

The 29th General Conference of the Evangelical Methodist Church
Grace Evangelical Methodist Church
Haltom City, Texas
July 9-10, 2008

The 29th General Conference of the Evangelical Methodist Church met July 9-10, 2008, at the Grace Evangelical Methodist Church, Haltom City, Texas. Dr. Edward W. Williamson, General Superintendent presided.

SESSION 1

Wednesday, July 09, 2008

1. **Opening Hymn.** Dr. Williamson led the conference in singing the Wesley hymn, “And Are We Yet Alive?” as members assembled and were seated. Dr. Williamson led in prayer.
2. **Welcome to members.** Rev. Temple Cowell, pastor of Grace Church, and host pastor of the 29th General Conference, welcomed the delegates, and guests.
3. **Information.** Mrs. Diane Strack, Head of the Department of Publications, shared information about the book table and items on-sale at the registration table.
4. **Plaques of recognition.** Dr. Williamson presented special plaques to Rev. Floyd B’Hymer, District Superintendent of the Central Lakes District, and Rev. Laurens Hudson, District Superintendent of the Southern District, in recognition of their years of ministry to the Evangelical Methodist Church and retirement from the Superintendency, July 31.
5. **Call to Order.** Dr. Williamson called the 29th General Conference to order at 3 p.m.
6. **Adoption of the Agenda.** It was moved, and seconded to adopt the agenda as printed, with the following additions: Dinner break from 5:30-7:30 Wednesday evening, and, Dr. Williamson indicated that business might stretch into Friday 8:30 – 10:15 a.m., only if necessary.
7. **Motion to Amend.** A motion to amend the agenda was made by Rev. Dewey Fleming to push back the start of the Pastors’ School until General Conference business is completed. The motion was seconded, and following discussion, was approved.
8. **Agenda Approved.** The motion to adopt the agenda, as amended, was approved.
9. **The Conference Bar.** The Bar of the Conference was established as the entire room. The chair asked that only authorized delegates vote on conference action.
10. **Roll Call Cards.** The Roll Call cards distributed to the delegates at registration were collected.
11. **Election of Parliamentarians.** It was moved and seconded that Mrs. Cindy Potter serve as primary Parliamentarian, and Rev. James Townson as assistant. Approved.

12. **Standing Rules.** It was moved and seconded to adopt the Standing Rules as printed in the booklet, with one editorial change to Item #9, changing the word “resolutions” to “minutes”. The Standing Rules were approved as amended.
13. **Minutes.** The Chair recognized the General Secretary, Rev. James Coulston, for the reading of the Minutes of the 28th General Conference. One addition to the Minutes from Indianapolis was read. Minute 124 of the 28th General Conference minutes was read by Rev. Coulston. He reported that the 28th General Conference delegates were mailed a ballot. The delegates were asked to reconsider the action of minute 124. That action was approved, 107 yes, and 4 no. The delegates were asked to rescind the action contained in minute 124, which was approved, 108 yes, and 3 no. The delegates were asked to adjourn the 28th General Conference, which was approved, 121 yes, and 2 no. A motion was made to approve the Minutes. Approved.
14. **Opening Remarks.** Dr. Edward Williamson addressed the conference with opening remarks.

**GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT’S INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE
2008 SPECIAL CALLED GENERAL CONFERENCE – July 9-10, 2008**

***“Your road lead through the sea, your pathway through the mighty waters –
a pathway no one knew was there!” (Psalm 77:19, NLT)***

These remarks are to answer the question, ‘Why are we here at a mid-quadrennial General Conference?’ Primarily we are here to experience the ‘Face of God.’ Moses is our teacher. The Lord told Moses I will no longer go with you and the people, instead I will send my angel. Moses said unless ‘your Face (Presence) goes with us, I will not go’. Moses is saying it is better to be in the desert with Yahweh, than in the Promised Land without Him. We must ask the question, ‘Does the one model conference have the direction and commitment of the Presence of God?’ The ordained Elders and local church delegates must decide.

The Apostles are also our teachers. At the first Special Called General Conference in Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council made the necessary changes in the Early Church organization to advance the Kingdom throughout the Roman Empire, they experienced the ‘Face of God.’ Their unanimous decisions produced these words, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (28). The September 2007 General Council experienced the same ministry of the Holy Spirit the Apostles experienced. An EMC General Council comprised of strong leaders, strong interests, and strong opinions came together in a unanimous decision of unity and expressions of appreciation for one another. We are here today because the Holy Spirit directed the General Council to call for this Special Conference and present their one conference model for adoption. The final decision for adoption and implementation is now the property of every individual delegate as you also seek the ‘Face of God’ for His Will. Is the one conference model the will of God for the EMC?

