

Version 2
Revised 5/19

Q & A



Questions Surrounding the Recent
Decision of the General Conference
and The Ruling of the Judicial Council

What happened in the church's deliberations regarding human sexuality?

In February, the United Methodist General Conference (the official body responsible for church governance) adopted what was called the "Traditionalist Plan."

That plan affirmed official exclusionary language and policies concerning LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church, and imposed severe penalties on Pastors who violated those policies (for example, by officiating same-sex weddings).

The General Conference also enacted provisions to allow dissenting congregations or other United Methodist organizations to exit the denomination, as well as a petition that protects clergy pensions.

After the vote, the legislation was appealed to the Judicial Council, a nine-member body tasked with deciding whether proposed church legislation comports with the church's constitution and existing rules.

What is the Traditionalist Plan?

The Traditionalist Plan, which passed by a narrow majority at the most recent General Conference, affirms the church's current bans on ordaining LGBTQ clergy and officiating at or hosting same-sex marriage.

What parts of the Traditionalist Plan were voted as constitutional on April 26, 2019?

The Judicial Council (which functions as The United Methodist Church Supreme Court) ruled in Decision 1378, the following provisions of the Traditional Plan are constitutional:

- Expanding the definition of self-avowed, practicing homosexual to include persons living in same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union, or who publicly state they are practicing homosexuals. (Petition 90032)
- A pastor who has been found after trial to have conducted a same-sex marriage now must receive, as a minimum penalty, a one-year suspension without pay for a first offense, and termination of their clergy status for a second offense. (Petition 90042).
- Boards of Ordained Ministry must make a full examination of candidates for licensing, commissioning or ordination, and shall not recommend anyone who does not meet the qualifications for ministry. The Bishop must rule the recommendation of any such person out of order. (Petition 90043)
- Bishops cannot consecrate a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" as a bishop, or commission or ordain a self-avowed, practicing homosexual. (Petition 90036)

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- Where a complaint is filed against a pastor for violating the Discipline, the person filing the complaint is to be a participant in any efforts to reach a just resolution of the complaint and every effort is to be made to have the person filing the complaint agree to any resolution before it takes effect. (Petition 90046) A bishop cannot dismiss a complaint unless it has no basis in church law or in fact. (Petition 90044, ADCA at 191). If a just resolution is reached, it must state all identified harms and how each harm will be addressed. (Petition 90046)
- The church may now appeal the outcome of a trial based on egregious errors of church law or administration. (Petition 90047)

If the Traditionalist Plan passed, doesn't that mean things stay the same?

No. The plan makes significant changes to the United Methodist Book of Discipline, including imposing severe penalties on both pastors and congregations for any deviation. This could lead to additional mandatory penalties and church trials.

How is the United Methodist Church governance structured? Who votes and who is in charge?

General Conference

The global meeting of The United Methodist Church. This gathering occurs every four years and includes a maximum of 1000 voting delegates (half clergy, half laity) elected from each Annual Conference to vote on matters of church law on behalf of the denomination.

Jurisdictional Conference

This regional collection of Annual Conferences meets following General Conference for the purpose of electing Bishops for their geographical region. The Western Jurisdiction includes the Mountain Sky Conference, which is St. Andrew's Annual Conference.

Annual Conference

Geographical areas are separated into Annual Conferences based on density of UMC congregations in any particular area. Each Annual Conference is led by a Bishop, elected out of the Jurisdiction. The Mountain Sky Annual Conference (MSC) includes Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and one church in Idaho. Bishop Karen Oliveto is the episcopal leader of the Mountain Sky Conference.

Districts

Each Annual Conference is sub-divided into districts, each led by a District Superintendent. St. Andrew is part of the Mile High/Metro District.

Are we planning to leave the United Methodist denomination?

St. Andrew has not made any decisions at this time. In April, the St. Andrew Church Council established the Futures Strategy Task Force to help lead our planning. This group will gather information and create a strategic plan, which will then come before the Church Council and congregation for acceptance or revision.

The Task Force's work will include researching the multiple times that the Church has split in the past, assessing our options, and proposing a working relationship with other like-minded congregations throughout the country. They will also ensure that our assets are protected and continue to be used in ministry. The Task Force is in close dialogue with the Mountain Sky Conference, Jurisdiction, and leadership throughout the country on the challenges in front of us.

