tomorrow.

When we were last together, we learned a lot about the speaker recognition system, and that helped us to facilitate the business of the General Conference. And in addition, we've previously used the electronic voting at our General Conference, and since we don't use technology on our regular day-to-day basis, it's really important that we all get on the same page about the speaker recognition system and our voting devices. So, I want to invite Simon Bryan from the company Lumi to provide an orientation for us and give us instructions on the speaker recognition system and on how to conduct voting. And he's going to walk us through a test voting process. So make sure you have your device card, and make sure you have your device in your hands and really throughout this orientation, and Simon will walk us through with any other additional instructions that we will need.

Would you welcome Simon to our body.

SIMON BRYAN: Thank you. As Bishop Bickerton said, we have the speaker and voting system consisting of two parts. This will be a little bit of a refresher for those of you who have been there this morning, so a bit of a rerun on my part.

We have the voting card and the keypad. The keypads will be in the room. So the keypads will be on your desks when you come into sessions. They stay here. You have no need to take these keypads anywhere else. The keypads stay in the room and they will be available when you come in. Your voting card, however, is personalized to you. So do look after it. For those of you who have not received it yet, if you are a delegate, you can actually pick up a

card from the back of the room where you came in. I think most of you have your cards for now. You'll notice that your card has your name on it and also the legislative committee that you are in. So what you need to do is place the card into the top of the keypad. So make sure the chip is facing you. And the chip goes in downwards. Then it just goes into the top of the keypad. And when you insert it, your name will appear on the keypad screen.

So as I mentioned, really look after this card. A good place to put it is in your name badge. That's a good place to store it so you don't lose it. And you will need it throughout the event. You will be using that card in your assigned legislative committee. So you will use the same card in a keypad in your legislative committee. You can only use your card in your assigned legislative committee. So as I say, the name of your committee is on your card. It will only be able to be used in that particular committee. And all the committees all work in the same way. You'll find that there will be keypads provided in those rooms. You put the smart card in the top of the keypad, and then you'll be able to vote in those rooms.

As for reserves, if you would like your reserve to step in for you, please go to the table where you came in. There you'll have to present yourself with your reserve. You'll need to hand over your delegate card, and your reserve will receive their card in return. We can only give your reserve their card if you give your delegate card back. And then obviously vice versa, if you wish to rejoin proceedings, go to that table in the back there, and your reserve will hand over their card, and you'll get your card back, and you'll be able to join into proceedings again.

So let's have a little practice vote. So, the way the platform works is that you'll be presented with what you are voting on, and you'll press *one (1)* for yes and *two (2)* for no. So you can simply press *one (1)* or *two (2)*. And if you change your mind, you can simply press the new choice, and it will override your previous vote. If you wish to withdraw your vote completely, you can press *X*, which will withdraw your vote.

So let's have a little practice. So we'll make sure that our voting cards are in our devices. And I'm going to ask you whether or not you are enjoying the

Charlotte weather. I don't even know what the weather is like outside, but I am sure it is very pleasant. So we will vote *one (1)* if we are enjoying the weather, and we will vote *two (2)* if we are not particularly enjoying the Charlotte weather. And I'm going to ask you to vote now, please. So you'll all press your little buttons, *one (1)* or *two (2)*. What you'll see is it'll say sending, so your vote is being transmitted. And then you will receive a message back to say whether yes or no has been received. So just take a moment to cast your votes and we will see how you're doing.

*(pause for vote testing)*

Okay, let's see what we think of the weather. So the vote's now closed, and, well there you go—we are all pretty much enjoying it, and that's good. So I think everyone got the hang of that. Like I said, it's pretty intuitive, pretty straightforward.

So what I'm just going to now do is just remind you of the speaker recognition system. And the way that works is you'll see that on your keypad, there is actually a little microphone button. So what you'll do when the speaker pools are open, and they are not open at the moment, but when the pools open, you'll be able to press that microphone button. And you'll press that, and it will actually give you a list of the speaker pools that are available. There are seven pools available. And what you will do is you can actually use the little scroll pad in the middle of the keypad, and you will get to scroll up and down and select by pressing that scroll ball. You get to select which pool you'd like to join, or you could simply press the number that corresponds to the pool you wish to join. Those pools are labeled 1-7. So I'll just show you a slide of what those pools are. If your point has been addressed, and you don't want to be part of the pool, you can actually press the microphone button again, and you will leave the pool.

So, I'll just show you the slide to show you what is available for those pools. So you'll see there 1-7. We have, the first one will be if you want to join a pool to speak for the motion, to speak against the motion, if you wish to offer an amendment, if you wish to close debate, make a point of order, have a point of information or an inquiry, or you have another parliamentary topic you'd

like to discuss. And that will be available later. So with that, I will hand back to the team and hopefully you will all enjoy the voting.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thanks, Simon, for this great technology.

*(indecipherable)* All right, at this time I want to call on the chairperson of the Commission of the General Conference, Kim Simpson, and the chair of the Credentials Committee, Diane Brown. Kim and Diane.

KIM SIMPSON (Central Texas): I'm not going to stand on the stool. Even though I should, I am not going to do it.

*(laughter)*

The Commission on General Conference and I are saddened that some of our elected General Conference delegates are not with us today. As of noon today, 751 delegates out of 862 are registered and present, including 273 out of 370 General Conference delegates from Central Conferences. There are still registrations taking place today and over the course of the General Conference. For comparison and context, during the opening session of the General Conference in 2016, 786 out of 864 were present and voting. That's 87% of the delegates at today's opening session compared with 91% in 2016.

