



2016 General Conference Virtual Voting FAQs

Why did the Governing Board add virtual voting as a ballot option?

The Governing Board decided to offer remote voting in order to facilitate greater engagement in the elections and greater global participation.

Does Virtual Voting at a General Conference violate MCC's Bylaws?

UFMCC Bylaws allow for virtual participation in a General Conference. The manner in which this is facilitated is not prescribed.

Has Virtual Voting been offered at a General Conference?

Yes, in 2013, virtual voting was offered to non-US churches, and one church participated. The Governing Board opened voting after the Business Forum and closed it before the Business Meeting. This allowed around 18 hours for voting. We were able to stream the forum to support this period of voting.

Why didn't the Governing Board initially offer Virtual Voting for the 2016 General Conference?

Following the 2013 conference, the Governing Board undertook a review of voting. Because the location for the 2016 conference would be held outside the US, in addition to weighing the low participation in 2013, the Governing Board determined virtual voting would not be offered. We subsequently discovered there was insufficient bandwidth available within the venue at an affordable cost to facilitate offering all the proceedings via live stream. This information supported the decision to require all voters to be present.

Why did the Governing Board reverse its decision to allow Virtual Voting at the 2016 General Conference?

In the first quarter of 2016, we received requests from US-based clergy and a number of clergy and churches outside the US requesting the ability to participate in the vote for Moderator.

Why did the Governing Board to restrict Virtual Voting to only one round?

Our voting procedures allow for several rounds, not just two rounds. Therefore, while a second ballot could theoretically be conducted virtually, with a delayed announcement after an extended voting period is offered, a third one could not. Also, our first choice is to use a handheld voting machine with prescribed rounds in our Procedures Manual. However, if we were to switch to the paper ballots, the proposed rounds are different than those prescribed by the electronic voting machine.



What other factors influenced the Governing Board to only allow one round of Virtual Voting?

Multiple rounds of voting would disproportionately disadvantage virtual participants outside the US as their time zones and internet connections would make it difficult. We do not believe it is appropriate to require that participants stay up all night on the off chance they may need to vote again. We also recognize that some individuals must rely on an internet facility and its limited operating times. In many parts of the world, good internet is only available in public areas which are not open or not safe at night.

Who or what will be on the First Round of Virtual Voting?

Eligible Clergy and Lay Delegates who have registered will be able to vote for a Moderator and Governing Board members.

Will Virtual Votes be included as part of the tally for a candidate in a second round of votes?

No. Each round is a unique opportunity to vote on the candidates presented for that round. It is likely that a second (or third) round would have fewer candidates than the first. Each voter has a responsibility to make their choice from the candidates presented in the round, therefore, as virtual voters will not be able to make a specific choice for subsequent rounds, the votes will not be carried forward.

Why must a delegate pay to vote? Is this a Poll Tax?

While the costs associated with providing virtual voting are significantly lower than the costs of operating physical conference, there is an administrative process required to manage the registrations and a cost associated with the Internet access for the live stream of the business meeting. The fee charged is intended to contribute towards these costs, It is not a poll tax.

Will I be able to ask a question during the Business Forum if I am viewing it as a livestream?

No. We are using web livestreaming rather than Adobe Connect, which uses the chat box.



I have heard that Virtual Voting is really an absentee ballot. Explain the difference.

While we are constituted under California law, we continue to be challenged as an organization that has grown beyond the US and we seek innovative ways, in all aspects of our operations, to engage with our members and the wider world. It was in this innovative spirit in the late 2000s that we added the provision for virtual participation in General Conference and allowed the exact mechanism to be determined by the Governing Board.

We did not remove the bylaw restriction on proxy / absentee ballots because we still believe that, wherever possible, voting should be in person and voting should be confirmed to be carried out by the eligible delegate. The unique ID process we use for virtual voting allows this in the same way as delegates are registered to physically attend.

Comparing this to local, state, or national elections does not reflect our calling as an organization to evolve and adapt or to be a forerunner in inclusion and justice. As Internet usage has become commonplace around the world, it has provided a unique opportunity to include our members from further afield. We see this increased participation in the online ministries of some of our churches and in the Oasis program. Virtual Voting is a part of this and enables us to do this in a way that historically postal votes, with extended delivery timescales, or proxy ballots would not.

Guidance issued by electoral commissions does not reflect use of technology in voting, as it is not used for government elections. It is also designed to minimize cost and fraud in circumstances when thousands of voters are all voting on the same day. These situations are not analogous to our elections or those of any other denomination we are aware of.

Early voting allows delegates an opportunity to cast their vote in advance of opening day of the business meeting for one round only. The delegate is able to watch the forum and business meeting via web streaming and be virtually present.