We are in a prayer-filled discernment process, gathering information and evaluating all options, including a gracious exit from the denomination. In the future, should the Task Force conclude that a gracious exit is best for the future of St. Andrew, both Church Council and the congregation will have their voices heard, in a vote, prior to taking an exit request to the Mountain Sky Conference for their approval.

At this time, the Task Force has not made any recommendations as it is too early in the fact finding and discernment process.

Will we remain a reconciling congregation?

Yes. We remain committed to the belief in the sacred worth of ALL people.

Will we continue to provide financial support to the United Methodist Church?

Yes. More than 90% of those funds stay in the Mountain Sky Conference, and most of the funds that go beyond our region serve important work among like-minded Methodist organizations. For the time being, we feel that withholding our apportionment would only harm those we are trying to help.

Have we become a "one issue church"?

St. Andrew has never been and will never be a "one issue church." LGBTQ exclusion was pressed upon us by the vote at General Conference in February and we have no choice but to respond. We believe that exclusion of any people because of their sexuality, race, gender, or for any other reason is discriminatory, against Wesleyan teachings, and incompatible with St. Andrew's values. As the Task Force considers our options, we remain focused on the core value of our St. Andrew family, that all persons are of sacred worth.

Can the UMC take our church property?

Loss of our church property is a very remote possibility. All United Methodist Church property is held in trust for the conference in which it's located, which in our case is the Mountain Sky Conference. The so-called "trust clause" exists so that in the event of a church closure, or a congregation being unable to meet it's bills over the long term, the property can be used to start or support new ministries in the Mountain Sky Conference.

Before such a decision can be made, there is a long process of evaluation, involving several conference level committees and a Mountain Sky Conference vote which requires a 2/3 majority, to close the church and repurpose the property.

Under even the simplest of scenarios, that process takes several years. None of those conditions apply here at St. Andrew: we are a thriving congregation doing strong ministry.

Moreover, the Mountain Sky Conference leadership agrees with us about the importance of our commitment to inclusivity in all dimensions of church life.

Finally, an important part of the work of the Task Force is to ensure that we will be able to protect our material assets and continue to use them in our ministry. The Task Force will be carefully reviewing our options and reporting back to the congregation. Any decision to exit the denomination would need to be approved by both Church Council and congregational votes.

The Judicial Council has determined that an exit must meet three minimum requirements:

- Approval of the disaffiliation resolution by a two-thirds majority of members of the church present and voting at the church conference.
- Establishment of the terms and conditions, including the effective date, of the agreement between the Mountain Sky Conference and the exiting local church by the conference board of trustees in accordance with applicable church law and civil laws.
- Ratification of the disaffiliation agreement by a simple majority of the members of the Mountain Sky Conference present and voting.

Can our clergy be punished for rejecting the decision of the GC?

Effective January 1, 2020, they may be. Penalties are a year's suspension without pay for first offense and termination of conference membership and church credentials for a second offense. Because of the steps necessary to impose those punishments, it's unlikely. But as a matter of Christian conscience, all of our clergy are deeply committed to including everyone in the life of the church and are willing to face whatever penalties may be imposed. The Task Force is committed to finding answers and forming plans prior to the new rules going into effect.

Does this go into effect immediately?

No. The current rules of the Book of Discipline stand until January 2020. We continue to be strongly committed to inclusion, opposed to the decision of the General Conference, and will continue our ministry as we have been.

In the meantime, the Futures Strategy Task Force will continue working to help St. Andrew discern the new thing to which God is calling us.

Can the decisions be overturned at the next General Conference in 2020?

While the mechanism exists within the United Methodist Church to overturn the decision through debate and voting, the conservative faction is growing in size and strength. It is likely that the church will become less inclusive as those in favor of full inclusion increasingly become the minority.

The Judicial Council nullified parts of the Traditionalist plan.

Are we still considering a separation?

Even if the entire Traditionalist Plan was deemed unconstitutional, it is clear that LGBTQ acceptance will continue to be a dividing issue within the church. We would rather seek a separation in order to fully live into our inclusive belief that God welcomes LGBTQ persons to participate in all aspects of life in the church.

Does St. Andrew have a plan?

We are working on it. St. Andrew will have a key voice in the conversation about what is next for those United Methodists now exiled by the decisions of General Conference. St. Andrew is the second largest reconciling congregation in the denomination, and we will not accept the status quo. We will consider every option before us, including a gracious exit from the denomination. These conversations are already underway, and will likely last for months. Our Futures Strategy Task Force is working at the local and regional levels to discover our options and create alliances so that we can form the best possible plan for our future.

