



General Conference FAQs

-FAQs prepared by the Office of Connectional Ministries

Basics of General Conference

- **What happens at General Conference?**
 - General Conference is a gathering of United Methodist clergy and lay delegates, elected by their Annual Conferences, to worship, collaborate, and consider legislative proposals. It is scheduled to take place once every four years. The postponed 2020 and 2024 General Conference took place April 23-May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, NC.
- **Who represented Virginia at General Conference?**
 - Virginia was represented by 11 seated clergy and 11 seated lay delegates as well as a host of other observers and supporters. The full delegation list can be found here: <https://vaumc.org/gc2024-delegation/>.
- **What are the “3 R’s” that were supported at General Conference?**
 - Much of the legislation that came before the General Conference dealt with three legislative priorities known as the “R’s”. Those were:
 - Regionalization
 - Removal of Harmful Language
 - Revised Social Principles

Regionalization

- **What is regionalization?**
 - According to ResourceUMC, “The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters has been working diligently since 2012 to develop a proposed structure for The United Methodist Church, worldwide, that builds connectional unity across the whole denomination while making room for customization in how the church lives out its mission in each region of the world, including the United States.” In essence, regionalization allows for unity in doctrine and theology while allowing for contextual flexibility in the following conversations:
 - Criteria for ordained and licensed ministry
 - Criteria for specialized lay ministries
 - Criteria for admission of and care for lay members
 - Organization of the regional, annual, district, and charge conferences
 - Hymnal and ritual
 - Judicial administration
- **Is regionalization official?**
 - All petitions proposed by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters related to regionalization were passed by the General Conference. Of those,

there is one that requires constitutional amendment, which requires ratification by the annual conferences that make up the United Methodist Church.

- **Who votes on it?**
 - Each Annual Conference will vote on this constitutional amendment. In order for it to be ratified and implemented, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the voting membership of the United Methodist Church must agree to the amendment. In other words, if a total of 100,000 ballots are cast around the world, at least 66,700 (i.e. $\frac{2}{3}$) of those must support the amendment in order for it to be ratified. *NOTE* – numbers are used to illustrate the methodology for assessing implementation. We have no way of knowing how many votes will actually be cast around this amendment.
- **When will we vote on regionalization in Virginia?**
 - It is incredibly likely that we will vote on the constitutional amendment related to regionalization at the 2024 session of the Virginia Annual Conference, taking place June 20-22, 2024 in Hampton, VA.

Removal of harmful language and Revised Social Principles

- **What happened to language around incompatibility?**
 - The General Conference eliminated previous language from the Book of Discipline regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons in the life of the United Methodist Church. The General Conference strengthened language around the sacred worth of all people and maintains there is room for all people in the United Methodist Church.
- **What are the Revised Social Principles and where can they be found?**
 - The Revised Social Principles, created and vetted by the General Board of Church and Society, 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. (taken from the Revised Social Principles, p. 5).
 - They can be found at this link: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124>. Further, they will be a part of the newest edition of the Book of Discipline when it is released in early 2025.
 - It should be noted that the General Conference passed these nearly uniformly as written. One amendment was made to the subsection “Marriage” within the section titled “The Nurturing Community” in the section called “The Social Community”. The first sentence of that paragraph now reads: “ Within the church, we affirm marriage as 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.”

The work of the local church

- **Who makes the decision about a church hosting same gender weddings?**
 - According to par.2533 of the Book of Discipline, the local church Trustees are responsible for setting policies regarding building use, to include weddings. These policies are meant to be affirmed by the Church Council, which is appointed by the Charge Conference.
 - Unless your church has an imminent wedding taking place in your building, we recommend that your church not rush to make policies around hosting weddings, as there could be further clarity on authority to make decisions about this coming from the United Methodist Judicial Council.
- **Will my local church receive a pastor who identifies at LGBTQ+?**
 - If your local church could affirm and support the work of a clergy person who identifies as LGBTQ+, it is possible that you could receive an LGBTQ+ pastor at some point. If your local church is non-affirming or non-supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, it is highly unlikely your local church would have an LGBTQ+ pastor appointed to it.
- **What is the power of local churches to make decisions regarding beliefs?**
 - The United Methodist Church uses creeds like the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed as statements of faith, and has articles of religion, doctrinal standards, and a theological task that are a part of the Book of Discipline. Members of United Methodist Churches are invited to reflect on those beliefs and commit to a continued life of shared ministry and mission centered on that which we share. This is a part of the commitment we make in our membership vows when we join a local United Methodist Church and commit to "be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries."
- **Can a member of a United Methodist Church go to a Global Methodist Church?**
 - While there is never a limit on church attendance and where an individual chooses to worship on a given day, we would encourage United Methodists to support their local United Methodist church through their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness. Should another church in your community be one you wish to make your church home in, we would ask that you consider transferring your membership to that church, whether or not it is a part of the United Methodist Church.

