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3 **Title:** Cancelling 2021 the General Assembly and resulting temporary changes  
4 in business procedures

5 **Origin:** Moderator Team  
6

7 **Background Information:**

8 The report of the General Assembly Futuring Task Force, presented to the General  
9 Assembly in Indianapolis in 2017, called for continuing the practice of meeting every two  
10 years. Following that recommendation, the Time and Place Committee of the General  
11 Board recommended moving forward with plans to hold General Assemblies in  
12 Louisville in 2021 and in Memphis 2023. The General Assembly in 2019 adopted the  
13 Time and Place Committee recommendations. In order to secure dates and favorable  
14 rates, these contracts are generally made two to four years before the event. Event  
15 contracts are in place with the Louisville convention center and hotels for the 2021  
16 General Assembly, and with the Memphis convention center and hotels for 2023.

17 The health risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have raised concerns and  
18 uncertainties surrounding travel and large gatherings. Travel bans [into the U.S.](#) and  
19 [from the U.S.](#) have been put in place internationally. [Stay-at-home orders](#) and social  
20 distancing protocols have been [put in place](#) in [large swaths of the United States](#) and  
21 Canada. A vaccine is not available as of summer 2020 and the number of [new cases](#)  
22 [began to climb](#) where there had been few before. The ability of [asymptomatic](#)  
23 [individuals](#) to infect others is a matter of concern that makes this outbreak particularly  
24 hard to control. While [masks are required](#) in many locations and businesses, they have  
25 not been universally adopted.

26 **In light of the unprecedented current novel coronavirus pandemic and the**  
27 **uncertainties introduced into planning in-person events, the moderator**  
28 **team of the General Assembly recommends to the General Board that the**  
29 **July 31-August 4, 2021 General Assembly be cancelled.**

30 A lot could change between now and the summer of 2021, and it is possible that large  
31 gatherings would be feasible. However:

- 32 • Canceling hotel and convention center contracts with more than 12  
33 months' notice carries a smaller financial loss than canceling within a year  
34 of the event date.

35                   • Moving forward with planning the event means significant staff resources  
36                   and additional financial obligations, and greater financial loss if the event  
37                   is ultimately cancelled.

38                   • Input from leaders across the church indicated the high likelihood that  
39                   attendance would be low even if an event was held, leading to further  
40                   financial loss as well as disenfranchisement for those who are not able to  
41                   travel.

42   The authority to take this action can be found in the Design of the Christian Church  
43   (Disciples of Christ).

44   Paragraph 55 states, “Between meetings of the General Assembly, the General Board  
45   may take interim action with established policy of the General Assembly on behalf of the  
46   Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), subject in all matters to a review of its action by  
47   the subsequent General Assembly.”

48   The Design allows for officers and General Board members to stay in place until their  
49   successors are elected at the next “regular” meeting of the General Assembly (Design  
50   p. 48d, 57). The moderator, moderator-elect, first vice-moderator, second vice-  
51   moderator and general minister and president are the elected officers of the General  
52   Assembly.

53   Since there would be no 2021 General Assembly, the Assembly would not elect new  
54   officers nor a 2025 class of the General Board. The current officers and General  
55   Assembly elected General Board members will serve until their successors are elected  
56   in 2023.

57   In the current environment made tenuous by the issues around the pandemic, allowing  
58   the current officers and board members to continue their service lends stability.

59   In paragraph 80, the Design specifies that in each biennium, the Administrative  
60   Committee nominates five persons for election by the General Assembly for the term of  
61   four years on the General Nominating Committee.

62   The Design does not provide for the General Nominating Committee members  
63   continuing their service until their successors are elected. The 2025 class of the  
64   General Nominating Committee would be elected by the General Board as interim  
65   action at their Spring 2021 board meeting on behalf of the General Assembly. The  
66   action will be ratified by the General Assembly in 2023.

67   *What are the financial implications of this decision?*

68 The financial implications of this decision are significant, as contracts with the  
69 convention center and hotels will need to be cancelled. The Office of the General  
70 Minister and President executes these contracts on behalf of the whole church, with the  
71 expectation that church members will attend and use the contracted hotel rooms, and  
72 that ministry partners will host events which will meet the contracted obligations for food  
73 and beverage purchases. Contracts for the 2021 assembly were based on a  
74 conservative estimate of attendees, taking into account declining numbers over the past  
75 several assemblies.

76 Cancellation fees at the Louisville convention center and hotels are over \$500,000. The  
77 Office of the General Minister and President is responsible for these financial losses.

78 *Who was part of the conversation that led to this recommendation?*

79 The Moderator Team, the General Minister and President, and the OGMP staff have  
80 been meeting weekly for most of the past two months to gather information and discuss  
81 options. The College of Regional Ministers, the General Ministry Cabinet, and the Chair  
82 of the Kentucky Local Arrangements Committee were also consulted. While a variety of  
83 opinions were expressed, the overwhelming consensus was that *not* meeting in person  
84 was a wise and prudent course of action.

85 *What other options were considered?*

86 Several other options were considered, including various versions of the following:

87 A fully virtual General Assembly business meeting could be held. According to  
88 Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb's Executive Order 20-23, non-profits can hold  
89 business meetings virtually due to the pandemic. However:

- 90 • A virtual meeting is unprecedented in our denomination at the general  
91 level, and there are no current procedures in place and no past practices  
92 to fall back on.
- 93 • To comply with the Design and EO 20-23, The General Assembly would  
94 need to be held at the same time as previously scheduled and would  
95 conduct business as usual with reports, resolutions and elections of  
96 officers, general board and general nominating committee as usual,  
97 including installation of new officers (Design p. 41, 42 & EO 20-23). This  
98 would require virtual meetings held over the course of multiple days. Such  
99 an undertaking would require unbudgeted expenses for technology, as  
100 well as training for staff and all participants.

101 The General Board would need to meet in person or remotely to process  
102 all General Assembly business prior to General Assembly (Design p. 44).

103 This would be cumbersome to do remotely under current rules and  
104 practices and would take significant staff resources.

105 A hybrid event with a smaller onsite event and options for virtual participation  
106 could be held. However:

107 • Conducting business with some voters onsite and some using a virtual  
108 platform presents similar challenges to those listed above, and privileges  
109 those who are able to travel to attend.

110 • A smaller in-person event faces the same challenges of travel  
111 uncertainties and low attendance and could lead to additional financial  
112 loss.

113

114 **Recommended Action:**

115 • Cancel the 2021 General Assembly, and

116 • elect the class of 2025 of the General Nominating Committee at the Spring 2021  
117 meeting of the General Board.