Are other churches looking to separate from the denomination and form something new?

Yes. While the Traditionalist Plan prevailed by a slim margin, many churches in the United States and Europe are dissatisfied with that outcome. Like-minded congregations are already exploring ways to band together, and our Futures Strategy Task Force will reach out to those congregations and groups.

Is the Task Force acting timely or is it moving too quickly (or slowly)?

We believe it is important to work at a steady deliberate pace given the importance and consequence of this issue and we are committed to a thorough and thoughtful process.

We are in a fact finding, prayer centered discernment process to determine best steps forward for St. Andrew.

The Task Force is striving to be thoughtful and responsive to voices on all sides, acknowledging that we are all processing the changes within The United Methodist Church after the General Conference vote in February and the Judicial Council vote last month.

We are mindful of the deadlines imposed by the April 26th, 2019 Judicial Council vote and how those laws could negatively affect St. Andrew and it's clergy when they become effective on January 1, 2020.

That means, should punitive action be taken, our clergy could be punished, unpaid and even defrocked should a complaint come against them and be sustained.

Historically, justice for civil rights has been delayed as fear for the unknown triumphs in the short term. We seek God's voice and timing in this process.

I feel like I should be doing something. Is there any way I can get involved?

In the next few months there will be several opportunities to voice your opinion about the future of St. Andrew. Please look for our communications concerning town halls, surveys, focus groups, etc.

Most importantly, continue to be St. Andrew. Reach out to your neighbors and community with love. Commit anew to creating inclusive and welcoming space for everyone. Pray for and engage with the Futures Strategy Task Force.

Will the Task Force Meetings be open?

Unfortunately, no. Due to the tremendous amount of confidential legal, personnel, real estate, and financial matters we have to discuss it is in our best interest to limit the discussion to experts in those fields. We are committed to transparency and will make regular congregational updates on our progress, and meeting minutes will be available.

Will you consider additional members on the Task Force?

If you have particular expertise, we would love to have you be involved. Please talk to Task Force members about the expertise you can offer. We are trying to limit the size of the group for meetings while we also want to include broader expertise from the congregation.

How can I stay informed and learn about the latest developments at St. Andrew?

It is our intent to keep members and constituents current on the work and recommendations of the Task Force using the following methods:

Task Force communication:

In addition to the meeting minutes, we will provide updates and recommendations to Church Council monthly. A paper copy of the updates will be available in the church office after each meeting as well as on the website at www.GOstandrew.com/future

Task Force members will be in the atrium Sundays after Church Council meetings to answer questions.

We will be inviting congregational feedback via surveys and small group sessions. We anticipate holding town hall meetings every two to three months in order to provide information, answer questions, and receive comments for consideration. After each meeting, we will distribute any recently updated materials.

Church Council Communication:

The Church Council will receive updates and recommendations from the Task Force and consider actions, as appropriate, at least monthly.

We invite members and constituents to attend the Church Council meetings to listen and/or to give comments and input.

If you have questions, please contact a Task Force member in person or via email - taskforce@gostandrew.com. As always, our Pastors' doors are open.

Outside of St. Andrew, where can I find information about UMC steps forward?

Learn more about the Mountain Sky Conference and sign up for email updates - www.mtnskyumc.org

Read communications from the Western Jurisdiction: <https://westernjurisdictionumc.org>

Learn about the Reconciling Ministries Network: <https://rmnetwork.org>

Visit the United Methodist Insight website, a forum for discerning God's future for The United Methodist Church: <https://um-insight.net>

Visit United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy & Friends website: <https://www.umarc.org/copy-of-home>

Read more about the UM Forward movement, "launched with the wisdom of queer clergy of color at the helm." <https://um-forward.org/about-us>

Read the new book Where Do We Go From Here? Honest Responses from United Methodist Leadership. Edited by Kevin Slimp

The Institute on Religion and Democracy, a faith-based alliance of Christians, provides updates via email and their website: <https://theird.org/>

Read about The Wesleyan Covenant Association's support of the Traditional plan.

