

FAQs Regarding General Conference Decisions – June 2024

The General Conference met in Charlotte, North Carolina, from April 23 to May 3, 2024. More than 1,000 pieces of legislation were considered and debated in committee and on the conference floor.

The 2016 Book of Discipline is being edited to reflect the decisions made by this General Conference.

Resources

- Follow updates to the new 2020/2024 Book of Discipline:
<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2020/legislation/general-book-of-discipline-legislation>
- The Recap: Post-General Conference episode:
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-recap-post-general-conference-episode>
- Effective dates for GC legislation:
<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/effective-dates-for-general-conference-legislation>
- Ecumenical relationships explainer:
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-ecumenical-relationships>
- Updated Revised Social Principles feature:
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/revised-social-principles-updating-the-umc-toolbox-for-social-witness>

Removal of Language

What did the General Conference approve regarding same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBT persons?

The legislation that was passed removed language that prohibited pastors from conducting same-sex marriages. The language prohibiting LGBT persons from being ordained was also removed. These changes went into effect at the conclusion of General Conference on May 3, 2024.

Is there still room for conservative, traditional clergy and laity in the United Methodist Church?

Yes! We respectfully hold space for differing views of marriage and whom God calls into ministry. We trust God to hold these differences while we hold our beliefs and support colleagues and churches with boundaries for understanding. We maintain an open table for Holy Communion for all by the grace of Jesus Christ.

How do the decisions made at General Conference change the mission and ministry of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The mission and ministry of both the Arkansas Conference and our more than 400 local congregations remain the same. We are and remain followers of Christ who are working to equip and send disciples of Jesus to transform the world by sharing God's grace with the world. We continue to welcome all who want to learn, live, and serve as his disciples, people transformed by the Holy Spirit and empowered to live out the love of God in our communities. Our appointive process will continue to use the consultation process with both clergy and congregations, as they seek the most faithful path for their ministry and mission.

What must our church do to accommodate the decisions made at General Conference?

The recent decisions of the General Conference do not require any action from anyone. However, they do leave space for change to occur if that is the desire of your congregation.

Will pastors be forced or allowed to officiate same-sex weddings?

United Methodist pastors have always decided which weddings they will perform. This decision is based upon several factors, including the couple's preparation for the marriage covenant. This has not changed; pastors will continue to decide who they will marry. There is no mechanism in conference leadership nor desire on the part of the bishop to determine who a pastor will marry. As the newly adopted language reads, we will "not penalize any clergy for performing or refraining from performing a same-sex marriage service." The desires of all clergy are to be honored and not judged by others.

Does our church have to/get to host same-sex weddings?

The General Conference legislation explicitly protects the right of clergy and churches to officiate at or host same-sex weddings, as well as the right not to do so. The United Methodist Church will not "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."

Resource:

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/judicial-council/judicial-council-decision-home/judicial-decisions/judicial-council-decision-1503>

May anyone become a United Methodist ordained pastor?

By General Conference action, a person's entrance into the process for ministry of the United Methodist Church may not be prohibited based on gender, ethnic origin, color, economic status,


or sexual orientation. Rather, candidates for ministry are to be eligible based on their perceived gifts and potential for effectiveness in proclaiming or teaching the gospel, making disciples, providing pastoral care, or connecting the church to the world. The Arkansas Annual Conference and its Board of Ordained Ministry are entrusted with providing a path to ordained ministry that both welcomes diverse candidates and maintains a high standard of calling, commitment, and accountability.

Regionalization

Regionalization was approved by the General Conference. When will regionalization go into effect?

The petition to “amend the Constitution to create Regional Conferences on a worldwide basis” was approved by 78% of the General Conference delegates. However, constitutional changes also require the approval of two-thirds of the aggregate votes of all annual conferences around the world. This ratification by the annual conferences is required for Worldwide Regionalization to take effect.

The Arkansas Conference members will vote on these constitutional amendments at the 2025 Annual Conference.

