



The United Methodist Church

Founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace, we are people of faith who experience and extend the love and grace of God as we serve our neighbors near and far. United Methodists are anchored in Scripture and committed to a discipleship that is grounded in the love, teachings and example of Jesus Christ.

The United Methodist Church is a diverse worldwide church serving all people, where everyone belongs and can be fully included and regarded as God's beloved.

As John Wesley said, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may."

We are moving forward with renewed hope and a focus on mission and ministry as we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We proudly claim that we are a people with open hearts, open minds, and open doors.

Regionalization

Regionalization aims to structure our denomination more to reflect the growth and ministry of our global church and give The United Methodist Church's different geographic regions equal standing in decision-making.

Under Regionalization, the seven existing central conferences in Africa, Europe and the Philippines will be reorganized into "regions." The entire United States will also be designated a "region."

All regions will be required to adhere to the core parts of The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline outlining our church mission, doctrinal standards and essentials of our faith. (Parts I - V: Constitution, General Book of Discipline, Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task, The Ministry of All Christians, and Social Principles). The General Conference is the only body given authority to change or adapt these.

Regional Conferences would have the authority to adapt the parts of the Book of Discipline focused on organization and administration so that items related to their context and missional realities can be decided at a more local level.

The United Methodist Church's constitution currently gives central conferences authority to adapt portions of the Discipline to fit their missional needs, but the United States currently lacks this authority. Therefore, all U.S.-related legislation requires the approval of the General Conference.

Regionalization would allow the U.S. Regional Conference to handle US-centric items that don't impact other parts of our worldwide church but take up much of the General Conference's time, like clergy pension plans. This would enhance the General Conference's efficiency and missional focus.

Much of the regionalization legislation passed by the General Conference — including creating a U.S. regional conference — is contingent upon ratifying constitutional amendments. The regionalization legislation amends the constitution of the UMC and, therefore, must pass a two-step process to become church law.

- The first step has been completed. The constitutional amendments, which must receive a two-thirds majority vote at the General Conference, surpassed this threshold, securing 78% approval of the whole body of the General Conference. (Delegates approved the amendments 586 to 164).
- Now Ordained clergy and lay members of every Annual Conference in the world must now vote on the amendments. To be ratified, it must receive a two-thirds majority approval from an aggregate total of all votes cast. In other words, all the votes cast in all Annual Conferences will be tallied as one vote and the amendments must receive an approval of two-thirds.

Annual Conferences will vote on the amendments in 2024 and 2025. Holston will vote on the constitutional amendments at its 2025 Annual Conference session. The Council of Bishops likely will announce the vote results late in 2025.

Changing Language about Human Sexuality

The 2024 General Conference neutralized language about weddings and ordination by removing sections in The Book of Discipline that prohibit persons in same-gender relationships from being ordained and same-gender weddings from taking place in our churches or being officiated by United Methodist clergy. This takes us back to pre-1972 language in The Book of Discipline.

The conference additionally added protective language, ensuring no clergy can be compelled to perform or prohibited from performing any marriage.

Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett Note:

These changes in our Book of Discipline do not signal that we are suddenly all on the same page in our understandings about human sexuality. Nor do the changes erase the pain that people across the theological spectrum and our LGBTQ brothers and sisters have experienced in our 50+ years of conflict. However, it provides space in The United Methodist Church for persons with differing experiences and theological convictions to stand.

Some specific actions by the General Conference:

- Removed ¶ 304.3. which said: *While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore,*

self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

- Add new subparagraphs after ¶ 340.2 regarding Responsibilities and Duties of Elders and Licensed Pastors saying *No clergy at any time may be required to provide for or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing any marriage, union or blessing. All clergy have the right to exercise and preserve their conscience when requested to perform any marriage, union, or blessing.*
- Added new subparagraphs after ¶ 419.12: Specific Responsibilities of District Superintendents *13. The superintendent shall not penalize any clergy for performing, or refraining from performing, a same-sex marriage service. 14. The superintendent shall neither require any local church to hold or prohibit a local church from holding a same-sex marriage service on property owned by a local church.*
- Added new subparagraphs after ¶ 416.7 regarding Specific Responsibilities of Bishops *8. The bishop shall not penalize any clergy for performing, or refraining from performing, a same-sex marriage service. 9. The bishop shall neither require any local church to hold or prohibit a local church from holding a same-sex marriage service on property owned by a local church.*
- Removed a ban on annual conferences and denominational agencies from giving United Methodist funds to any "gay caucus group" or using funds to "promote the acceptance of homosexuality." Instead, the provision now says annual conferences and agencies should honor the denomination's commitment not to reject lesbian or gay members.
- Eliminated the requirement that the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination's finance agency, enforce the ban. Instead, the provision says the agency should ensure that church funds do not go to anything that rejects LGBTQ people or limits the response to the HIV epidemic.
- Removed the ban on boards of ordained ministry from even considering candidates without evaluating whether they are "self-avowed practicing" gay people and struck the requirement that bishops rule gay candidates ineligible.
- Erased the mandatory penalty of at least a one-year suspension without pay for clergy found guilty of officiating at same-sex weddings or unions. This was the denomination's only chargeable offense with a mandatory penalty.
- Allow gay clergy in good standing to be appointed across annual conference lines when their bishop can't locate an appointment in their conference.
- Eliminated the 52-year-old assertion in the denomination's Social Principles that "the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching."
- Edited ¶ 304.2 regarding Qualifications for Ordination. The subparagraph now says: *For the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness to the Christian gospel, and in consideration of the influence of an ordained minister on the lives of other persons both within and outside the Church, the Church expects those who seek ordination to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life. To this end, they agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, integrity in all personal relationships, social responsibility, and faithful sexual intimacy expressed*

through fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication, mutual consent, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.

What does this mean to the Holston Conference?

- Pastors will have the right to choose what weddings to perform.
- Local church Boards of Trustees will have the right to determine which weddings to host.
- Persons are not prohibited from ordination due to being in a same-gender relationship.
- The Conference Board of Ordained Ministries and District Committees on Ministry will continue to have authority to recruit, examine, confirm the calling of and discern the qualifications of those to be credentialed into licensed and ordained ministry.
- The Bishop and Cabinet will continue to use careful and prayerful consultation in the appointment process, with the goal of clergy/church matches that result in effective ministry.

Revised Social Principles

The United Methodist Church passed Revised Social Principles through six pieces of legislation - five of which were approved on consent calendars. (A consent calendar is a group of petitions approved without floor discussion because they received ten or fewer votes against them in the legislative committee.)

The Revised Social Principles, developed over eight years with contributions from over 4,000 global members, remove references to homosexuality, reflecting a significant shift from previous teachings since 1972. Revised Social Principles aim to make the denomination's social teachings more globally relevant and concise.

The preface of the newly adopted Revised Social Principles explains,

"The Social Principles are not church law. Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions. The Social Principles are thus a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. Moreover, they challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice."

Delegates only amended one paragraph of the proposed Social Principles during floor discussion. It speaks to marriage. The amended paragraph says: *Marriage:*

Within the church, we affirm marriage as a sacred lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and woman of consenting age; or two adult persons of consenting age) into union with one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.

Wespath Compass Plan

A new retirement plan for United Methodist clergy in the U.S. has won approval overwhelmingly at the General Conference. Delegates approved the plan by a vote of 658 in favor and 64 opposed. The plan, Compass, was conceived and championed by Wespath, the denomination's pension and benefits agency, as a sustainable approach to supporting retired clergy.

Wespath has for years offered the Clergy Retirement Security Program, which combines defined-benefit and defined-contribution components. That program will be frozen at the end of 2025, with Compass taking effect on Jan. 1, 2026. Clergy will retain CRSP benefits earned through the end of 2025 and then begin earning benefits through Compass. The plan does not affect the benefits of clergy who have already retired.

Bishops

General Conference passed four of the five petitions the Jurisdictional Study Committee recommended, eliminating the current formula for calculating bishops. These four petitions:

- Eliminated the formula for calculating bishops in each jurisdiction;
- Established a minimum number of bishops (five) for each jurisdiction;
- Established a process for jurisdictions to request any additional bishops needed, which means those jurisdictions who believe they need more than five bishops can discern the number they need;
- Established that if a jurisdiction wants more than five bishops, the jurisdiction, not the denomination, will pay for those additional bishop costs; and
- Authorized the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy to receive and act on any requests from jurisdictions for additional bishops.

The General Conference voted by 645 to 96 to add two African bishops, increasing the number of African bishops from 13 to 15. They further approved adjusting the boundaries of the three central conferences on the African continent, so there will be four central conferences starting in 2025.

The Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy recommended a Bishop distribution in the United States. Following retirements at the end of August, there will be 32 active bishops in the U.S., a reduction from the current 37 active bishops. This recommendation also notes that no new Bishops will be elected at Jurisdictional Conferences in July. The committee was required to provide a minimum of 5 bishops to each jurisdiction.

Beginning Sept. 1, 2024, the number of residential Bishops in each jurisdiction will be

- Southeastern Jurisdiction 9
- Northeast Jurisdiction 6
- North Central Jurisdiction 6
- South Central Jurisdiction 6
- Western Jurisdiction 5

This distribution means three current bishops would be transferred to a different jurisdiction. Specifically, this means two bishops would transfer to the Western Jurisdiction, and one bishop would transfer to the Northeastern Jurisdiction.

General Church Budget

During General Conference, delegates voted to reduce a key component of calculating apportionments — the portion of local church giving requested to fund the general-church budget. They passed the new base rate for The United Methodist Church's apportionment formula.