The General Council and I are fulfilling our roles as described in *The Discipline of the Evangelical Methodist Church*. In our organizational model the General Superintendent and the General Council are not figure heads, but carry responsibilities for every district and every local church. Paragraph 608 (1) in the General Council section reads, “To give direction to the church by presenting creative and practical programs to the General Conference for adoption, *seeking to anticipate the future needs and continued growth of the church.*” (Italics added). Appropriately the 2006 General Conference assigned the General Council to bring to this Conference what has become

the one conference model. In addition, the General Superintendent is the only superintendent elected by the entire denomination and I have been reporting since 2000 at all annual District Conferences the challenges of decline we face as a denomination. In the last eight years we have been in dialogue about possible organizational restructuring for team building and making the focus the local church.

Our history also brings us to this Special Called General Conference. A special called mid-quadrennial General Conference was called by our General Superintendent, Dr. Lloyd Garrett in 1976, to change from the Annual Conference model to regional district models. The proposal was only partially adopted, which prompted Dr. Garrett's resignation. The proposal was for a Cabinet or Board of Superintendents, abolishing the office of a single General Superintendent, and dividing the country into regions called districts. The division into regions of districts was adopted, but the office of a single General Superintendent was maintained. We may not be holding this General Conference today if the whole 1976 proposal had been adopted or entirely rejected maintaining the two Annual Conference systems. The parsing out of Dr. Garrett's proposal unintentionally set in motion a drift from our Methodist connectional moorings. The decline in growth from the mid seventies to 2000, 165+ churches to 106 today, began in this time period.

In spite of the job descriptions remaining unchanged for the General Superintendent and the General Council, a drift into an association mindset entered our organization. The regions called districts assumed a role not intended by our founders and the congregational and connectional model drifted into a congregational Baptist-like association mindset away from our connectional Methodist heritage. The office of the General Superintendent, especially by those who wanted the office abolished, moved from the biblical shepherd role into an office for fund-raising, recruitment, and fraternal relations. The office of district superintendent assumed individualistic Episcopal roles void of a denominational team approach among the superintendents. Conflicts in their roles, lines of authority, and personal relationship between the office of General Superintendent and the offices of the District Superintendents became the norm. General Superintendents, although elected by the entire denomination, had to have permission to enter the bar of the district conference with the other clergy. Most General Boards became ineffective, and some never held a meeting during the quadrennial. This resulted in District Boards with an individualized and often ineffective smorgasbord of procedures and practices. Piece meal adherence to General Conference legislation occurred such as, conducting Pastors' Schools, maintaining and recording clergy CEU credits, strategies and guidelines for church multiplication, Board of Ministerial Relations procedures, background checks of new ministers, all resulting in a checker board of inconsistency among the districts of the denomination.

Conferences became driven by personal issues and became increasingly political with attempts to mobilize as a district block for voting, when a district has no vote, only local churches at General Conference have this privilege. Church buses or vans have been known to arrive at a district conference site in time to vote on superintendent elections and then to disappear the remainder of the conference business sessions. Our General Council was considered to have a similar format to the United States Congress comprised of political parties and territorial political interests. Threats were made or insinuations to the effect that 'my' district will 'pull out' if a program or policy was adopted they opposed. That attitude was passed down to local pastors and churches some of whom chose to leave the denomination. There was no semblance of the Acts 15 model in our meetings. I am speaking as an eye witness and observer to these things long before I was elected the General Superintendent. I often said, 'If we modeled the operations of the General Church in our local church, our congregation would be destroyed.' The greatest loss was with local churches and clergy who no longer experienced connection with one another across the whole denomination. The local church and pastor felt isolated and alone.

The climate began to change in the nineties with the Superintendency of Rev. Clyde Zehr and Dr. Jack Wease. Brother Zehr introduced denominational training events

and jump started an active General Board of Evangelism. Brother Wease faced a relocation of Headquarters and a change of auditors who required an organizational chart and increased record keeping. The Handbook was developed that contains General Conference legislation and our organizational chart which was approved by the 1998 General Conference. This organization chart, created from the *Discipline*, reaffirmed the balance of our congregational and connectional distinctive of the organization. The nineties was the forbearer of a decade of reflection on our organizational model and denominational decline. When we entered the new millennium a strong desire for an effective disciple-making ministry in the local church and church planting became our missional focus

