

General Conference Update



KNOW
that
I am **GOD**

The United Methodist Church General Conference
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA



IT STARTS WITH YOU!

You are a committed leader within your local church faithfully participating in the life and ministries of your local congregation through your **prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.**

YOUR CHURCH IS PART OF A DISTRICT

The Virginia Conference has **eight districts** -- Coastal Virginia, Living Waters, Mission Rivers, Mountain View, Northern Virginia, Shenandoah River, Three Notch'd, and Valley Ridge.



YOUR DISTRICT IS PART OF AN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Your church is one of approximately 875 churches in the **Virginia Annual Conference**. The United States has 54 annual conferences, supervised by bishops in 46 episcopal areas. There are 75 annual conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, which are supervised by 20 bishops.



YOUR CONFERENCE IS PART OF A JURISDICTION

There are five US Jurisdictions -- North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern, and Western. Virginia is part of the **Southeastern Jurisdiction** or SEJ.

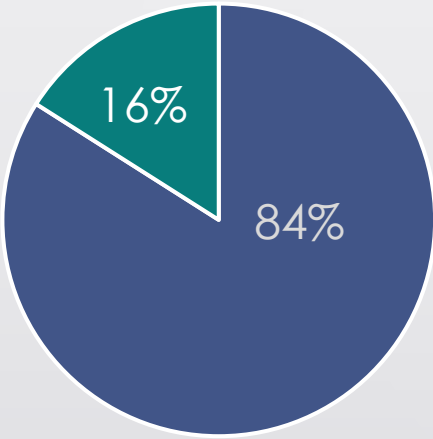
WE ARE A WORLDWIDE CHURCH

Outside the US, Annual Conferences are organized into seven **Central Conferences**. Together we all make up the United Methodist Church.

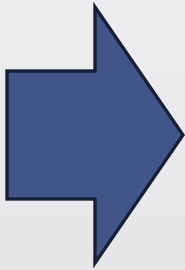


We Are a Worldwide Church

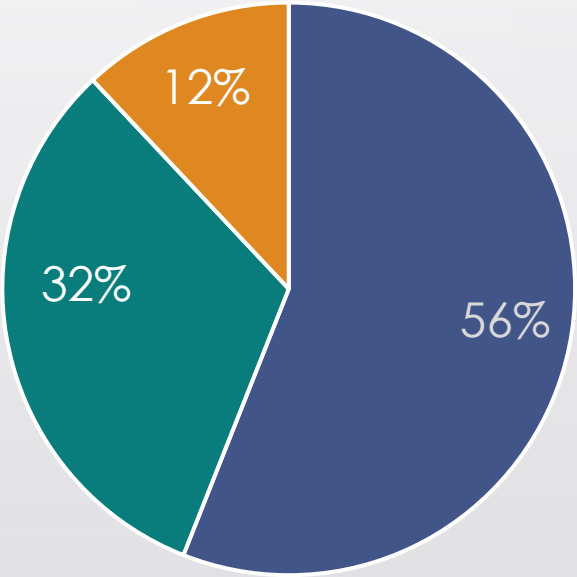
2000 General Conference Delegates



- US
- Rest of world



2020 General Conference Delegates



- US
- Africa
- Rest of world

Governed by Three Bodies

Judicial

Judicial
Council

Legislative

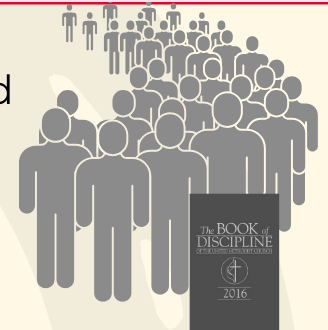
General
Conference

Executive

Council of
Bishops

GENERAL CONFERENCE SETS POLICY

The General Conference meets every four years. Legislation is examined and voted upon by **persons elected** from Annual Conferences from **across the denomination**. The Council of Bishops presides over General Conference and the Judicial Council reviews passed legislation to determine its constitutionality, legality, or meaning.