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/>

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/2019/04/29/legislation-to-restore-churchs-order-constitution-al-what-now/>

St. Andrew

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

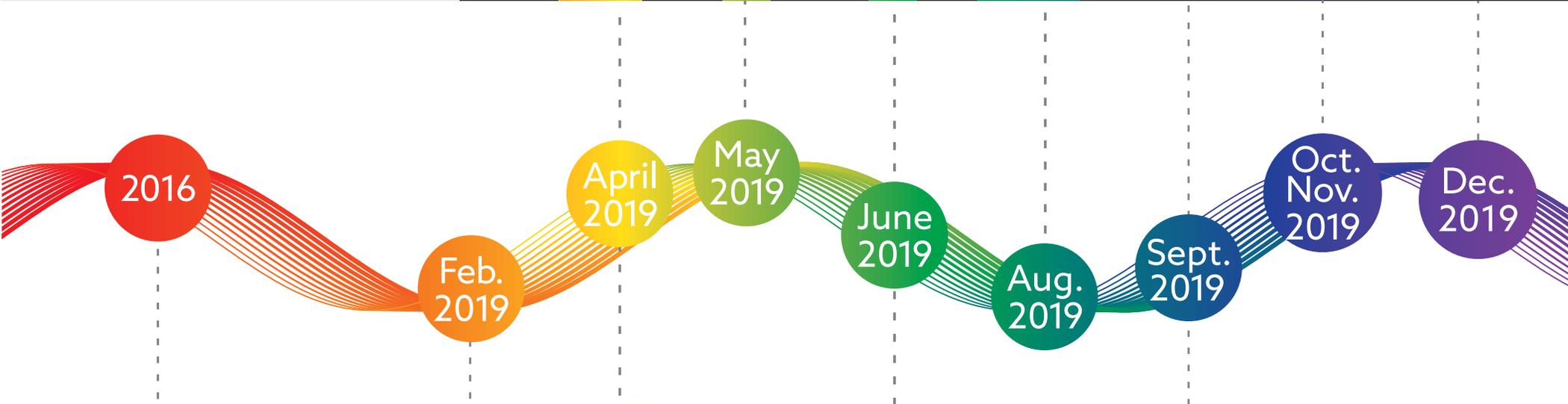
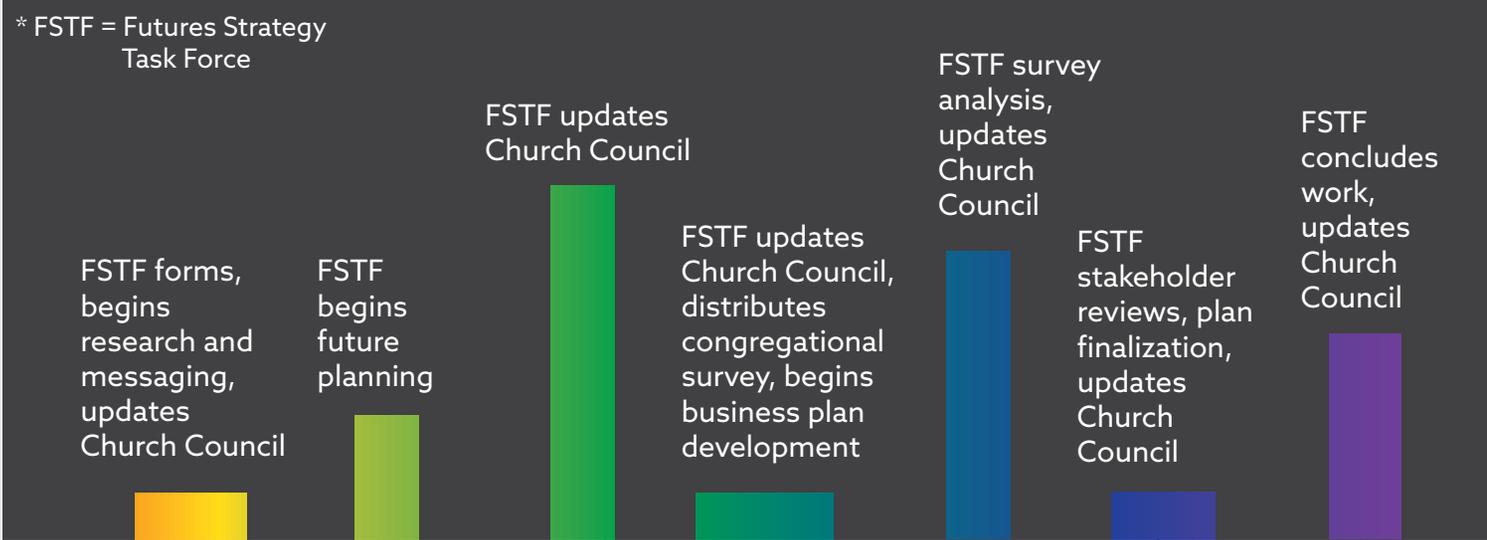
Futures Strategy Task Force

TIMELINE

2019

Dates to be updated as needed

* FSTF = Futures Strategy Task Force



UMC General Conference charges Bishops with developing a plan or plans to be considered at a specially called General Conference addressing LGBTQ issues in the broader church.