Conferences will shift from their current base rate of 3.29% to a base rate of 2.6% for 2025 and 2026. Then, if the apportionment collection rate is 90% or higher in those years, the base rate will jump to 2.9% for 2027 and 2028.

On the last day of legislation, General Conference passed a quadrennial general church budget that takes into account two scenarios—a 2.6 percent base rate for apportionment calculations and one that starts at 2.6 and jumps to 2.9 percent if collections reach 90 percent.

- The budget at the 2.6 percent base rate is \$353.6 million.
- The budget at the 2.6 percent and the 2.9 percent base rate is \$373.4 million.

The total budget comprises seven different funds: the World Service Fund, Ministerial Education Fund, Black College Fund, Africa University Fund, Episcopal Fund, General Administration Fund and Interdenominational Cooperation Fund.

Each annual conference has the authority to decide its own formula for apportioning funds to local churches within its boundary. Holston uses a tithe model, where local churches give 10% of their unrestricted receipts.

Reaffiliation of Churches

General Conference delegates approved legislation requiring each annual conference to develop a readmission policy for Disaffiliated Churches to The United Methodist Church. The vote was 629 to 96.

The new paragraph to be added to the Book of Discipline says: *With a spirit of grace, we welcome those churches which have disaffiliated or withdrawn to rejoin The United Methodist Church. Where applicable, every annual conferences shall have a policy of reaffiliation for the churches seeking to return to the connection. Each such policy shall require that reaffiliating churches affirm their commitment to the Trust Clause in ¶2503.*

Ended Disaffiliation

By a vote of 516 to 203, General Conference delegates supported the removal of Paragraph 2553, which expired on Dec. 31, 2023. This action ended a disaffiliation policy that the special 2019 General Conference added.

Full Communion with Episcopal Church

General Conference approved full communion with the Episcopal Church. The agreement needs the approval of the Episcopalians before going into effect.

Holston Delegate Reactions To General Conference (holston.org)

Sharon Bowers - Bowers called the change in church language “a fresh start.” “We were not a real church until we made the step to be totally inclusive,” Bowers said. “So I’m excited about what God’s going to do and where we’re going to go.”

Kim Goddard - “We made a very faithful statement that we are better together than we are apart,” Goddard said. “That was the big takeaway for me. We were trying to get to a place where we can all be in a neutral space and give an opportunity for those who see things differently to live that out in their context. While knowing that doesn’t change my belief and my practice in my context.”

Randy Frye - Holston delegate of six General Conferences, said the church he leads will continue to focus on the mission, although the vote will not be welcomed by all. “At First Broad Street, we have been talking about how we are going to move forward. We’re going to focus on the mission, and the mission is to make disciples of Christ,” Frye said. “Will we have fallout? Yes. Will there be reactions and some people could leave? I’m pretty sure. But we’re going to just keep focusing on the mission and keep moving forward.”

Q and A with Bishop Wallace Padgett (source holston.org)

Q. *When all is said and done and when General Conference concludes on Friday night, what will you pray for? What do you want Holston members to keep in mind until you can get back home and help answer the questions they might have?*

A. I will leave this General Conference praying we grow increasingly effective in making passionate spiritual disciples and leaders of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I encourage us to celebrate how God is working through The United Methodist Church across the world in mission and ministry. I also ask that we take the time to prayerfully read pieces of legislation that were passed at General Conference prior to deciding our response to them. Finally, I hope that we will continue to be kind and gracious with each other in our differences and major on our commonalities as we move forward together.

Next Steps - Where Do We Go From Here?

Thank you for your prayers and patience. We know this has been a stressful time for many personally as well in the life and ministry of the church. On May 1, General Conference delegates voted to delete the church disaffiliation policy from the Book of Discipline.

Bishop Wallace-Padgett has indicated in the coming weeks, there will be opportunities to unpack the impact of legislation from General Conference. The first will be a clergy gathering this Thursday May 9 from 10am-12pm. In the coming weeks, there will be informational meetings in each district of Holston Conference. We will communicate those to you as soon as they are known.

Each voice in our church is important and matters. Our hope and intention as an administrative council is to help resolve uncertainty by keeping you informed and being transparent with the new information we receive as soon as possible. Please reach out to any of us on administrative council to share your thoughts and concerns.

Administrative Council Chair (2024) - Phyllis Wilburn
Connect Lay Leader (2025) - Lisa Thompson
Grow Lay Leader (2024) - Kara Scheetz
Serve Lay Leader (2024) - Steve Abercrombie
Give Lay Leader (2026) - Jennifer Hensley
Missions - Sheila Borders and Steve Rodier
Lay Members to Annual Conference - Janice and David Willocks
Staff Parish Chair - Danny Lantz
Trustees Chair - Tim Sayers
Lead Pastor - Scott Layer
Associate Pastor - Audrey Madigan
Director of Finance - Joel Malone
Director of Children's Ministries - Hannah Collins
Director of Youth Ministries - Michelle Garcia
Director of Worship and Music - Lindsey Blocker