The 1998 General Conference asked me to leave our local church in West Virginia and serve you as the General Superintendent. I asked one thing of the district superintendents, "Become a team." By an action of our unified wills, because historical precedent opposed us, we determined to function as a team and unify the denomination. By 2000, these men, (Jim Beeler, Harold Thompson, Don Brynes, Jack Conner, Paul Bullman, and Clyde Zehr) had taken steps to stop the denominational decline and the EMC began to turn around. It is now 2008 and the denominational leadership believes an organization change to the one conference model is critical for the continued future health of the denomination. These changes are built upon the foundation of the past decade of renewal among our pastors and local churches. Adoption of the one conference model with the local church centered regions is the next step. Such a model with the regions and Camp Meeting Bible Conferences will take us to additional steps in unity in which the local church will be the 'heart' focus of the denomination, resulting in unified prayer, focus, and Missional ministry.

In our smaller holiness denominations there is a fear of what is sometimes termed 'centralization'. We have faced that 'fear'. It is a fear of reverting to an organizational model that became aloof from the local church and gradually drifted into liberal theology taking our church properties and forcing unwanted pastors on local churches. I have constantly affirmed that the changes we have been discussing for eight years are not 'centralization', but 'accountability' within our Methodist congregational and connectional system.

Let me say, I know well the Episcopal Church government organization. The Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) was the cradle of my spiritual birth and call into the ministry. In 1968 our Council of Bishops sold out the Bible believing EUB congregations to the Methodists and we became United Methodists. The choice was to leave the denomination, lose the church property or accept an appointed liberal theologically trained pastor. In spite of the Good News Renewal, of which I was a participant, I bear witness to watching a biblical evangelical, an Asburian, denied the path to becoming a UMC Bishop through the recruitment of opposition votes and political alliances. That was not the kind of church system I wanted to make a lifetime investment. I wanted to be part of what turned the world upside down through the original biblical doctrines and passion for the world of the Wesleys, Francis Asbury, and the early Methodists. That is why I serve in the Evangelical Methodist Church. Prayer and seeking the Face of God is a high bar of integrity and excellence I want the Conferences of the Evangelical Methodist Church to reach. Conferences absent of political regional self-interest and delegate manipulations. A Conference where the decision making process is Kingdom minded, living out biblical holiness theology, and finding the finger prints of God on the denomination.

Our founders, Drs. Hamblen, Vargas, Smith, and others chose the Episcopal Methodist Book of Discipline to keep the Evangelical Methodist Church organized and connected. That was the first Discipline of American Methodism. They knew the necessary exceptions to make to protect the EMC from an Episcopal government that could fall into an "ever widening chasm" (*Discipline*, ¶11) that separates conservative biblical theology from theological liberalism. The exceptions are our cardinal organizational distinctive you hear in the General Council Report. We are protected from 'centralization', but we must stay 'connectional' and accountable to one another.

- Local Church ownership of their property
- Superintendents elected to four year terms
- Calling of a pastor by the local church
- Limitations placed upon the General Conference in par.641.

The 'why' we are assembled here today has been explored. The next question is how do we know God's will? We came here not to fight and argue, but to pray and seek the Face of God for His direction for the denomination. Pastors, how do you check on yourself in assuring your own heart and mind that you have the leading of the Holy Spirit for your local church? Lay people, how do you know the will of God in these matters, what are the signals and indicators that God is giving direction to a local church and the pastor? We use our head, "is it reasonable", and our 'heart', a witness of the Holy Spirit.

A final question deserves an answer. Why do we have super majorities of 2/3's and 3/4's for changes in our Discipline? First we do not want frivolous revisions and secondly we are Congregationalist believing God's Will can be found in unity and confirmed by the majority. The super majorities were not set up so a minority could recruit enough opposition votes to stop the will of the majority. If we find our voting between 65 to 75% of our delegates for the one conference model resolution, then I believe we are seeing God's hand and direction. I pray that we can experience the Face of God as we make individual decisions and trust our local churches for the final decision of what is God's Will for the EMC by approving the Constitutional changes and placing our future in the hands of every local church. The General Conference delegates create districts and regions. As a delegate you have not come to a political convention, but a sacred assembly. A sacred trust has been placed upon you, the future expression and working of the Kingdom of God in the Evangelical Methodist Church. What do you do with a sacred trust? As individual delegates you seek the 'Face of God' and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If the General Council has discerned the will of God correctly there will be a witness of the Spirit.