The Bishops, known as the Commission on the Way Forward, develop three plans:

- One Church Plan
- Traditional Plan
- Connectional Plan

Special UMC General Conference occurs and Traditional Plan is approved.

UMC Judicial Council affirms some parts of the Traditional Plan, finds other, less consequential parts unconstitutional by Book of Discipline standards.

Mountain Sky Annual Conference, Billings, MT. St. Andrew represented directly through delegates.

General Conference 2020 Petitions due.

St. Andrew

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Futures Strategy Task Force

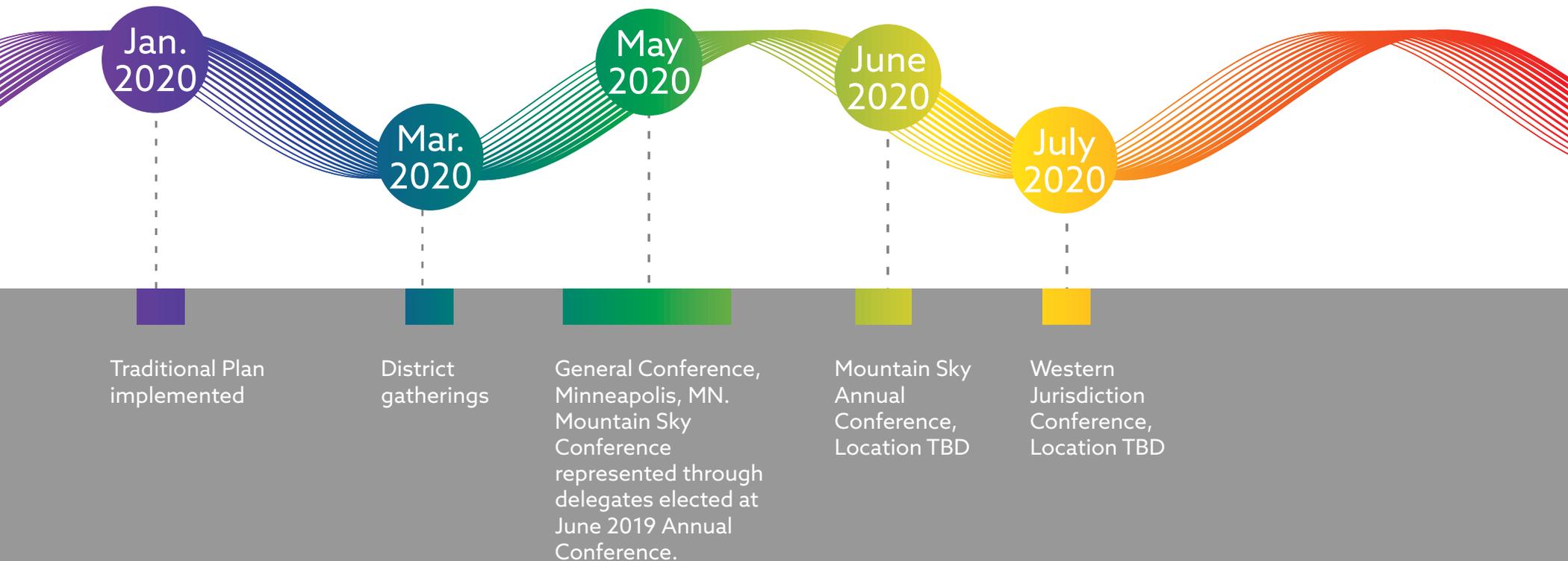
TIMELINE

2020

Dates to be updated as needed

* FSTF = Futures Strategy Task Force

Although the FSTF is set to conclude its work in December 2019, we anticipate there will be additional needs after the Traditional Plan is implemented.



"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

- Philippians 4:6-7

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