

United Methodist Polity 101

TLUMC Town Hall #2
February 10, 2020

“Polity”

Structure, organization, law, and practice

How an organization is structured largely determines the results that it produces

United Methodist Polity

Connectional in nature

Modeled after the U.S. government in many respects

Designed with checks and balances

Executive, Legislative, and Judicial Branches

Legislative Branch

General Conference

The only body that speaks as “The United Methodist Church”

Meets every four years (quadrennium)

2020: 862 delegates, equal number of clergy and laity elected by their annual conferences

Delegates allotted by membership size of each annual conference

Scope of General Conference

Legislative body

Votes on changes/alterations to *The Book of Discipline*, proposes constitutional amendments

Defines powers and duties of clergy, conferences, and congregations

Establishes policy and procedure for denomination

General Conference is the central “hub” for the denomination

Jurisdictional and Central Conferences

Jurisdictional (U.S. regional); Central (Non-U.S. regional)

Meets every four years after General Conference

Determines boundaries of annual conferences and episcopal areas within its region

Elects and assigns bishops

Elects members to General Boards and Agencies

United Methodist Jurisdictions and Annual Conferences in the United States of America



- Jurisdiction Boundaries
- Conference Boundaries
- State Boundaries
- North Central Jurisdiction
- Northeastern Jurisdiction
- South Central Jurisdiction
- Southeastern Jurisdiction
- Western Jurisdiction
- Some churches are outside the boundary of the Rio Texas Annual Conference.
- Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference is comprised of Native American congregations of Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas.

Annual Conferences

Regional conferences within a jurisdiction

Meets annually

Led by appointed bishop

Elects delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences, vote on conference matters and constitutional amendments

Sets ministry priorities and budget for the region

Clergy hold membership and itinerate within the boundaries of an annual conference, assigned by the bishop

District

Regional subdivision of the annual conference

Brings churches together in shared mission and ministry

Administered by a District Superintendent

Local Church

Where laity hold membership

Elects at least one lay member to annual conference (as many lay members as full-time clergy)

Executive Branch

Council of Bishops

Includes all active and retired UMC Bishops

Bishops are elected for life

Provide oversight and vision for UMC

Preside as administrative officers at General Conference

May call special session of General Conference

College of Bishops

Bishops within a particular Jurisdiction

Bishops are primarily accountable to their College of Bishops

Judicial Branch

Judicial Council

Nine members, elected by General Conference (clergy and laity - no bishops)

Determines constitutionality of General Conference actions

Reviews decisions of law by bishops

Final court of appeals in church's judicial system

Support Structures

General Boards and Agencies

Equip annual conferences and local churches

Provide ministry guidance throughout the world

Constituted by General Conference

Boards and Agencies of the UMC

Church and Society

Discipleship

Global Ministries

Higher Education & Ministry

Pension & Health Benefits (Wespath)

Archives & History

Boards and Agencies of the UMC

Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns

Commission on Religion and Race

Commission on Status & Role of Women

United Methodist Men

Finance and Administration

Communications

UM Publishing House

TLUMC: Within the UMC

General Conference

Western Jurisdiction

Mountain Sky Annual Conference

Peaks/Pike's Peak District

The Book of Discipline

Book of Discipline

Doctrine, by-laws, and constitution of the UMC

Can only be modified by General Conference

Any United Methodist Church member, church, or conference may submit legislation to General Conference to alter the Book of Discipline through the legislative process

General Conference 2020

Fast Facts

Dates: May 5-15

Location: Minneapolis Convention Center, Minneapolis, MN

862 delegates

55.9% U.S.

32% Africa

6% Philippines

4.6% Europe

Rest from churches that have concordat agreements with UMC (like Puerto Rican UM Church)

Process

General Conference work is divided largely into two phases:

Legislative Committees (assigned, grouped legislation)

Plenary Session (full General Conference body)

Legislative Committees debate and vote on legislation related to their committee area that has been submitted to General Conference. Legislative Committees debate legislation and can amend, approve, combine, or reject them for recommendation to the full body of General Conferences.

Items that gain super-majority support in committee can be placed on a Consent Calendar and voted on all at once in Plenary. Legislation can be pulled from Consent Calendar to be voted on at plenary if enough votes are cast in Plenary to lift an item.

Plenary Process

Delegates are not required to vote as representatives of their church or annual conference. They may vote their conscience.

Voting is generally done electronically using digital voting devices.

Plenary sessions are chaired by Bishops on a rotating basis.

The Unique Situation at General Conference 2020

The Situation

While legislation has been submitted to General Conference as usual, with many different plans for separation of the denomination among them, a coalition of divergent groups will be submitting an agreed-upon “Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation”

This Protocol has been submitted with the idea that, if passed, will supersede most of the other legislation for the 2020 General Conference

The Situation

Delegates of the General Conference may thus vote to suspend the rules and take up this legislation as a “committee of the whole” near the beginning of General Conference, where it will be debated and voted upon

If passed, the Protocol would effectively end the General Conference, which would adjourn. Traditional UMs would exit and the UMC General Conference would reconvene as the post-separation UMC. They would then deal with any related legislation

If the Protocol does not pass, the process outlined previously would continue with legislative committees and plenaries

Post-Protocol

The Book of Discipline will be retained and altered by the post-separation UMC

All boards and agencies stay with the post-separation UMC. Traditional denomination may participate in them on a contract basis (especially Wespath)

The new traditionalist denomination will draft its own *Book of Doctrine and Discipline* (draft already in process)

Where Things Stand:

Protocol Legislation is being presented to General Conference - legislation has been written and will be submitted by an annual conference in special session since it is past the September 2019 deadline

The Advanced Daily Christian Advocate contains all other legislation slated for General Conference. That can be downloaded via:

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2020-advance-daily-christian-advocate>

Questions?