

Exploring GENERAL CONFERENCE

United Methodist Communications is offering this five-session online course for those who want to learn more about General Conference.

"The free course is ideal for anyone attending the 2008 General Conference, including communicators and delegates, as well as United Methodists interested in learning more about how the denomination makes decisions," said site administrator Cheryl A. Hemmerle. "Participants can move through the sessions at their own pace."

In addition to many interactive features such as videos and quizzes, participants can engage in facilitated discussion forums to ask questions and share ideas. The goal of the course is to give participants a basic working knowledge of the church's legislative process through General Conference.

GC FACTS

What is it?

General Conference is the only body that officially speaks for The United Methodist Church. Delegates revise *The Book of Discipline* and *The Book of Resolutions*, which contains more than 300 statements of the church's stance on social justice issues. Delegates also approve plans and budgets for church-wide programs for the next four years and elect members of the Judicial Council and the University Senate.

Course materials include information about:

- ▶ The history, role and purpose of General Conference
- ▶ How delegates are elected, their role and responsibilities
- ▶ How petitions, the general church budget and other important matters are decided through General Conference
- ▶ Social issues facing The United Methodist Church and the denomination's stance on those issues
- ▶ The highlights of the 2004 General Conference and what's ahead for 2008

To register for the course, visit <http://training.umcom.org>.
For more information, call (888) 278-4862 or e-mail training@umcom.org.
Sessions will be offered until May 2008 leading up to the 2008 General Conference.

GC FACTS

Who Can Come?

All worship services, plenary sessions and legislative committee sessions are open and will be held in the Fort Worth Convention Center. See specifics at www.gc2008.umc.org. Seating may be limited. Special events include:

April 23:
Opening Worship with Holy Communion.

April 24:
Episcopal, Laity and Young People's Addresses.

April 25-May 2:
Morning worship.

April 27:
Area Night Celebration and Bishops' Reception.

April 29:
Address by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

May 2:
Closing Worship.

GC FACTS

Keeping Up with GC2008

The Web site, www.gc2008.umc.org, offers information and news. Users can track petitions and see live video streaming of special events. Direct questions about General Conference to InfoServ, (800) 251-8140, infoserv@umcom.org or click on "Questions" on www.umc.org.

The Daily Christian Advocate (DCA) [Cokesbury, (800) 672-1789, www.cokesbury.com] is the most comprehensive reference tool. An Advance DCA is available.

GC FACTS

The Site

When General Conference convenes in Fort Worth, it will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the creation of The United Methodist Church 30 miles from its 1968 birthplace in Dallas. The site is rotated among the five geographic U.S. jurisdictions. There is no prohibition on future sessions being outside the United States.

All GC Facts adapted from 2008 General Conference Visitors' Guide produced by United Methodist News Service.



Inform. Inspire. Engage.

Resources for Church Leaders



MINISTRY TOOLS & TIPS

Inform. Inspire. Engage.



WELCOMING TIPS for Easter and Beyond

Extend a Hand, Extend the Season



The actual Easter season only *begins* Easter morning: It lasts 50 days. Prepare this Easter for guests, but make it your goal to use the following 50 days to get to know your guests and involve them in your church community.

All of our guests, including those who come at our invitation, are actually responding to an urge God has placed inside them. That urge will not be satisfied with one or two worship experiences—newcomers decide whether or not to return within the first 10 minutes of involvement with your church. Their initial participation is a beginning, so follow up to involve them in the community of faith.

Because you know you'll be entertaining guests during Easter, this is a perfect time to plan ahead to include guest-friendly elements in the service. Here are some suggestions to prepare your congregation to welcome others:

- ▶ If time permits, try a "mystery guest" audit to find areas that could be improved.
- ▶ Ensure that items in the bulletin use language easily understood by someone who is not familiar with church terms (no "insider" language). Explain and identify nearly everything.
- ▶ Create a bulletin insert highlighting your church's regular programs and ministries. This is one way to attract the attention of someone who wants to give his or her gifts and talents, as well as receive support and acceptance.
- ▶ Suggest that members and attendees use the inserts when issuing invitations to friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors.
- ▶ Make a special effort to welcome everyone—members and guests alike. Give extra time for the "passing of the peace" so members and guests alike can greet everyone around them without feeling rushed.

Consider using the following ideas for the rest of the Easter season to get to know your Easter guests and help them connect with your church community:

- ▶ Follow up with people who attend on Easter Sunday. With Easter guests, send a letter with information about the church or make phone calls to answer their questions. Follow up within 48 hours of the visit.
- ▶ Offer a "newcomer lunch" or similar gathering a week or two after Easter. Mention the lunch during "joys and concerns" and in the Easter bulletin. Send a reminder in the follow-up letters to guests.
- ▶ Schedule a membership exploration class to begin a few weeks after Easter. Let people know they have no obligation to join the church, but help them understand the ministries and study opportunities available to them through your congregation. Involve some long-term members as hosts for the class, so they can support and encourage the newcomers as they seek deeper connections with your church.
- ▶ In early April, offer a serving opportunity, such as a spring neighborhood cleanup or a Habitat for Humanity build. Invite the newcomers to participate in the activity as a short-term service project and a way to meet others in the church.
- ▶ Begin a new Sunday school class or Bible study designed to last about seven weeks in April and May. Explore basic Christian beliefs or another spiritual topic. Time the course to end before people begin their summer vacations.

Plug Members into the Light and Life of Your Church

You know that "20/80 rule," where 20 percent of a group's members do 80 percent of the work? Sadly, that rule applies to many churches. The same charged-up people get involved while others seemingly sit passively and dispassionately in the pews from Sunday to Sunday. But it doesn't have to be that way. Many people will get involved if personally asked to help.

One simple way to draw people of all ages into the life of your church is by inviting them to serve as an acolyte, usher or greeter. None of these roles are complicated or time-consuming. Yet some people may hesitate when asked because they've never been trained and are unsure what to do.

By setting up a 30-minute training session before or after church one Sunday or one night during the week, you can give potential volunteers the tools they need to assist with worship as an acolyte, usher or greeter. While every church has its own way of handling these roles, there's one resource that provides an overview to each.

Acolytes, Ushers and Greeters (#6292) is a short DVD covering each of these areas of ministry in a way that is of interest to novices and veterans alike. It addresses topics such as how to seat late arrivals or what to do if a candle won't light. Incorporating this DVD into your training session will help put new recruits at ease and help them move from uncertainty to preparedness. At \$19.95 it's an inexpensive training resource that no church should be without. To order a copy, call EcuFilm at (888) 346-3862.



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