In a few moments you may receive a more accurate picture of the one conference model than you understood before the Conference. As a delegate you may experience a witness of the Spirit that changes how you cast your vote on a predetermined decision and opinion. As people believing in the Bible as the Word of God, we can anticipate the Holy Spirit to guide the EMC just as He did the first General Conference in Acts 15. The Jerusalem Council struggled with polices, By-laws and Constitutional changes in our setting, but were unified to see the Kingdom of God expand through all the regions of the Mediterranean Sea. They did not allow the human limitations to anchor them to personal preferences. We must join them in allowing the Holy Spirit to take us beyond where we have been and face the challenges of ministry in the 21st Century. Whatever the decision, we will submit to God and one another to advance the Kingdom of God where God has assigned us. Let us enter a season of prayer before the Resolution of the General Council is presented.

Prayerfully shared,
Edward W. Williamson, General Superintendent

The hymns, "Come, Thou, Almighty King" and "When I Survey," were sung by the conference. This time was concluded by a season of prayer and seeking the Lord.

15. **General Council Report.** The Chair recognized the General Secretary to present the "General Council Report to the Special Called General Conference...One Conference Model Resolution." Rev. Coulston began the reading of the report, introducing individual members of the General Council to

present a portion of the rationale for its adoption:

- a) Rev. Jack Conner shared about the history and the core values of the EMC.
- b) Rev. Max Edwards shared that the one conference model would bring simplicity, unification, and accountability. He introduced Evangelical Methodist Women's President, Mrs. Sonya Penny, who shared about the EMW and how it will be enhanced by the one conference model.
- c) Rev. Ike Cowell shared about how the CSP can enhance fellowship, regional interaction, and renewal. Rev. Cowell introduced Dr. Jim Halbert to discuss the enhanced ability to multiply churches under the unified conference approach. He also introduced Rev. Vernon Perkins, Head of the Department of Multicultural Ministries, to talk about how ethnic ministries could be enhanced under the CSP.
- d) Stanley Morris shared the perspective of the General Board of Finance, and how a one conference model would be budgeted.

16. **Break for Dinner.** The conference recessed at 5:30 p.m., to reconvene at 7:30 p.m.

SESSION 2

Wednesday, July 9, 2008

17. **Call to Order.** Dr. Williamson called the conference to order at 7:30 p.m.

18. **General Council Resolution.** Rev. Coulston continued the report, and recognized the following members of the General Council:

- a) Dr. Harold Thompson, District Superintendent of the Atlantic District, gave a thumb-nail sketch of the timeline for the next two years.
- b) Rev. Jim Townson, chairman of the Board of Ministerial Relations, was introduced and related how this board would function under the proposed conference structure.
- c) Rev. Debra Miller, chairperson of the Board of Youth Activities, was introduced to present the perspective of future youth ministries under the one conference model.
- d) Rev. Robert Gober was introduced and related the procedures of the Board of Discipline Revision in preparing the *Discipline* revisions.
- e) Rev. James Coulston shared how the next two years would be marked by times of prayer for a fresh wind of the Holy Spirit.

19. **Motion to Adopt the First Resolve.** Rev. James Coulston moved that on behalf of the General Council, the General Conference accept the Comprehensive Strategic Plan as a new organizational system of a single conference model, establishing a two year prayer initiative called, "Fresh Wind."

20. **Motion to Amend.** A motion to amend the first Resolve was offered by Rev. Tony Elder: “Resolved to accept the Comprehensive Strategic Plan as a new organizational system of a single conference model, contingent upon the approval of the proposed Constitutional amendments by this 2008 Special Session of the General Conference and their subsequent ratification by the churches, and approval by this General Conference of the necessary changes in the By-laws of the *Discipline*. This will also establish a two-year prayer initiative called “Fresh Wind.” The motion was seconded and discussed.
21. **Approval of Motion to Amend.** A standing vote was taken. The *yeas* 119, and the *nays* 115. The motion to amend was approved.
22. **Motion to Amend.** A motion to amend was offered by Rev. Dean McColley. The chair called for a second to the motion. With no second offered, the motion died.
23. **Order of the Day.** The order of the day was called for, which was the hour of adjournment for the day. The chair declared the session adjourned.
24. **Challenge the Ruling of the Chair.** A motion to appeal the ruling of the chair was made and seconded. The ruling of the chair was debated. The Previous Question was called for, and upon a favorable 2/3s vote, debate was ended. The vote was taken with the *yeas* 101, and the *nays* 144. The ruling of the chair was sustained.
25. **Adjournment.** With the ruling of the chair sustained, the conference session was adjourned.