Resource:  WWRegionalization_Summary_GC_ENG_digital.pdf

Revised Social Principles

The Preamble to the Revised Social Principles states: “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.”

Resource: <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124>

Why were the Social Principles revised by the General Conference?

The Social Principles were revised in the Book of Discipline to address contemporary issues and undergird disciplinary language revisions. The revisions involved 12 years of development and engagement from thousands of United Methodists around the world.

The Revised Social Principles are theologically grounded, use succinct language, and are compatible with different contexts. They are separate from the Book of Discipline, the United

Methodist book on church law. The preface provides the history of Methodism and its predecessor bodies' commitment to social principles, and the preamble outlines the church's theological convictions.

The revised Social Principles integrate Biblical and Wesleyan references throughout the text.

Revised Social Principles legislation adopted by the General Conference:

- [Part V: Social Principles Preamble](#)
- [¶160 The Community of All Creation](#)
- [¶163 The Economic Community](#)
- [The Political Community](#)
- [Part V: Social Principles Preface](#)
- [¶161, ¶162 The Social Community](#)

Were assertions about homosexuality removed from the Social Principles?

Yes. General Conference delegates removed the statement that "the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching." [¶161, ¶162, The Social Community](#)

When do the Revised Social Principles go into effect?

The revised document goes into effect on January 25, 2025.

What do the Social Principles say about abortion?

"Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion."

"We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases, we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers. We support parental, guardian, or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection or eugenics (see Resolution 3184).

Resource: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-nurturing-community>

Resolution from General Conference being spun as misinformation:

Most social issue resolutions refer to public policy matters, such as local, state, and federal government programs and legislation. Other statements focus on conditions affecting the church and the church's programs or funding. Any and every United Methodist can submit a resolution to be considered with the title of their choice.

The petition to resolution R611, which was cast at the General Conference focusing on "a just and lasting peace for the Palestinian people," calls for the support of ecumenical and interfaith bodies that advocate for Palestinian self-determination while affirming "Israel's right to exist within secure borders." It also calls for "the Palestinian Authority and Palestine religious and political leaders to continue to condemn violence against Israeli civilians publicly and to use nonviolent acts of disobedience to resist the occupation and the illegal settlements."

This and the other resolutions that deal with this conflict call for peace. It is important to note that this came to the Conference in the form of a resolution. Resolutions are non-binding and have no financial implications.

ADDITIONAL LEGISLATION

[Budget Highlights from the 2020/2024 General Conference](#)

What was approved concerning the United Methodist Church's relationship with the Episcopal Church?

General Conference approved a full communion agreement with the Episcopal Church. Once approved by the Episcopal Church, it means that the denominations will recognize each other as the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in which the Gospel is rightly preached and taught." The Episcopal Church will address whether to approve this relationship at a future meeting of their body.

How will the change in the number of bishops affect the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The General Conference approved adding two bishops for Africa due to the growth of the United Methodist Church there. In order to stay within the budget, the number of active bishops serving in the U.S. was reduced from the current 39 to 32, beginning September 1 of this year. This distribution of U.S. bishops will result in one fewer active bishop serving in the South Central Jurisdiction, of which Arkansas is a part. While the Arkansas Conference had hoped not to share a bishop, there is now a great possibility that we will share Bishop Laura Merrill with another Conference. That decision will be made in July at the South Central Jurisdiction Conference.

How did the role of Deacons change?

Legislation was approved, allowing ordained deacons to preside over the sacraments - Holy Communion and Baptism - within their ministry settings. This will begin on January 25, 2025.

Was environmental and climate change legislation considered at General Conference?

Yes. The majority of legislation supported by climate justice activists within The United Methodist Church was passed by General Conference on the consent calendar in the early part of its second week. However, the General Conference did not adopt a proposed requirement that United Methodist Institutions, including Wespath - the denomination's pension and benefits agency - divest from fossil fuel company stocks.

Resources used to prepare this document include:

UMNews

TNWKUMC

General Board of Finance and Administration

General Board of Church and Society