Other important General Conference decisions

- **I heard that the United Methodist Church and Episcopal Church did something together...what is that?**
 - The General Conference approved a "full communion" agreement with the Episcopal Church. While not a merger, this agreement means each church acknowledges the other as a partner in the faith, recognizes the validity of each other's baptism and Eucharist, and commits to work together in ministry. This agreement also means Episcopalians and United Methodists can share clergy.

- This agreement still requires ratification from the Episcopal Church, which likely would not come before 2027.
- **Were deacons granted new responsibilities at General Conference?**
 - Deacons were granted sacramental authority at the postponed 2020 and 2024 General Conference. This means that Ordained Deacons will be able to preside over Holy Communion and Holy Baptism. This is meant to be done in an effort to connect the church with the world, a significant part of the work of deacons in the United Methodist Church.
- **Was there a shift in the budget for the United Methodist Church? Will this impact the budget of my local church?**
 - The General Conference approved a quadrennial budget of approximately \$373 million dollars, contingent upon an apportionment contribution rate of at least 90% in the first two years of the quadrennium. This represents a 38% reduction over the previous quadrennial budget for the United Methodist Church.
 - This reduction should translate into a reduction of apportionment expenses for most United Methodist Churches in Virginia. United Methodists in Virginia should also remember that, because of disaffiliation, Virginia is now the largest annual conference in the United States. As such, we are bearing a larger responsibility for funding the general church than in previous years. So while apportionments should go down, they may reduce more incrementally than monumentally.
- **Did any legislation impact the Council of Bishops?**
 - The Interjurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy brought a report about the assignment of Bishops. In the US, the jurisdictions will have the following allocations of Bishops:
 - Western: 5
 - South Central: 6
 - North Central: 6
 - South East: 9
 - North East: 6
 - This means the following actions will have to be taken to balance the number of bishops serving in each jurisdiction:
 - Western: Receives 2 bishops from other jurisdictions.
 - South Central: Sends 1 bishop to another jurisdiction.
 - North Central: Sends 1 bishop to another jurisdiction.
 - South East: Sends 1 bishop to another jurisdiction.
 - North East: Receives 1 bishop from other jurisdictions.
 - Bishops will be assigned locations to serve at Jurisdictional Conferences taking place this summer.
- **Was any action taken on climate justice?**
 - Many petitions were passed that enable the work of climate justice to be a part of every Annual Conference and have support in every local church.
 - A petition regarding divestment from fossil fuels was referred to Wespath for future consideration.

- More information regarding climate justice petitions can be found in this UM News article:
<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/climate-justice-legislation-fares-well-overall>
- **What happened regarding the United Methodist Church and current conflicts in the Middle East?**
 - Legislation was passed regarding a resolution to support peacekeeping in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This petition includes language about redirecting military aid monies from Israel and Egypt to humanitarian aid projects sponsored by the United Nations, while also calling on Palestinian governments to denounce violence against Israeli citizens and asking United Methodists not to boycott purchasing from Israeli companies.
 - A small group of observers and delegates at General Conference staged a silent protest in support of protests happening on college campuses. This protest was covered in the media but was not sanctioned by the General Conference or the United Methodist Church.

Responses to General Conference and what's next

- **How are United Methodists around the world responding to the actions of General Conference?**
 - Largely, the response to General Conference has been a hopeful and positive one. While some advocacy groups have shared alternate perspectives, a majority of delegates, including the entire delegation from the Virginia Annual Conference, have shared messages of joy and belief in a future for the United Methodist Church that can now include a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives.
- **When do decisions made at General Conference get implemented?**
 - A majority of legislation is set to be implemented as of January 1, 2025. There were some petitions, specifically those regarding removal of harmful language and prohibitions on pastors officiating same gender weddings, that went into effect at the adjournment of the General Conference session. Petitions requiring constitutional amendments will be considered by every Annual Conference session over the next 12 months and, if ratified, will be implemented in late 2025 or early 2026.
- **Will there be a General Conference before the next scheduled session in 2028?**
 - There is no other General Conference session scheduled prior to 2028; however, the Council of Bishops has previously recommended that there be a special session of the General Conference in 2026 to work on regional conferencing should regionalization be ratified.
- **What brings the Virginia Conference delegation joy about the work ahead?**
 - Many members of the Virginia Conference delegation have reflected on the opportunity ahead of United Methodists to be in shared mission and ministry. There are challenges ahead to be sure, but delegates share in a belief that we are better when we work together, when we empower laity to lead well, and when we resource the local church as the primary agent of disciple-making. There is reason to believe with hope in how God will continue to lead and move in the

United Methodist Church. We look forward to joining God in that movement and work!