There are several reasons why the number of absent delegates is higher for the current General Conference. We grieve that some of our delegates have died because of COVID or other causes. Some of our elected delegates have left the denomination. Some of our delegates and reserves were denied visas by the consular office in each embassy. The standards for visa approval are more stringent than they have been during any previous general conferences. And some delegates did not have passports, which are needed to obtain a visa, or they were unable to attain appointments in time. Wait times for appointments were significantly longer than in 2016 in some areas. A few of our conferences did not elect reserve delegates or elect delegates according to our rules and constitution, and therefore, may not be credentialed. The commission and staff worked closely with annual conference secretaries to confirm the information regarding credentialing of reserve delegates amid sometimes incomplete or inaccurate reporting from annual and central

conference secretaries so that letters of invitation could be issued. The integrity of credentialing is critical. We ask you to keep one another in prayer as we convene this General Conference.

DIANE BROWN (Michigan): Thank you, Bishop Bickerton. Good afternoon, Church. I am Diane Brown, laymember of the Michigan Conference, secretary of the North-Central Jurisdiction. And now also chair of the Committee on Credentials for this session. Yesterday, nine of us entered the committee room without knowing one another: four from central conferences and five from jurisdictional conferences. As our elected committee chair, I bring you this committee report unanimously supported by each of us.

The Committee on Credentials met with the secretary of the General Conference on April 22, 2024, and reviewed a variety of areas he and his staff have worked through in the past several years, including this past year pertaining to credentialing, General Conference delegates, and reserves. We discussed several topics. Among these topics were two very significant issues: (1) false and misleading letters of invitation to attend the General Conference as delegates had been sent by an unauthorized person or people outside of the office of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. And (2) areas of concern with credentialed delegates impacted by the implementation of paragraph 2553.

We are comfortable that the secretary and his staff have employed diligent efforts to work through many credentialing eligibility questions. We are supportive of these processes. We also recognize the process will continue for the next few days as credentialing continues. We will return with a final report during this conference. Thank you, and thanks be to God.

*(applause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thanks to you both for that update, and we'll look forward to hearing more along the way. Kim, I think you are right back up, right? *(indecipherable)* Kim's going to share the report from the Commission on the General Conference. And I want to invite Stephanie Henry to be in place to give us the report from the Committee on Rules. Kim.

SIMPSON: This time I will use the stool. Good afternoon. On behalf of the commission on the General Conference, I welcome you to the postponed 2020 General Conference. Yay, it's here!

*(applause)*

No one is happier than I am that this is happening. I have served the commission since 2012 and became chair of the commission in August of 2019. I thought it would not be difficult to lead the commission in the nine months until General Conference 2020. After all, the plans were made—all they had to do was be carried out. Well, then the pandemic hit, and I said, "Really God? Really?" Well, I imagine many of you had that same feeling when our lives were brought profound uncertainty and loss. Yet, in the face of adversity, here we are, ready to embark on the work of the church. Know that this commission has been hard at work over these years trying best to prepare you for you to do your good work.

This commission has planned more General Conferences than any commission before it has.

*(laughter)*

Thank you, thank you. It has had to discern decisions that no other commission has had to make. No one has postponed a General Conference before. I would like to offer my gratitude to the commission members for their years of dedication and sacrificial service. So those who are here that are commission members, would you stand and be recognized.

*(applause)*

SIMPSON: The commission has three subcommittees. Our Education and Innovation Committee has been chaired by Juliet Spencer and recommends changes to the training and to the post-General Conference evaluation survey. The Program Committee has been chaired by Lynn Hill, and he has chaired it for many, many, many years. They focus on content and agenda for this General Conference. The Rules Committee is chaired by Stephanie Henry and is responsible for the rules that we will adopt at this General Conference. The



commission includes staff members of the General Conference, and we are grateful for their leadership, provided by Sara Hotchkiss, business manager of the General Conference, and her assistant, Raquel Perez-Molloy; Gary Graves, secretary of the General Conference, and his assistant, Kelly McDonald; and Moses Kumar, the treasurer.

The commission works with the Council of Bishops and are grateful for the contributions of the bishops that have worked with us since 2016. They have been Bishop Tom Bickerton, Bishop Rudy Juan, and Bishop Christian Alsted. I would also like to thank the North Carolina and the Western North Carolina Conferences and their chairpersons, Trish Archer and Wanda Musgrave, for their warm welcome and the great hospitality of those conferences.

*(applause)*

We as a General Conference are grateful to Gary Graves and Sara Hotchkiss for the efforts they made above and beyond their job descriptions in negotiating through the issues of postponing the General Conference. You need to know that they were able to negotiate with the Minneapolis convention center and hotels without going through litigation when we had to break contracts with those entities. They saved The United Methodist Church millions of dollars in costs.

*(applause)*

Thank you for going above and beyond.

You may be aware that the commission has instituted some procedural changes since 2019. Travel and housing for all delegates is now made through the Office of the General Conference to reduce costs, and the certification processes have been strengthened. Delegates now required to wear badges with pictures on them, and there's tighter entrance into the plenary floor. We are also supplying all three meals for all the delegates except for Sunday, taking into consideration dietary issues and cultural needs, thereby fostering less stress and more time for our work.

The postponement of the General Conference has brought a frustration to many people. We all grieve the disaffiliations that have resulted from our inability to meet. We are now a smaller church in number but still a mighty force for the Lord.

*(applause)*

Amen. This waiting time has brought positive transformation too. We have had worldwide collaboration on important issues in ways that would not have happened otherwise. We have had time to process with a renewed clarity for our collective priorities. Many of you sit as a delegate for the first time. Welcome to the plenary floor.

