

Legislative Process

I am Rev. Kerry A. McCormick. I serve Redlands UMC in Grand Junction, Colorado. I am also the Chairperson of the Legislative Process for our Annual Conference, which means I gather the teams, train and support the officers and Petition Presenters, and help guide Petitions through adoption or rejection using our commitment to Holy Conferencing.

If you're new to Annual Conference, you've probably noticed that you've been assigned to one of three Legislative Sessions (A, B or C) to take place on Saturday morning. You were asked to print off and bring with you the two or three Petitions assigned to that particular session. You will be asked to discuss, amend as you see fit (using Robert's Rules of Order), and vote on each Petition in turn. Your decisions become part of our Standing Rules to be published in our Journal at the conclusion of our Annual Conference session.

Perhaps we can admit that we view voting as American citizens to be troubling and difficult, potentially rife with conflict – which we would just as soon avoid. It may be our civil duty, but it's easier to expect others to be more involved than we our selves deem necessary. That may work in your neighborhood, in your community, even in your nation, but here, as a member of the Annual Conference; you represent your local church. It's more than a duty to attend the Legislative Session to which you've been assigned – those who elected you, and whom you represent, are counting on you to be their voice, their vote, to speak to these Petitions because they may ultimately impact our local church budget (that is, our obligations to fund our commitments to Wider Missions) and our congregations in some way.

Petitions to the Annual Conference are designed to move us forward, to address our ways of doing business, or being in relationship with one another or the world around us, and to create cohesiveness as we are a disparate group. Any person or committee or group within the Annual Conference can submit a Petition. As long as the Petition follows our processes, meets our deadlines, is reviewed by our Conference Finance and Administrative committee (aka CF&A) for any possible budget impact, addresses a new need and does not ask us to contravene the current Book of Discipline, it can have it's moment in the sunlight before a Legislative Session. The process for creating a Petition, the deadlines and support can all be found on the Conference website.

As you participate in your Legislative Session, perhaps you'll want to write a Petition to be considered next Annual Conference. As a side note, Petitions to be advanced to the next General Conference (which will be held in 2016) will be processed during our Annual Conference session in 2015. So you really are encouraged to be passionate about the legislative work we do this week if you would like to develop a Petition to move the denomination forward in some way you feel is not currently being addressed.

Seven Petitions have been presented for deliberation on Saturday. Each must be affirmed within the session before we can vote on our Conference budget. The Petitions before us detail compensation for Conference staff and DS's, eligibility rules and funding for our health insurance plan, and determining our minimum compensation package and parsonage standards for clergy in "full connection." We will celebrate the memories and faithful blessings of two congregations, Warren (Denver) and Green River (Wyoming) who are each asking for discontinuance. We will determine if we want to support the Global HIV/AIDS fight through our 4th Annual Valentine's Day campaign. And we will determine if congregations should hold conversations in their communities regarding Hydraulic Fracturing (or fracking).

To streamline our process, we practice Holy Conferencing within the Legislative Session to develop a Consent Calendar. Every Petition put before a Legislative Session must be acted upon; we cannot “Table” a Petition or “Refer” it back to committee for further development. To make it onto the Consent Calendar with “Concurrence,” a Petition (with or without amendments) must be adopted by 80% of the voting members of the Legislative Session. When at least 80% of the voting members reject a Petition (with or without amendments), its status is called “Non-Concurrence” and is reported as such on the Consent Calendar. Any Petition (with or without amendments) failing to receive the 80% minimum vote will be listed as “Without Recommendation” on the Consent Calendar and will be moved to the agenda of the Plenary session on Saturday night for action there.

During the Plenary session on Saturday evening, the whole body confirms the good work of the individual Legislative Sessions through the Consent Calendar, where you will see the status of each Petition under the categories: Concurrence, Non-Concurrence or Without Recommendation. We now do this on the screens in our main meeting room. Petitions listed as Without Recommendation will be handled separately at that time as well.

Our legislative officers are volunteers (clergy and laity) who work hard to make this process engaging, informative and unifying as we are able to discuss our opinions as the body of Christ and come to agreements with one another. Let’s commit to speaking respectfully to the issues and gently and compassionately to one another – even when, especially when – we disagree. Let’s listen to the intentions of those around us, even when our words reveal the frailty of our hearts. Let’s hold ourselves to a higher standard of public discourse as People of God. Are we not bound to a decision-making process that aligns with scripture:

Remind them of these things and warn them in the sight of God not to engage in battles over words that aren't helpful and only destroy those who hear them. (2 Timothy 2:14) Instead, pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace together with those who confess the Lord with a clean heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Thank you for your commitment as a member of the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church to the Legislative Session and your participation in the Petition process. Your dedication and time, your efforts here this week will have an impact on our Conference and our local churches in the years ahead. God bless you in this good work.

Your Servant in Christ,

Rev. Kerry A. McCormick
RMC Legislative Process Chair