

The Central Conference Council – report to the 2022 annual conferences

Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

We believe war and bloodshed are contrary to the gospel and spirit of Christ. (Articles of Religion art XVI ¶ 104)

The war in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February is impacting the central conference in significant ways. Thousands have died on both sides, and more than 10 million Ukrainians have either fled their country or are internally displaced. The pastors and leaders in Ukraine are serving under extreme circumstances offering comfort, help and not least hope to their parishioners and fellow citizens. The United Methodists in the neighboring countries and throughout Europe are taking a very active part in offering hospitality, care, and support to the refugees. Amid the horror and pain of war, we are seeing the power of the connection as Methodists across the world join in prayer, encouragements and giving.

The Christian message points to the path of reconciliation and never to war and violence, as a solution to conflicts. In the face of this evil, we pray for a logic different from the one based on geopolitical competition. We pray for a change of hearts and minds of leaders; we pray for de-escalation and dialogue instead of violence and war.

Our central conference consists of Eurasian, Nordic and Baltic countries, including Russia and Ukraine. The Christian Church is not nationalistic and our relations with our brothers and sisters in other countries are not limited by nationality or culture. We have deep relations with each other, and although we are influenced by our culture and the political realities, we must never allow this to hinder or break our unity in Christ.

General Conference Postponed to 2024

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic and not least a dramatic increase in the complexity of visa processes the General Conference once again is postponed, now to 2024, dates are yet to be announced.

While the general conference now has been postponed for a total of four years, it continues to be a postponement of the 2020 general conference, which implies an extension of the quadrennium and no new elections of delegates will take place,

In addition, the decision to postpone general conference also implies that the legislation passed at the 2019 called session of the General Conference will not come into effect in the central conferences until one year after the closing of the general conference in 2024.

Central Conference Postponed to 2025

Due to the further postponement of General Conference the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference is once again rescheduled and is expected to take place in the early spring of 2025. The central conference council will set the dates once the dates for general conference have been announced.

The theme of the conference will still be: “Receive the Holy Spirit” John 20:23

Episcopal elections will take place at the regular session of the central conference in 2025. Bishop Eduard

Khegay's first term as bishop comes to an end, and he can be re-elected for a four-year term. Bishop Christian Alsted's second term comes to an end, and there will be episcopal election.

Further information regarding the deadlines for submitting petitions and resolutions to the re-scheduled central conference and for making nominations for the episcopacy will be announced after this year's fall meeting of the central conference council.

Implications

The postponement of general conference has led to reactions from several caucus groups, individuals, and annual conferences.

Some are concerned, the church for yet another two years will not be able to deal with the disagreements related to human sexuality and make room for flexibility in its polity. While others have expressed a desire to disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church with the purpose of joining a more traditional denomination. The announcement of the launching of a new traditional denomination named the Global Methodist Church by the first of May has accelerated the desire to disaffiliate for some individual and annual conferences.

The four European bishops are working collaboratively to describe processes and to guide conferences, local churches and clergy that seek to disaffiliate.

Extra Sessions of Central Conference

An extra session of central conference has been called for 30. April 2022 with the sole purpose of acting on a motion from the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference Council to temporarily until the next regular session of central conference to change the borders of the two episcopal area and move the Ukraine-Moldova Provisional to the Nordic and Baltic episcopal are.

Furthermore, central conference delegates, members and official guests are asked to keep reserving the previously announced dates for central conference 15-19 March 2023, as the council is considering asking the bishops to call another extra session to deal with adaptations to the Book of Discipline to smoothen the processes for disaffiliation and to allow for more flexibility and contextualization in the annual conferences. In addition, there are several other thinkable scenarios and motions an extra session could deal with. The council will decide on these matters in their fall meeting 11-12. October 2022.

Europe

The four European bishops continue to meet frequently to discuss the development in the denomination and in the central conferences. We have ongoing conversations thinking proactively about the future development of European United Methodism, which may include the re-drawing of the map of European United Methodism. Since the spring of 2021 each of the three European Central Conference executive committees in all their regular meetings have met with all four bishops to listen to reports about the situation and the developments in each episcopal area.

As the proposed legislation for "The Protocol of Reconciliation and Peace through Separation" will not be dealt with until the postponed general conference in 2024, we have decided to temporarily put the previously developed documents on the implications of the protocol on hold.

Decisions on disaffiliation made in annual conferences and in local churches in Europe may necessitate the formation of a Europe wide taskforce to study and make proposals for the future organization of the United Methodist Church in Europe, including its central conference structure, and its episcopal supervision.

Finances

Due to the pandemic, we came out of the fiscal year 2021 with a significant surplus, of which the Central Conference Council has decided to allocate 8.000 DKK / 1.081 Euro to the Eurasia Area Fund, and 70.000 DKK / 9.459 Euro to the Nordic and Baltic Area Fund.

The World Methodist Conference postponed to 13-18. August 2024 in Gothenburg Sweden

The World Methodist Conference has been postponed to 13-18. August 2024, when the worldwide Methodist, Wesleyan and United church family will gather in Gothenburg, Sweden. The overarching theme is "On the Move" with sub-themes, Migration, Pilgrimage, and Illumination. The conference will offer the unique opportunity to connect with Methodists from across the world, to be inspired and challenged, and together share the heart-warming experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The conference is hosted by the Uniting Church of Sweden (Equmeniakyrkan) supported by the Norway and the Denmark annual conferences.

Much more information can be found on www.worldmethodistconference.com All United Methodists in the Nordic, Baltic and Eurasian countries are encouraged to consider going to Gothenburg in Sweden in August in 2024. Funds are made available to offer grants in support of travel to the conference.

Final Words

We are all living and leading through unprecedented and highly challenging times in the world and in the church. Some among us do this under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions and with limited resources. This is a time to pray for each other and to act in Christian love. This is a time to speak well of one another and a time to speak truth in love.

May Christ have mercy on us all

Christian Alsted

chair of the Central Conference council