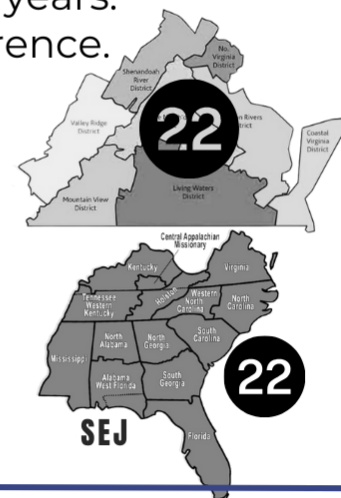
THE ROAD TO GENERAL CONFERENCE

THE VIRGINIA DELEGATION

DELEGATIONS ARE ELECTED

Delegates to General Conference are elected by Annual Conference members at their Annual Conference meetings every four years. Typically this happens the summer prior to General Conference. The number of delegates ranges from 600-1000. This year there will be **862 delegates**, half clergy and half laity.

There are **eleven clergy** and **eleven laity** (plus alternates) on the Virginia Conference General Conference delegation. These delegates were elected in 2019 by VAUMC members attending Annual Conference in Roanoke, VA. (Virginia's full delegation also includes 22 delegates to the SEJ Conference as well as alternates, all of whom were elected in 2019.)



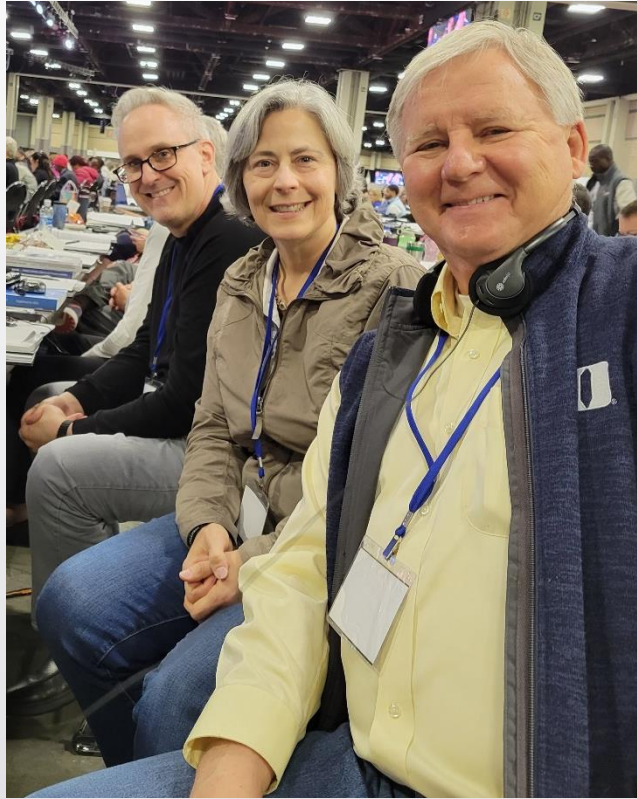
MEETINGS

The full Virginia delegation has been meeting together **since their election in 2019** to prepare for General Conference. These meetings were first in person, then virtually during the height of the pandemic, and then in person again.

Virginia Delegation



Reveille Delegates



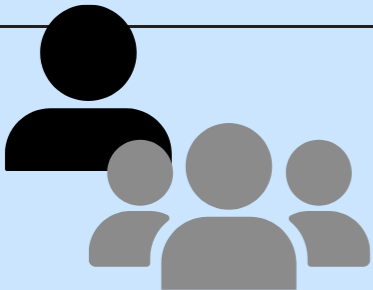
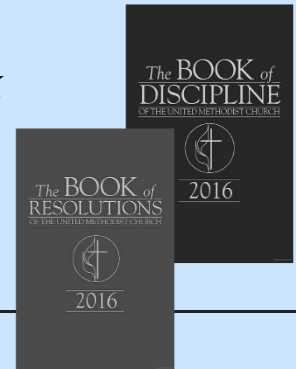
WHAT IS GENERAL CONFERENCE?

General Conference is the body that **sets official policy** and **speaks for the denomination**. This body meets every four years to revise and amend the *Book of Discipline*, the *Book of Resolutions*, and other official documents. It also sets the denomination's budget.



LEGISLATION

Petitions with changes or additions to the *Book of Discipline*, the *Book of Resolutions*, and other official documents are submitted during the years between General Conferences. This legislation is what General Conference Delegates act upon during General Conference.