SESSION 3

Thursday, July 10, 2008

26. **Opening Remarks and Information.** The conference was opened with Rev. Jim Coulston leading the conference in singing *Happy Birthday* to Mrs. Loretta Williamson. Dr. Williamson read scripture from Joshua 5:13-15, and gave a brief devotional thought. He shared prayer requests and led in prayer. Mr. Ronnie Jones gave a brief presentation from Asbury Theological Seminary.
27. **Call to Order.** Dr. Edward Williamson called the conference to order at 8:30 a.m.
28. **Resolution Discussion.** The General Secretary read the resolution that was opened for discussion. The discussion continued for 57 minutes.
29. **Previous Question.** The Previous Question was called. The motion was seconded and the necessary 2/3s vote was received to end debate. The Chair recognized the General Secretary to bring final remarks. Dr. Williamson asked the assembly to seek the face of God as the ballots are cast. He announced that the vote would be taken by paper ballot vote and will be decided by a simple majority. Dr. Williamson led the conference in prayer. The Secretary read the motion: “Resolved to accept the Comprehensive Strategic Plan as a new organizational system of a single conference model, contingent upon the approval of the proposed Constitutional amendments by this 2008 Special Session of the General Conference and their subsequent ratification by the churches, and approval by this General Conference of the necessary changes in the By-laws of the *Discipline*. This

will also establish a two-year prayer initiative called “Fresh Wind.” Ballots were distributed and the conference cast their vote.

30. **Recess.** The conference was recessed for a break while the tellers counted the ballots.
31. **Call to Order.** Conference reconvened at 10:30 a.m., and sang *Happy Birthday* to Mrs. Sonya Penny and recognized Kenneth and Sonya Penny’s 53rd anniversary on this same date. Rev. Wes and Janet Sperl were recognized for celebrating their 57th wedding anniversary on this same date.
32. **Vote Results.** The ballot results were announced: The *yeas* 157, *nays* 100. The first Resolve was approved by 61.1%.
33. **Point of Privilege.** The Chair recognized Rev. Jack Conner for a point of privilege. Rev. Conner moved to refer the Comprehensive Strategic Plan to the General Council to possibly bring it back to the 30th General Conference in 2010. The motion was seconded. Following discussion, the motion was approved.
34. **Motion to Adjourn.** A motion was made to adjourn the 29th General Conference *sine die*. The motion was seconded and carried.
35. **Hymns and Benediction.** The hymns, *Bless Be the Tie That Binds*, the *Doxology*, and, *And Can It Be* were sung. The meeting was adjourned with Rev. Floyd B’Hymer leading a prayer of benediction.

Recorded by,

James A Coulston

James A Coulston
General Secretary-Treasurer

REPORT

GENERAL COUNCIL REPORT TO THE SPECIAL CALLED GENERAL CONFERENCE ONE CONFERENCE MODEL RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the discussion on reorganization has been ongoing since 2000, and the action of the 28th General Conference directing the General Council for a report of a reorganizational plan (28th *General Conference Minutes, item #10b*), and with full discussions at the previous annual District Conferences of 2007 and 2008, and

WHEREAS the General Council was unanimous at the 2007 September meeting in recommending the one conference model and the calling for the Special General Conference in July 2008 for this

Comprehensive Strategic Plan of the General Council, with subsequent revisions as directed by the General Council, and

WHEREAS the General Superintendent Dr. Williamson and former General Superintendent Rev. Clyde Zehr held General Superintendent's Information Meetings to discuss the proposal and

WHEREAS through these meetings there is growing support and interest following prayer and discussion for this new model, be it

RESOLVED to accept the Comprehensive Strategic Plan as a new organizational system of a single conference model, establishing a two year prayer initiative called 'Fresh Wind', and be it further

RESOLVED to adopt the By-law amendments as presented by the General Board of Discipline Revision, acknowledging any changes that are contrary to the Constitution requirement that there be District Conferences, are conditional until two-thirds of the local churches approving a constitutional amendment removing that requirement, and;

RESOLVED that Dr. Harold Thompson, Rev. Jack Conner, and Rev. Clyde Zehr be elected as Conference Superintendents under the new organizational model until the 2010 General Conference. This election is conditional upon acceptance of the constitutional amendment, and;

RESOLVED that the General Board of Discipline Revision proposes a Constitutional amendment to eliminate the district conferences in favor of the new organizational system, and;

RESOLVED to authorize the General Council to approve any necessary legal transactions resulting in the transition to the one conference model and the management of all the implementations required for a successful transition and functioning of the Conference, and;

RESOLVED for the General Council's report to the 2010 General Conference present the details of the two year transition of the one conference model including the *Discipline* revisions required for finalization.