

## **GENERAL CONFERENCE CULTURE & VALUES**

Last year the General Conference asked the national staff to bring back to the Conference in 2022 a new delegate fee process. In the last 12 months, there have been several discussions about the values behind our General Conference and costs regarding the production of the event. Since the start of 2022, the geopolitical realities have had an effect on travel and the costs associated with it. While these realities could not have been foreseen, it still has raised questions about the purpose of our General Conference. Below you will find two distinct issues we need to discuss regarding our General Conference. This document will highlight the questions raised and potential solutions for the future.

### **Virtual Delegates**

There has been one request that has brought to the forefront our value on consensus and communal interpretation and decision making. Because of the realities of 2020, we held an all-virtual conference. This showed us that we are able to be flexible and nimble in order to complete the essential business tasks we need to do together each year. As we have learned to adapt to life post-CoVid-19, many have asked if we will now be offering the ability to have virtual delegates, like we had in 2020. This would allow people who are unable to attend in person to still vote and participate in the business of our General Conference.

However, if we were to allow people to participate via an online platform, it brings into question our polity of gathering as a body to decide things together. Discerning consensus is not as simple as taking a vote. This gift of discernment takes energy. That energy will need to increase because we have had the gift of proximity in the past to help us hear and discern if we have consensus on a given topic.

Although virtual delegates would be able to take part in the votes, there is something significant about being a part of the conversation happening in the room. It is our long-held practice of gathering together and working together as a gathered people that makes the question of virtual delegates difficult. There is merit to both options. Allowing virtual delegates would provide space for more people to participate in the business process at our General Conference. Deciding to gather in person allows for those present to hear each other, spend time together (formally and informally), and build consensus on the important topics of the day.

We know that this discussion is important and it will affect future conference. We look forward to discussing this further and pray for consensus in what we decide.

### **Engage Conference 2-Year Rotation**

In the fall of 2021, the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) approached the national executive board with the idea of changing the Engage Youth Conference to an every-other-year conference. The executive board and YAC had dialogue about the reasoning behind this recommendation and the effects this could have on our student ministry programs.

After much prayer and consideration, the executive board approved the YAC team to pursue this change and we are bringing it to the General Conference for discussion. Here are the specifics of this change for discussion:

1. Starting in 2024, Engage Conference will start an every-other-year rotation. This means that there will be a 2023 Engage Conference in Grand Rapids, but the Engage Conference will not meet in 2024. (Effectively, Engage Conference will meet on odd years.)
2. In the off-years, YAC will work with Regional and National leaders to provide missions opportunities for students. Our hope is that churches in regions can come together to give students a missions experience, especially smaller churches who do not have the student numbers that make those kinds of experiences possible.
3. At this time, Scott Soden, our Global Partners Coordinator is working with YAC to plan those missions experiences in 2024.

### **New Delegate Fee Process**

Last year, we committed to having a recommendation for a new delegate fee process. As we have thought and prayed, we looked at other groups to see how others manage this process to see if there are new practices we can implement to improve our process.

Note that this new process mirrors what has already been established with our youth attending Engage Conference. This is new for General Conference, but if your church sends youth to Engage, this will likely seem familiar. If not, during our conversation, we hope to hear from churches who have had success with this strategy in regard to Engage Conference.

**New Strategy Recommendations:**

1. Eliminate the delegate fee that is separate from the registration fee.
2. Set the advanced **delegate** registration fee to **\$349** per delegate.
  - A. We will offer “regular” and “late” rates to encourage congregations to select and register their delegates.
3. Set the advanced non-delegate registration fee to \$169 per registrant.
  - A. We will offer “regular” and “late” rates to encourage congregations to register non-delegates.
  - B. By having a non-delegate rate, we can accept walk-in registrations.
4. Set the advanced **virtual non-delegate** registration fee to **\$100**.
  - A. This will help cover the cost of the equipment and personnel necessary to provide this service.
5. **We will only charge churches for the delegates they send, not the total number of delegates allotted to them by *A Manual of Procedure*.**

The spreadsheet below shows the accounting for our General Conference. A few notes regarding this spreadsheet.

1. The \$290.00 average price for adult conference is based on the following assumptions:
  - A. 7% of 200 participants are considered delegates and charged \$349.00
  - B. 33% of 200 participants are considered non-delegates and charged \$169.00
  - C. This produces an average price per participant of \$290.00
2. The highlighted conference expenses show a range of values. This is to illustrate the range of costs we could encounter with different venues and regions of the country.