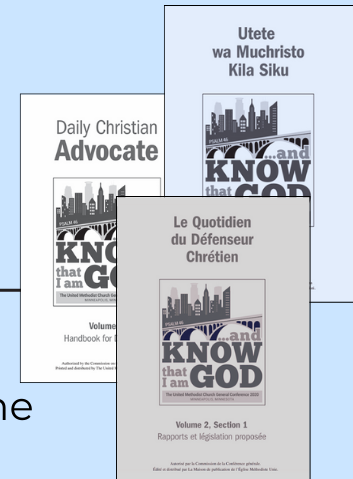


AUTHORS

Anyone can submit a petition to General Conference. Some come from individuals, some come from groups of people, some come from official bodies or organizations from within the church, and some even come from whole Annual Conferences.

WHAT IS GENERAL CONFERENCE? *(continued)*

Legislation is submitted prior to General Conference and is compiled for delegates into volumes of the **Advanced Daily Christian Advocate** to read and review. The ADCA is translated into four languages - English, French, Portuguese and Kiswahili.



REVISIONS

Submitted legislation is **grouped by theme** into one of fourteen **Legislative Committees**. Each General Conference delegate serves on a single committee and spends the first several days in committee reading, having conversations about, and revising what has been submitted.

Often there are **similar pieces of legislation** that aim to do the same thing that can be selected, combined, and/or revised before passing them forward.

Each day General Conference delegates receive **updated legislation** that has moved from committee on to the full body.



Legislative Committees

14 Legislative Committees

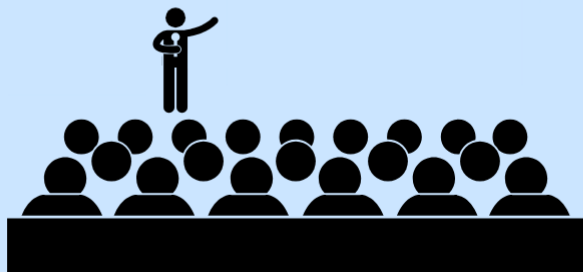
1,000+ total petitions



Photo: UM News



WHAT IS GENERAL CONFERENCE? *(continued)*



PLENARY SESSIONS

The full body of the General Conference meets together for worship, dialogue, and voting. It is in **full plenary sessions** where votes are taken on petitions and resolutions.

VOTING

Each General Conference delegate votes on legislation brought before the body. Most legislation requires only a **majority vote**.