*(laughter)*

I hope you have taken time to talk to former delegates and taken their advice because I think they probably told you to read the petitions and understand them, be well rested before you came, be ready to sit for hours, and not to miss the amazing worship experiences and meet people from all around the world. I would advise you also to find some time to be quiet amidst all the decision-making. You could even visit the Upper Room's prayer room. And listen to understand, not so much to be understood. Remember it's not about personal agendas, but it's about discerning God's will for our United Methodist Church. Let's name the issues that seem to be rising to the top of everyone's mind: regionalization, revised Social Principles, revised language, and the budget. The commission looked at possibilities of moving some of these issues forward, outside of our normal legislative process. It was decided that the commission didn't have the authority to deem one petition more important than another. We have a process in place that's built for thoughtful discussions and discernment. We should let that legislative process work as it is intended. We need to allow each delegate to do their work and let the Holy Spirit work through us. We don't do our best work if we are rushed and not in a posture of discernment. As we work together, may we approach our deliberation with humility and respect for one another. Everyone's input should be honored. In fostering a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, we have an opportunity to show the world how we as United Methodists can

exemplify the essence of our faith and reaffirm our commitment to a unified future. As we chart a course forward, guided by faith, fortified by unity, let us remain steadfast in our conviction that God's guiding hand will illuminate our path at this critical time in the life of our church. We have an opportunity to show the world that we can be a worldwide church with different cultures but one mission of sharing God's love.

The Native American Cherokee tribe has a tradition when making big decisions. They don't look at the effects of their decision for the next few years, but they look at the effects upon future generations. We as United Methodists would do well to follow their example of thinking through our decisions and how they will affect not just our grandchildren but their children and the future generations. We know the things we don't want, but do we know what we want? What are our next answers? What are our needs and vision as we move forward in unity with respect and honor for all United Methodists? I am deeply honored to stand here among you as we embark on this privilege together. I extend gratitude to each of you for your dedication and your service to The United Methodist Church. May God add a blessing to us as we travel this path together. And now Stephanie Henry will bring to us Plan of Organization and Rules of Order.

BISHOP BICKERTON: —to say a word of gratitude to Kim. Kim has commended this role as the chairperson of the commission and given stellar leadership. It's been a privilege to share that role with you and watch you do your thing on the commission. You've worked so hard and have been very dedicated to all of us, and I think you deserve acknowledgment and recognition for this body for the work that you do.

*(applause)*

SIMPSON: Thank you.

*(applause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Good afternoon, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE HENRY (Pacific Northwest): Good afternoon, Bishop.

Bishop, members of the general conference, visitors, staff, and volunteers, my name is Stephanie Henry, and I am a White laywoman from the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. It has been my privilege to serve on the commission since 2012 and as chair of the Rules Committee since 2016. Over these last eight years, the Rules Committee has gone line by line and word by word with the goal of clarifying and simplifying the rules to best serve you, the General Conference. Within that goal, we took special care to show restraint in our proposed changes that we might move quickly through this portion and on to the important work that awaits us.

Please draw your attention to the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order for the postponed 2020 General Conference. Beginning in the English version of the *Advanced Daily Christian Advocate* volume 1, on p. 29. Again, volume 1, p. 29. Or in the English version of the supplemental *ADCA*, volume 3, p. 1091. Again, volume 3, p. 1091. I will briefly address the substantial changes we propose, the line references are the same, regardless of which volume you're looking at.

On line 64, we changed the word *effective* to *active* bishops to clarify that we don't intend for retired bishops to preside at General Conference.

On lines 174 and 175, we add priority to items supported by the legislative committee to better apply paragraph 507 of *The Book of Discipline*.

On lines 325, 326, and 329, regarding the Committee on Ethics, we brought in the investigative work for an alleged violation of a rule to include the Office of the Secretary of the General Conference.

On lines four hundred and sixty-four through four hundred and six—excuse me, 461 through 464, we remove language in conflict with paragraph 507 of *The Book of Discipline*.

On line 589, we recognize that properly received amendments and substitutions can and should be distributed within the bar of the conference.

Starting on line 721, regarding Rule 6, we generalize the language to allow for different technologies to be used and to require that all requests to speak flow through that technology.

Starting on line 759, as part of Rule 7, we incorporated feedback from delegates who wanted to know how many people are in the queue to speak before delegates vote to end debate after three speeches for and three speeches against when there is a secondary motion pending.

On the same page, lines 766 through 767, as part of Rule 8, we raise the bar for interrupting a delegate who has the floor.

On the same page, starting on line 779, for Rule 10, we clarify the process to raise a point of order.

On lines 835 through 837, as part of Rule 15, we add language to clarify expectations of behavior. I will read the addition for emphasis: "Delegates are free to vote according to their conscience without interference by others observing, monitoring, or recording their votes. Persons shall not give or accept bribes or threaten delegates in order to influence voting."

Finally on lines 908 through 909, as part of Rule 23, we add the request for a Judicial Council decision to the list of non-debatable motions.

Bishop, I gladly move to adopt the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order for the postponed 2020 General Conference.

BISHOP BICKERTON: So it's moved to adopt the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order for the postponed 2020 General Conference. Before we open debate, I want to ask that anyone who wishes to be recognized to speak, that they'll use the speaker recognition device and use the correct action displayed on that device.

Let me remind you that Rule 21 requires that motions and amendments must be submitted in writing. Those motions and amendments must be written on one of the multipart motion forms that are available. Our pages have them, and they're seated by the microphones. As soon as you make a motion,

you've got to write it out and give it to the page, who will bring it forward for processing.

So, the motion is properly before us. We're gonna open the pool, so that if you wish to speak, you may register.

The question that is before us is on the motion to adopt the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order for the postponed 2020 General Conference. We're going to confine our conversation to the refinement of the rules. You may now register to speak.

I call upon Bonnie Marden from the New England Annual Conference.

Mic. 1.

BONNIE MARDEN (New England): Bonnie Marden, and we do not have any forms here, so somebody can help us with that? Bonnie Marden, lay member, New England Annual Conference. I have a move to—in the format that the parliamentarian coached us with this morning—a move to refer a rules change to the Committee on General Conference Planning and Order, Rule 7D, p. 42 in the first version of the *DCA*, line 399. It's the information about the Standing Committee to the add at the end of that sentence the following phrase: "except petitions with financial implications to expand review in governance equity." And I understand this is just a referral

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right, is there a second?

