

General Conference Awareness
Education Initiative
Arborlawn UMC

If one thing is clear in the wake of the UMC Special General Conference, it's that not very much is clear. Delegates from around the world voted on multiple propositions involving not only deep theological matters, but also complicated organizational matters. Even after the conference ended, much remained to be sorted out. As a denomination, we are not yet finished talking about human sexuality and marriage.

Given these complexities, it's fair to say that many people still aren't clear on what happened or what's ahead. That's why a group of **lay leaders** – from all points on the ideological spectrum – approached Rev. Chris Mesa recently with an idea: can we find a way to better educate the congregation about the last General Conference and what will undoubtedly come up at the next General Conference in May?

The idea was solely to try to explain what happened and what's happening, presenting facts and not opinions. The hope was that greater knowledge would ease anxiety and foster fully informed decisions, if and when a time comes to make decisions both individually and as a congregation.

The lay leaders were insistent on these points:

- **It would NOT be a debate either on scripture or on the basic questions about human sexuality and marriage that Methodists have debated for decades.**
- **It would NOT be a platform to try to persuade people to believe one thing or another.**
- **It would NOT be an effort to poll the congregation on opinions.**

Rather, this effort would involve simply presenting the facts as best we know them; what occurred at the called General Conference of 2019, what legislation has been enacted, what has been the response to that legislation, what plans are expected to be presented at the next regularly scheduled General Conference, what do those plans entail, and what effect might these plans have on local churches.

Several of the lay leaders involved in this initiative were also involved in the merger of the Overton Park and Westcliff churches that created Arborlawn. And although they have significant ideological differences in these matters, they have worshipped and worked closely together for many years. In a nutshell, that's The Arborlawn Way: acknowledging our differences, finding strength in that diversity, and working together to build the Kingdom. As we said in Arborlawn's original Vision Statement, we embrace the challenge to lead and the faith to follow.

The first meeting of the General Conference Awareness initiative will take place on Sunday, November 3 at 12:30 p.m. in the Worship Center, to be followed with a second presentation of the same materials the following evening, Monday night, November 4 at 6:30 p.m., also in the Worship Center. We will offer a recap of the events of General Conference 2019, report on what occurred at our own Central Texas Annual Conference of 2019, and talk about what plans are being prepared for General Conference of 2020. And as we do so, we will hold to these core values:

- **Respect, not judgment.** These are matters that involve passionately held beliefs. But this is a time to listen and learn, which means working to set aside preconceived notions and manage emotions.
- **Openness to God's voice.** God is present when we gather in God's name. Give God a chance to speak.
- **Self-awareness and self-reflection.** A mark of Christian maturity is to understand how our own words and actions impact others.
- **Patience and humility.** We are called, as Paul reminds us, to think of others as better than ourselves.
- **God's grace is always at the forefront.** We didn't earn our place at the table. God granted it by grace. Let's remember we're working for God.

We approach this task humbly, praying that as we share information faithfully, we will grow in our ability to focus on our common calling: helping build God's Kingdom in our Fort Worth community and beyond. Please join us.