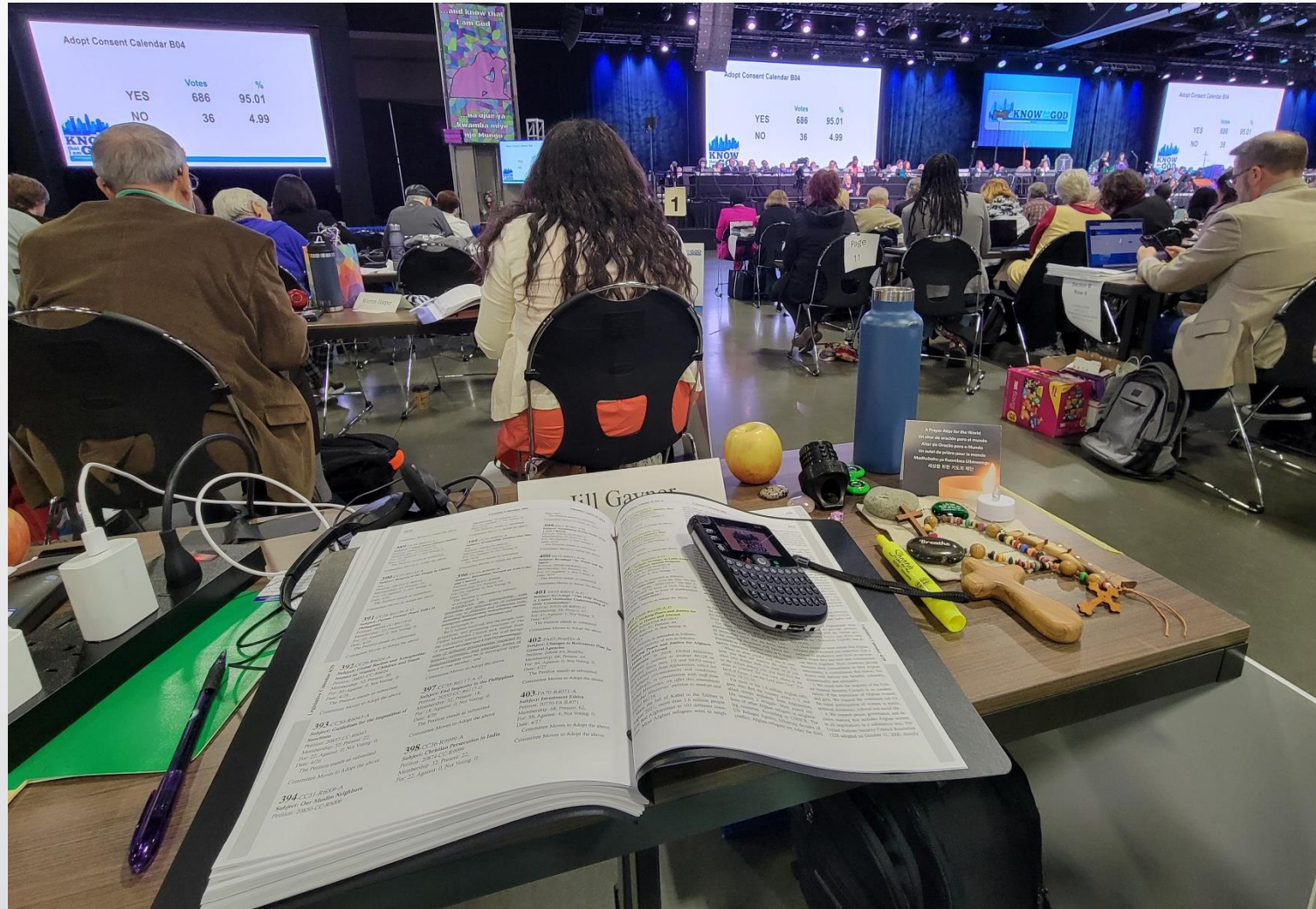
Changes to the **constitution** require **both** a $2/3$ vote by the General Conference and a $2/3$ aggregate vote of lay and clergy members in annual conferences.



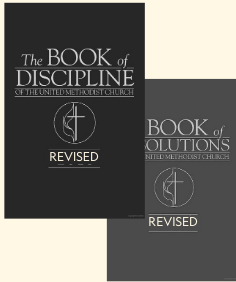
Plenary Session



Voting



AFTER GENERAL CONFERENCE



REVISED DOCUMENTS

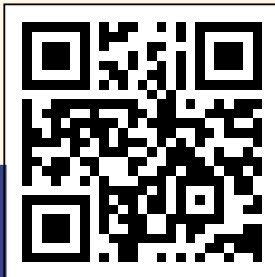
The *Book of Discipline*, the *Book of Resolutions*, and other documents as approved by the General Conference are updated with revisions. Passed legislation usually becomes effective on **January 1st** of the following year.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Constitutional amendments passed by 2/3 of the General Conference are sent to Annual Conferences for voting. Those **elected to attend Annual Conference** from their church or district will cast a vote.



Once **all Annual Conferences** from across the connection have voted, if 2/3 of the total votes cast are in favor, that legislation becomes official.