There is a second.

Bonnie, would you like to speak to it?

MARDEN: I think it speaks for itself, and just is a step towards investing in the greater equity that we envision in collaborative consultation, as we build and create a truly global international denomination.

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right, that is a motion to amend. It's properly before us. That motion is to refer—you'll notice that all of our—all amendments to our

rules need to be referred to the Rules Committee. They will then bring those back to us after they've reviewed them.

Bonnie, could we get you to state your motion one more time?

MARDEN: Do you have the location of the rule? Do you need that?

BISHOP BICKERTON: 7D.

BISHOP BICKERTON and MARDEN: Line 339.

MARDEN: It says within the Central Conferences, and I'm recommending a referral to consider adding the phrase "except petitions with financial implications to expand review in governance equity."

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you.

I have a point of order from Henoc Mwenze from South-West Katanga. What is the rule that you're citing in your point of order?

*(pause)*

Henoc Mwenze. What mic.? Here we go.

HENOC MWENZE (South-West Katanga): *(simultaneous interpretation from French)* Speaking French. Western Katanga. Henoc Mwenze. I wanted to intervene. All of the documents that we have are in English. So this means that we have no French translation for the work tools, which actually is going to penalize our participation in this session of the General Conference. Thank you very much.

*(pause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Right. So, if I understand you correctly, you're not getting French translation. Is that correct?

MWENZE: (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) We are not talking about interpretation. We are talking about the *DCA* document, everything that was distributed. The documents that were distributed is what we're talking about.

BISHOP BICKERTON: You're talking about the document not being in French. Yes. Do we not have it in French? There are documents that are available in French. The pages and the marshals distribute it to the areas that have been designated for that. If there was an error and they missed that, we will check in with the *DCA*, and we will make arrangements for the French portions to be delivered. Or we will make arrangements for you to be able to pick them up from Cokesbury. We will look into that. OK. They'll get—Mwenze, we have your name, and we will be in touch with you when Gary is able to locate those, so that you can get one. We'll make sure you get one personally.

MWENZE: Thank you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much.

We are back on the motion to refer from Delegate Marden. There is a speech for, Guy Nyembo.

Let me remind all the delegates that when a person comes to the mic., please be sure—you've got your headsets—please be sure that you wear them so that you can hear them in real time. Guy Nyembo, are you near a mic.?

All right, I'm going to move to a speech against, Mario Baluyut from the Philippines. Mario?

All right, the motion to amend the Rules—the motion to refer to the Rules Committee is properly before us. The motion from delegate Marden. Are you ready to vote? I believe that you are. If you'll take your devices. We'll have our first opportunity to vote.

The question is on the adoption of the motion to refer the amendment to section 7D to the Committee on Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. If you'll take your devices, if you are ready to vote. If you will support that



motion to refer, you'll press *one* (1). If you're not supportive of the motion to refer, you'll press *two* (2). Please vote now.

(*pause*)

All right, we'll close the balloting and wait for our results.

You have affirmed the motion to refer. 582 to 113. It is approved.

[*Yes, 582; No, 113*]

I turn now to Drew Dyson from Greater New Jersey.

DREW DYSON (Greater New Jersey): All right, thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Afternoon, Drew.

DYSON: My name is Drew Dyson. I'm a clergy, male, White, from Greater New Jersey. My pronouns are he and him. I would move to refer an amendment to the rules to the Committee on Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. Rule no. 6, volume 3, p. 1117, line 725. Rule 6, line 725. Following the sentence that ends with the word *microphone*, insert this sentence: "The digital queue or speaker pool seen by the presiding officer shall be projected and made visible to the body."

BISHOP BICKERTON: Is there a second?

There is a second. Do you want to speak to it?

DYSON: Yes, please. I've been a part of delegations to General Conference since 2012 and experienced the move from the color-coded cards being waved in Tampa to gain the attention of the presiding officer and secure the floor to the digital queue used in Portland, St. Louis, and now here in Charlotte. We've also been through a long season of virtual meetings and conference that have furthered the use of technology in service to our work. I applaud the move to greater efficiency in the modernization of our processes, and Bishop, I have no desire to go backwards to card waving. I'd also like to maintain a spirit of collaboration and trust in the spirit of our disciplinary

commitment to open meetings. Since 2016 in Portland, there's been frustration by myself and many others, who felt that they were stuck in a digital queue and missed the opportunity to be recognized. While I believe that this was unintentional, it nevertheless created a sense of frustration and eroded the trust between delegates seeking to faithfully do the work that they have been duly elected to do and presiding officers who likewise are faithfully seeking to facilitate the work of the body. The body understands that the queue is not a simple linear list of hopeful speakers but also contains the purpose for which one is seeking the floor and that both our rules and Robert's Rules gives precedence to certain motions over others. We also understand that presiding officers work in accordance with our rules to maintain fair, balanced, and diverse speakers have access to speak from the floor and are not simply moving chronological through the list in front of them. At the same time, I believe that this small act of transparency, making the digital screen with the queue visible to both presider and body will serve our shared work by building trust and promoting a spirit of collaborative work as we strive for the ideal of holy conferencing. Thank you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much. We call on Judy Kenaston, who has a speech against.

No? All right, let's get the tech team to clear the queue, please. If you would like to speak to or for this referral, you can register to speak.

I don't see anyone in the pool.

Drew, can I get you to state your amendment again, please?

DYSON: Yes, sorry, Bishop.

BISHOP BICKERTON: That's OK.

DYSON: To refer an amendment to the rule to the committee on Plan of Organization and Rules of Order, Rule 6, Volume 3, p. 1117, line 725. Following the sentence that ends with the word *microphone*, insert this sentence: "The digital queue or speaker pool seen by the presiding office shall be projected and made visible to the body."

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much. I think we're ready to vote. If you'll take your devices.