LEARN MORE
vaumc.org/gc2024

Sources:
umc.org, umcnews.org,
resourceumc.org

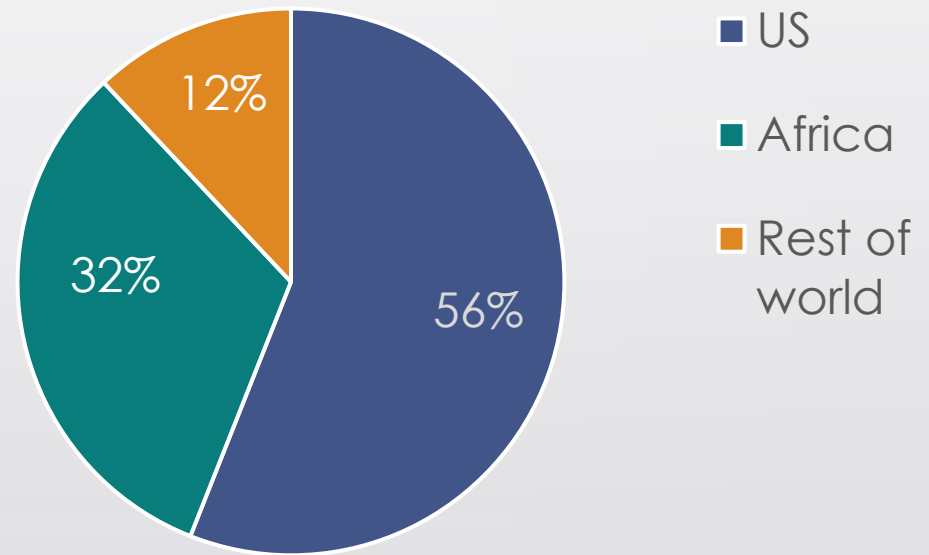
Need for Worldwide Regionalization

- Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in Baltimore in 1784. This is the earliest branch of the church we now know as The United Methodist Church.
- While Methodist missionaries spread the gospel overseas, we remained a largely U.S. based church well into the 20th century.
 - In 2000, just 16% of the General Conference delegates came from outside the U.S.
 - At this General Conference, 46% of the delegates are from outside the U.S.
- We are now a truly global church

We Are a Worldwide Church



2020 General Conference Delegates



Worldwide Regionalization Plan

Provide space to stay connected in ministry but more regional in governance

- Goal: ease the burden of U.S. legislation on General Conference
 - Currently the majority of General Conference petitions relate mostly or exclusively to the US
 - The only venue for the US church to address potential legislative changes is General Conference
 - Central Conferences are currently able to adapt certain portions of the Book of Discipline, and handle matters at their Central Conference meetings

Regionalization Legislation

- First 4 of 8 sections passed on the consent calendar (90% majority approval)
 - Constitutional amendment passed with 78% majority (2/3 needed for constitution change)
- “I feel like this General Conference is really focused on the future of the church. We really are figuring out how we’re going to live together and go forward ... It’s the most promising thing that could happen.”
 - Lonnie Chafin, Northern Illinois delegate and Chair of the Conferences Legislative Committee

Regionalization Next Steps

- Constitutional changes head to Annual Conferences for a vote
 - Requires 2/3 of total vote of Annual Conferences; VAUMC to vote in June
- Central conferences would become regional conferences:
 - Africa – 4 regional conferences (one additional conference created to group countries together better): Mid-Africa Central Conference, East Africa Central Conference, Southern Africa Central Conference, West Africa Central Conference
 - Europe – 3 regional conferences: Central & Southern Europe, Germany, Northern Europe & Eurasia
 - Philippines – 1 regional conference
 - United States – new regional conference

Regionalization Next Steps

- Approving adaptations to the *Book of Discipline* – work in process

- First 5 sections of the Book of Discipline would remain unchangeable by the regions
- Existing Part VI would be reorganized:
 - New Part VI would include all matters that cannot be changed by regions
 - New Part VII would include all adaptable matters
 - Only regional conferences would have authority to make changes to Part VII
- Feedback will be gathered from all Annual Conferences to help determine how to create the new Parts VI & VII
 - Legislation to make the changes would be submitted to a future General Conference

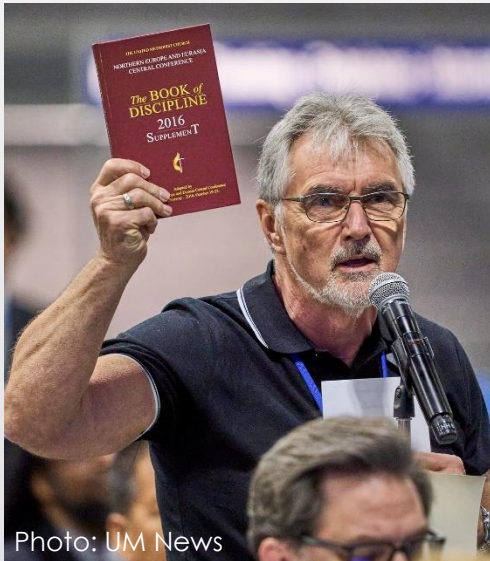


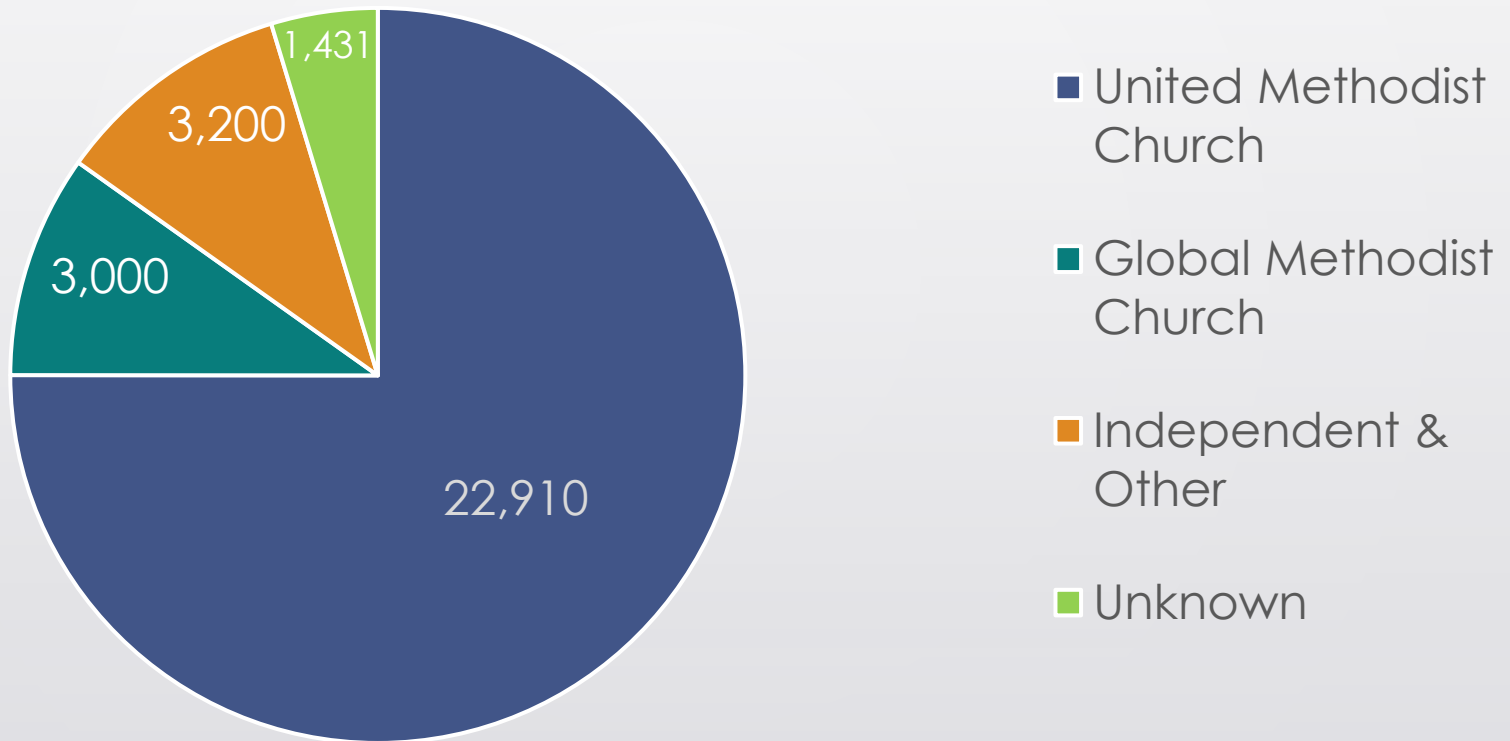
Photo: UM News

2019 Disaffiliation Rule changes

- 2019 Traditional Plan added ¶ 2553
 - “Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality—
 1. Basis—Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.”
 - **Deadline: must complete exit by December 31, 2023**