This is a motion to refer to the Committee on Plan of Organization and Rules. If you would support the Drew Dyson recommendation to refer, you'll press *one (1)*; if you're opposed, press *two (2)*. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right, we'll close the poll.

You have supported the motion to refer, 564 to 143.

[*Yes, 564; No, 143*]

Thank you very much.

Are there others that wish to speak on the rules—the Plan of Organization and Rules? If you want to speak, enter the queue.

Just to make sure, Drew Dyson, make sure that you have your amendment in written form so that it can be processed up here.

All right, call on David Livingston from the Great Plains Conference.

DAVID LIVINGSTON (Great Plains): Thank you, Bishop. I have a motion that I'd like to make that's in reference to the Commission's report from earlier. Is that in order at this time?

BISHOP BICKERTON: I would just hold that, I'll call on you, David, when we finish the rules and I'll recognize you just as soon as we finish this portion of the rules.

LIVINGSTON: Thank you. I tried to buzz in earlier, but my buzzer wasn't working.

BISHOP BICKERTON: That's OK. We got you now. Thank you so much. I see in the queue a lot of speeches for and speeches against. There's a motion to

amend. I call on Giovanni Arroyo, with an amendment, from Baltimore-Washington.

GIOVANNI ARROYO (Baltimore-Washington): Giovanni Arroyo, Baltimore-Washington Conference, male, Latino, clergy. I move that the rules of order to [amend] by adding a new rule that follows the following way: "Immediately after the Conference is called to order, an indigenous person shall offer a proper acknowledgment of land ownership. Anyone other than an indigenous person who attempts to offer a land acknowledgment shall only do so after consultation with appropriate tribal authority of indigenous persons in the area where the General Conference is being held." If I get a second, I will speak to it.

BISHOP BICKERTON: There is a second.

ARROYO: Part of our Wesleyan identity is to live into the simple rules of "Do no harm, Do good, and Stay in love with God." In part, being of a diverse community is to acknowledge that we stand in native people's lands. Part of our work is to recognize that sometimes we could cause harm by our silence or in our inaction of recognizing the reality of our native people who we are standings, land we are standing on. It is important for us to be intentional of the work that we are called to do if we are to build the beloved community. And so part of us modeling this to the church, we as the body must begin to make sure that we are doing good, doing no hard, and staying in love with God as we care in how we treat one another and recognize each others in this space.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Motion to amend the rules with the addition of this new rule is a motion to refer to the committee for their work and to report back to us. Hilaire Kibatuli from East Congo. This is a speech for. Hilaire Kibatuli.

*(pause)*

Come to a mic.

All right, are there others that wish to speak for or against? This is a motion to refer to the Committee on Rules, a new amendment, a new rule. Gio, could I ask you to repeat it once again, please?

ARROYO: Give me one second, Bishop. "Immediately after the Conference is called to order, an indigenous person shall offer a proper acknowledgment of land ownership. Anyone other than an indigenous person who attempts to offer a land acknowledgment shall only do so after consultation with appropriate tribal authority of indigenous persons in the area where the General Conference is being held."

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you. I do have a speech for from Effie McAvoy McClain from New England.

EFFIE MCAVOY MCCLAIN (New England): Greetings, beloved. Rev. Effie McAvoy McClain, Chair of New England Conference Commission on Religion and Race. She/her pronouns, Black/African American. Queer. I am here and speak for the General Conference Secretary's motion in regards to the harm that the church and colonialization has done to ingenious persons within, not only these United States, but around the world. In acknowledging truthfully whose land we stand on in a way that is respectful and connotes honor to the bodies that have lost their land, their lives, sometimes their language and their identify, is the least we could do; the least as a General Conference, as a church. I'm also for reparations, but that's a whole [other] conversation. In so doing, I support the motion to add this to our rules as we see our indigenous siblings, not as just an arm piece, but actual persons in the body whom we respect, whom we see as our peers and our colleagues in this work to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. So, that's my speech.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much. Is there a speech against?

*(pause)*

Are we ready to vote? If you'll take your devices—This is a new rule that's being recommended. This motion to refer to the rules committee is properly

before you. If you will support it, please press *one (1)*, if you're not supportive, please press *two (2)*. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

All right, we'll close the voting.

You supported this motion to refer, 579 to 125.

[*Yes, 579; No, 125*]

It will now go to the Committee on Rules.

Are there other rules [or] matters that you'd like to discuss?

I see a lot of speeches for and speeches against in the queue. I don't see someone wanting to make any amendments, so—

Ivan James from Missouri. Ivan James?

*(pause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: Kalaba Chali, would you like to speak?

Ivan James, are you at mic. 2?

IVAN JAMES (Missouri): Yes. Ivan James—

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right.

JAMES: From St. Louis, Missouri Conference. Male. I was just going to move that the, be closed and move on to the next order of business.

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right, you're moving that we move the previous question?

Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED VOICES: Yes.

BISHOP BICKERTON: OK, our parliamentarian has reminded us that we have not had speeches for or against the rules. So, we have to have three speeches for and against the rules as a whole. So, does anyone wish that we are back to the main motion of approving the rules that would be contingent upon receiving the reports from the referrals back to the committee, back to the General Conference from the committee. Does anyone wish to speak for or against the rules being approved?

*(pause)*

Kalaba Chali?

*(pause)*

Danjuma Juji?

Yes, mic. 4.

KALABA CHALI (Great Plains): Kalaba Chali—

BISHOP BICKERTON: Yes. Thank you.

CHALI: From the Great Plains Conference. Clergy. Male. Bishop, I think there is an error with the machine. I did not put my name to speak.

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right, thank you very much.

*(laughter)*

OK. That may be a first.

Mark Stallons from Kentucky, do you have a speech you'd like to give? Mark Stallons from Kentucky?

All right, it appears that we might be ready to vote. So, if you will approve the rules as presented, that's what we're voting on with the realization that we've had a few matters that are referred to the committee that they will bring back to us to bring recommendations on revisions of the rules once they have met.

The Plan of Organization and the Rules of Order are in front of us, I believe we are ready to vote.

If you will support—

This motion does require a 2/3 vote, by the way. The question is on the motion to adopt the Plan of Organization and Rules. If you are in favor of approving our Plan of Organization and our Rules of Order, please press *one* (1). If you're not in favor, please press *two* (2). Please vote now.

*(pause)*

And we'll close the voting. And you have voted our rules through. 687 to 29.

[*Yes, 687; No, 29*]

I haven't been keeping time, but that may be a record, too, for the amount of time it's taken to pass the rules. So we are very grateful for—

*(applause)*

Listen to the crowd.

*(laughter)*

All right. David Livingston. I promised to call back on you. Can we clear the speaker queue, please?

David Livingston.

LIVINGSTON: Thank you, Bishop. David Livingston, clergy, from the White Plains, male, White. And I have a motion with some trepidation because there's some "whereases" and "therefores" in it.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Uh oh!

*(laughter)*

LIVINGSTON: And I have a written copy.



BISHOP BICKERTON: I'll be listening carefully.

LIVINGSTON: Whereas, Central Conference delegations at General Conference have historically not been fully seated, including more than thirty delegates at the 2016 and 2019 sessions;

And whereas the 2020 General Conference held in 2024 has an even greater discrepancy than previous conferences;

And whereas in the weeks leading up to this General Conference the Commission on General Conference staff have not provided clear and transparent information about reasons for the levels of participation from Central Conferences, invitation letters, flights, housing, and delegate information;

And whereas this lack of transparency has created rumors of conspiracy and questions of credibility;

And whereas having not held a regular session of General Conference since 2016, it is not reasonable or plausible to delay denominational action by postponing or cancelling General Conference again;

Therefore be it resolved that the 2020 General Conference: (1) Affirms the concerns raised by Central Conferences and others about the large discrepancy between the number of delegates allocated and the number in attendance from Central Conferences; (2) Implores the Secretary of the General Conference to submit a written report, to be published in the *DCA*, explaining with clarity and full transparency, why this discrepancy, as well as delays in housing, flights, invitation letters, and delegate information occurred; (3) Instructs the General Commission on General Conference to include proportional representation from each Central or Regional conference in planning future sessions to assure that specific concerns of each region are adequately addressed;

And be it further resolved that while we acknowledge that the gathered session is valid and duly called, based on paragraph 506 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, we urge the delegates to the 2020 General Conference to make

every effort to listen to and carefully consider voices from regions that are underrepresented, so that the decisions of the body represent the will of the whole denomination as best as possible.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED VOICES: (*indecipherable*)

BISHOP BICKERTON: There is a second. You want to speak to it?

LIVINGSTON: Thank you, Bishop. Yes, I do. I really do appreciate the report that Kim Simpson and others gave today. The update on where we are, the promise for more updates as time goes on. I appreciate the work of the General Commission. It's clear to me that there are a lot of circumstances that created a perfect storm to make this as difficult as it is.

And some of those pieces were, I believe, within our control. And we need to have clarity about that, we need to have transparency about that. And we need to, second, with that last therefore clause, particularly those of us from the United States need to, in this moment where we are numerically overrepresented compared to the rest of The United Methodist Church, we need to take it upon ourselves to listen very clearly to those from outside of the United States who have important insights and thoughts to share, and, as was stated earlier, I think something to the effect of this, we need to listen first rather than speaking first.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much. Because your motion is so long, make sure that we have a copy up here. If you can bring it up so we could have it. Could I ask the page if you could bring it up to us now since it's so long. It'd be good to refer to it.

I do have a speech for from Jethro Muyombi from South Congo. Call upon Jethro Muyombi.

Yes, he's coming.

JETHRO MUYOMBI (South Congo): *Merci*, Bishop.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Let's make sure we have our headsets on, please.

MUYOMBI: OK, I think I will speak in French. That's why I was skipping my mic. so that I can listen to translation because my English is too small.

BISHOP BICKERTON: OK. If you feel more comfortable in your native language, please do so. That's why we have the headsets.

MUYOMBI: Thank you very much, Bishop. (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) I want to speak for. And if you will permit me. Jethro Muyombi. I am a layperson. I conduct the conference. I am an attorney, and I'm also a deputy, a parliamentary. And I wanted to support the motion that was presented because I observe that there is a self-exclusion of some voices. It's like the rules that we are voting on, the intervention of (*indecipherable*), my mother, was not really taken into account because there are some people who maybe voted the rules without understanding them because on the table we only have English documents. And I think that we should probably report—we should postpone so that the president would actually make sure that those who do not speak English have French documents and that they would understand the things for which they're supposed to vote. That's the first thing.

And now, in terms of this motion, I support this motion because if you vote, whereas there are episcopal regions for which the members of the delegation are not there, what will it be? Will it be a way to vote against? Or to vote in the (*indecipherable*) they have already lost some voices of people who may have been able to either support or go against a certain decision. So, thank you, so I just wanted to second the motion.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much. We call on Ande Emmanuel from Southern Nigeria.

A speech for. Ande?

ANDE EMMANUEL (Southern Nigeria): Bishop.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Yes.

EMMANUEL: My name is Rev. Ande Emmanuel from the southern conference of the Nigeria Episcopal area. I stand here to appreciate the mover of this motion and thank them for putting this together. The event around delegates' participation in this General Conference, most especially in the part of Africans who was so challenging to many of us. We have seen up to this moment, how delegates were struggling and eager to be in this place. But due to delay in issuance of invitation letters, flight tickets, and even information where we were going to stay, this has affected tremendously participation of delegates in this General Conference. Therefore, this is a step forward in trying to prevent this from happening henceforth. So I wholeheartedly in support of this resolution. Thank you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you so much. That's two speeches for. I have not heard a speech against. Is there someone who wishes to speak against?