Change in Denominational Affiliations

US Church Affiliations



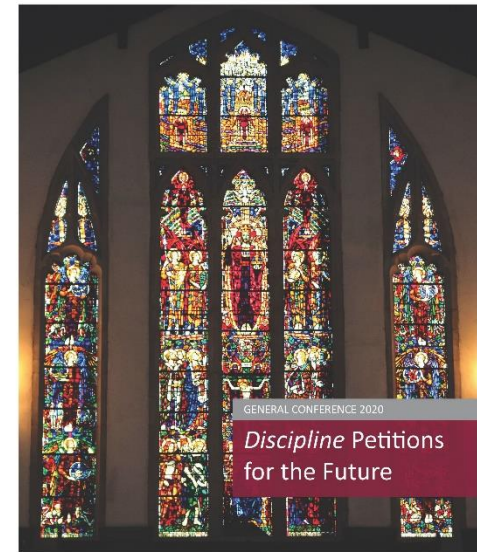
Disaffiliation Legislation

- Disaffiliation impact on the UMC
 - 25% of UMC churches in the US have disaffiliated
 - 35% Southeastern Jurisdiction
 - 30% South Central Jurisdiction
 - 22% North Central Jurisdiction
 - 12% Northeastern Jurisdiction
 - 5% Western Jurisdiction
 - Virginia was below average with 20% of churches disaffiliating
- ¶2553 expired in December 2023
 - Repealed at GC by 72% majority vote
 - No new disaffiliation legislation was passed.

Wespath new retirement plan

Provide sustainability, affordability, adequacy, and flexibility

- New program is similar to most private sector 401K plans
- Includes three types of employer contributions:
 - \$150 / month flat dollar contribution (indexed for inflation)
 - 3% contribution of pay (base salary plus housing)
 - \$1 for \$1 conference match on up to 4% of pay
- Provides an average of 9% of pay to clergy
 - Versus 11% under current defined benefits plan
- Clergy who have earned a pension will retain those benefits



a general agency of The United Methodist Church

Updated Social Principles

First batch passed on the consent calendar by 92% majority

- The goal of the Social Principles is to be a “teachable document” that “inspires public advocacy for the promotion of social holiness in the world”
- Last major revision was in 1976; 2012 GC mandated an update
- The update team was guided by the following goals:
 - Write the Social Principles in a clear and concise manner
 - Consolidated from 76 principles down to 51
 - Integrate Biblical and Wesleyan references throughout the text
 - Reflect the world-wide nature of the church in all areas of the document
 - World Community was eliminated as a separate section
- Four sections in the revised Social Principles:
 - Community of All Creation (previously Natural World)
 - Economic Community
 - Social Community
 - Political Community

Human Sexuality in *The Book of Discipline*

1972

First homosexuality rule added to the Book of Discipline

“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Additional homosexuality rules added over time

- Prohibited “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from serving as clergy
- Prohibited clergy from performing same-sex weddings

2019

Special Called General Conference passed Traditional Plan

- Tightened rules which prohibited the ordination of homosexual clergy
- Increased penalties for clergy performing same-sex weddings

Human Sexuality Legislation

- Removed all of the rules which harmed or excluded LGBTQ+ people
 - Ordination – Approved by 93% majority vote on a consent calendar. Celebration of singing, hugging, crying tears of joy followed.
 - Weddings – Passed by 67% majority vote
 - Note – clergy have the right to decide which weddings to perform
 - Church trustees can decide what weddings can be held in their church
 - Funding
 - Incompatibility language removed in new Social Principles – that section passed by 76%. Delegate Molly Mwayera (Zimbabwe) helped by adding the italicized language
 - Marriage is a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (*adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age*) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community
- Repealed all of the Traditional Plan
 - Passed in 2019 with a vote of 438 – 384 (53%)



Molly Mwayera

Photo: UM News

Celebration



Denominational Budget

- UMC finances have been dramatically impacted since 2016
 - Collections began to decline before the pandemic; the pandemic accelerated the decline
 - 32% of US churches have disaffiliated or closed, significantly impacting general church apportionments
- Quadrennial budget: \$354 million
 - 41% reduction from the 2016 budget of \$604 million
 - Passed by 95% majority vote
- Apportionment base rate reduced from 3.29% to 2.6%
 - If collection rates exceed 90% in 2025 & 2026, base rate will go up to 2.9%
 - Higher base rate would increase the quadrennial budget to \$373M