*(pause)*

All right, we'll take one more speech for, and that's Henoc Mwenze from West Katanga.

Henoc Mwenze?

Henoc Mwenze (South-West Katanga): *(simultaneous interpretation from French)* Henoc Mwenze, South-West Katanga. I would like to speak in favor of this motion that has been made and I would like to underscore a different effect. An effect that we as delegates of the Central conferences, we are surprised to see that the per diem was canceled and we are being forced to eat food that is not part of our diet. Is it possible that we could—how can it be possible that we would be given this type of food that we do not ordinarily eat, so I would like to ask that this manner of proceeding would be reviewed since we weren't even contacted or consulted. If we had known or if at least the food was something that worked with our culture. So what you are being presenting to us has not been food for us. So if there is a problem with money, give us half of the per diem that was given before, while still leaving breakfast in place. That would allow us, Mr. Chair, that we are suffering when

it comes to the food that we are being fed and that does not follow our diet. That is what I wanted to say to support the motion that has been offered.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much for that, and I would hope that we will do that kind of review, and appreciate it that very much.

The motion is before us. We've had three speeches. Four have given opportunity for those who wish to speak against. There are none.

We want to move directly then to vote automatically on the David Livingston motion that is before us. We could ask, will the secretary of the General Conference, are you able to read this motion for us? Gary?

GRAVES: Whereas, Central Conference delegations at General Conference have historically not been fully seated, including more than thirty delegates at the 2016 and 2019 sessions;

And whereas the 2020 General Conference held in 2024 has an even greater discrepancy than previous conferences;

And whereas in the weeks leading up to this General Conference, the Commission on General Conference staff have not provided clear and transparent information about reasons for the levels of participation from Central Conferences, invitation letters, flights, housing, and delegate information;

And whereas this lack of transparency has created rumors of conspiracy and questions of credibility;

And whereas having not held a regular session of General Conference since 2016, it is not reasonable or plausible to delay denominational action by postponing or canceling General Conference again;

Therefore, be it resolved that the 2020 General Conference: (1) affirms the concerns raised by Central Conferences and others about the large discrepancy between the number of delegates allocated and the number in attendance from Central Conferences; (2) implores the Secretary of the

General Conference to submit a written report to be published in the *DCA* with clarity and full transparency why this discrepancy as well as delays in housing, flights, invitation letters, and delegate information occurred; (3) instructs the General Commission on General Conference to include proportional representation from each Central or regional conference in planning future sessions to assure that specific concerns of each region are adequately addressed;

And be it further resolved that while we acknowledge that the gathered session is valid and duly called based on paragraph 506, we urge the delegates to the 2020 General Conference to make every effort to listen to and carefully consider voices from regions that are underrepresented so that the decisions of the body represent the will of the whole denomination as best as possible.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you. The motion is properly before us; we are now ready to vote.

If you would support the David Livingston amendment—or David Livingston proposal, press *one (1)*. If you are not supportive, please press *two (2)*. Please press now. Vote now.

*(pause)*

We'll close the balloting.

And you support the resolution, 669 to 40.

[*Yes, 669; No, 40*]

Thank you very much.

We now want to turn to the election of our Coordinator of Calendar and the General Conference administrative committees. We turn to Gary Graves to do that.

GRAVES: Thank you, Bishop. As Secretary of the General Conference, I nominate Dr. Susan Brumbaugh to serve as Coordinator of the Calendar.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Susan Brumbaugh has been nominated to serve as the Coordinator of Calendar. The question before us is on the election of Susan Brumbaugh to that office. We will now proceed to vote. Motion requires a majority vote.

The question is on the adoption of the motion to elect Susam Brumbaugh as the Coordinator of the Calendar.

If you are supportive of that election, would you please press *one (1)*. If you are opposed, please press *two (2)*. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

Just hold for a second. The poll is not open, I understand. We'll get word when it is. Let's clear the vote. We will do it again. All right, I think it's open now.

If you would elect Susan Brumbaugh, would you please press *one (1)*. If you are opposed, please press *two (2)*. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

All right, we'll close the balloting, wait for our results.

You've approved Susan with a vote of 672 to 28.

[*Yes, 672; No, 28*]

Thank you very much.

*(applause)*

GRAVES: And, Bishop, the next piece that we have is found on today's Daily Edition, p. 1863. Today's Daily Edition, 1863.

This is the election of our General Conference administrative committees, and we present them to you having been nominated for your election.

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right, they are properly before us. If you have your *Daily Christian Advocate* for Tuesday, April 23rd, we are on pp. 1863, 1864, 1865. They are properly before us. Are you ready to vote?

If you would elect these persons to the general administrative committees, please take your devices. If you are supportive, please vote *one (1)*. Oppose, please vote *two (2)*. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

All right, we are going to close the balloting.

And you have elected them by a vote of 645 to 18.

[*Yes, 645, No, 18*]

The next item of business we have is the report of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar. The report will be given by Emily Allen to give us indication of what our agenda looks like tomorrow. Emily?

EMILY ALLEN: Good evening, my name is Emily Allen. I am a White laywoman delegate from California-Nevada Annual Conference. I am also the chair of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar. Bishop, I am pausing because I understand the materials I was going to offer for approval have only been distributed in English so far. I would be interested in delaying my report until tomorrow when we have an opportunity to have the materials in all official languages of General Conference.

*(applause)*

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right. It's hard to have an agenda tomorrow when we haven't passed an agenda for tomorrow, so we are in a little bit of a quandary. Could you give us a hint of what we're going to be doing tomorrow?



ALLEN: More or less what has been printed in all previous versions of the agenda. My work today was to approve the most recent version. I am afraid I don't have both in front of me to compare one to the other and give you exact details.

BISHOP BICKERTON: OK.

ALLEN: I could read it aloud but we are coming up against (*indecipherable*) day.

BISHOP BICKERTON: I think maybe if you could read it, if you read it aloud, that'll give us all a sense of, a little bit of a sense of what we are doing tomorrow, and then we can—when the translated versions are out there, we can officially vote on it. But kind of give us a scope of what we are doing tomorrow.

ALLEN: Absolutely.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you.

ALLEN: Thank you, and I will try to read slowly for live translation interpretation. Our Wednesday starts with breakfast, which is available starting at 6:30 a.m. The Committee on Agenda and Calendar and Committee on Reference will meet starting at 7 a.m. Registration opens at 7:30 a.m. Worship starts at 8 a.m. The plenary session at 8:30 includes the Episcopal Address, Monitoring Report, and Report on the Social Principles Revision. A second plenary at 11 a.m. includes the Young People's Address, General Book of Discipline Report, Financial State of the Church, the Pathway to Our Next Expression. Lunch is at 12:30. At 2:00 the Organization of the Legislative Committees begins. At 4:30 dinner and training begins for Legislative Committee Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Parliamentarians, Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Recorders, and Subcommittee Chairs. Five o'clock is the daily deadline for *DCA* printing, and dinner starts at 6:30.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Great. Emily has given us a good hint of what we're doing tomorrow. You have in front of you a little placard. I want you to get your placard if you would. You've got a little fan. Everybody got your little

fan? All right. If you are supportive of what Emily has given us as a hint for tomorrow, let me see the green side of that card. All right. If you are opposed, let me see the other side of that card. Emily, it's a good hint, they've approved that—at least conditionally upon a formal report tomorrow when the translated copies will be distributed to everyone.

ALLEN: Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you so much. We appreciate your leadership.

Turn to Jasmine Smothers on a report from the Committee on Presiding Officers.

*(pause)*

Hi, Jasmine.

JASMINE SMOTHERS (North Georgia): Good evening, Bishop. Bishops, General Conference, my name is Jasmine Rose Smothers and I serve as a clergy delegate from the North Georgia Conference. They're so good to me. My pronouns are she, her, and I am an African American female, adult female, no longer young adult, but that's OK.

*(laughter)*

During this General Conference I also have the privilege of chairing the Committee on Presiding Officers. I represent twelve incredible committee members who come from each Central Conference and Jurisdiction, six clergy members, and six laypersons. The committee has a responsibility to select and notify the presiding officers from each plenary sessions. All active bishops are eligible to serve as presiding officers, and we are grateful for the training and preparation that they have invested in to lead us well during this time. We owe a debt of gratitude to our parliamentarian, Mr. Henderson, who spent several hours with us yesterday to help us understand our role. You will hear from the committee each day to share with you the schedule of presiding officers. Please know that the committee has defined its priority and commitment to a diverse and skilled presiding officer for each session. For the

committee, diversity includes language. Therefore we have asked our presiding officers to preside in their first language or one of the official languages of the General Conference other than English if they are comfortable with doing so. For such a time as this, it is important that our witness in the world reflects the global nature of our church. Our prayer is that Pentecost will break out among us again in this place these two weeks. So tomorrow, Bishop Laura Merrill from the South Central Jurisdiction in the United States will preside over the morning plenary and Bishop Carlo Rapanut from the Western Jurisdiction in the United States will preside over the mid-morning plenary. Thank you for your time today and for your cooperation with our presiding officers.

BISHOP BICKERTON: Thank you very much, Jasmine.

SMOTHERS: Thank you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: We look forward to your reports every day. Thank you very much. Turn now to the Secretary of the General Conference to see if he has—oh, I'm sorry, the Committee on Journals requested to give a brief report as well. Rachel Miller, would you give your report on the journal? I'm sorry.

Rachel.

*(pause)*

*(applause)*

Welcome.

RACHEL MILER (West Ohio): Sorry about that. I did not realize I needed to do this, but I will sprint to the occasion and here we are. I'm Rachel Miller, clergy delegate serving West Ohio Conference in the North Central Jurisdiction. And I am privileged to serve as the chair of the General Committee so you will be hearing from us each morning as we give a report on the day's ADCA. And at this point that's all I know. Thank you.

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right. Thank you so much. We turn now to the Secretary of the General Conference for any announcements.

GRAVES: Thank you, Bishop Bickerton. We do have word that the other language ADCAs will be placed on the desks tonight with apologies that they did not make it in time today. So they are here. They will be placed on the desks tonight. That is from our DCA editor. We want to remind you to leave your Lumi voting device on the table tonight when you are leaving. Make sure you remove your card and keep the card with you, but leave the device on the table please. The interpretation device, however, does go with you, so if you will keep that with you as you move throughout the building to different places, they will be able to assist you as we listen together. A reminder that tonight dinner is between 6:30 and 8 p.m. in the Crown Ballroom. Breakfast tomorrow morning at 6:30 to 8:00 a.m. We seem to be very fond of starting at 6:30 and ending at 8 when we eat. The morning committees, Agenda and Calendar and Reference, both are scheduled at 7 a.m. For those of you who were here just prior to the 2 p.m. worship service and spent some additional time in Concourse C or Concourse A and B, we did want to give you just a bit of explanation. We did have an inspection from the Fire Marshal and in doing so, they have to keep the space closed. And so evidently we passed because we're here. So we've probably had some adjustments that needed to be made. One I did hear of that was a bit interesting. Now all our interpreter booths each have a smoke detector.

*(laughter)*

That's what we have.

BISHOP BICKERTON: All right. Thank you, Gary. Friends, I think we are done for the day. You have been absolutely fantastic, and I appreciate Bishop Harvey and Bishop Nhiwatiwa being behind me, Mr. Henderson being to my right, and you all being in front of me. You've been great. I look forward to us working together these next couple of weeks and I continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will blow freely in this space to guide us in the decisions that we are called upon to make. We'll be back together at 8:00 for worship; plenary session will begin at 8:30. We are now in recess. Good night, everyone.

*(applause)*