Budget Impact on Bishops

- Tighter church budget will impact the number of bishops
- US bishops will decrease from 2016 church budget of 46 bishop to 2024 level of 32
 - Currently 39 active bishops serving
 - 7 bishops are retiring this year, bringing the number down to 32 if there are no new elections in 2024
 - Goal to reduce US bishops to 22 through attrition
 - Can be achieved in 2028, when 14 more bishops will face mandatory retirement
- Central Conferences have 20 active bishops
 - The church is growing overseas, particularly in Africa
 - Budget allows for 2 new bishops in Africa (they asked for 5 new bishops)
- 32 US + 22 Central Conferences = 54 bishops in proposed budget

Jurisdictional Conference 2024

- Meeting July 10 – 12, 2024
- Southeastern Jurisdiction (SEJ) episcopal elections
 - One retirement: Bishop Bill McAlilly, leaving 10 active bishops
 - SEJ Committee on the Episcopacy (COE) recommendation: no new elections
- COE original plan to reduce to 10 Annual Conferences:
 - New merger: Alabama-West Florida / North Alabama / South Georgia Area
 - New merger: Central Appalachian Missionary / Holston / Kentucky Area
 - Florida Area
 - Mississippi Area
 - North Carolina Area
 - North Georgia Area
 - South Carolina Area
 - Tennessee-Western Kentucky Area (previously merged)
 - Virginia Area
 - Western North Carolina Area
- Per Interjurisdictional Committee recommendation, will need to further reduce to 9 ACs
 - One bishop will need to move to another jurisdiction

Commissioning Missionaries

Going from everywhere, to everywhere



Celebrations

Bishop David Wilson, the first Native American bishop



Celebrations

Bishop Tracy Malone

First Black woman to serve as
president of the Council of Bishops



Photo: UM News



Photo: UM News

Celebrations

Deacons can now preside at the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism in their appointments



Photo: UM News

Seeing All the People



Holy Conferencing



Photo: UM News

“This was my eighth General Conference to attend. In the past, these were conflict-driven, deeply divided gatherings. This year was so different – joyous, largely united, and hope-filled. It was really remarkable.” - Rev. Adam Hamilton

“After having seen above half a century of years, we are sick of strife and contention.

If we do not yet think alike, we may at least love alike.

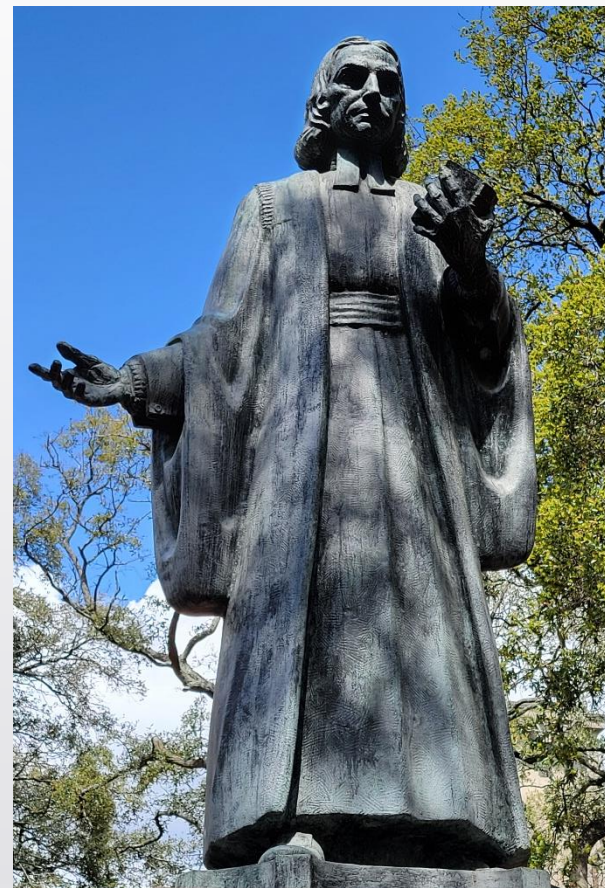
And, indeed, unity of affection is a good step forward toward unity of judgement.

We need not despair of getting farther by-and-by: the right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass.”

~ John Wesley

Letter to James Hutton

December 26, 1771



Questions?

