

2024 GENERAL CONFERENCE

GENERAL CONFERENCE

OUTCOMES

General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which meets once every four years. The conference can revise church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy, and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs.

Approximately 740 delegates from 133 annual conferences attended this conference where delegates reviewed 1,099 pieces of legislation.

The Alabama-West Florida Conference had four clergy and four laity delegates representing the conference and multiple reserves in attendance. Below are summaries of the major legislation that passed.

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REGIONALIZATION

This amendment aimed to give The United Methodist Church's different geographic regions equal standing in decision making. Prior to this passing, only central conferences (those outside the US) had that authority under the denomination's constitution to adapt the Discipline as missional needs and different legal contexts require.

Because it is a constitutional amendment, it will need at least a two-thirds total vote of annual conference lay and clergy voters to be ratified. Annual conferences are church regions consisting of multiple congregations and other ministries.

Under the petitions that passed General Conference, each regional conference, including the United States regional conference, would have the authority to:

- Establish and publish a regional Discipline with legislation and provision pertaining to church structures within its boundaries, including qualifications and educational requirements of clergy and specialized lay ministries.**
- Establish and publish a regional hymnal and ritual of church, including for marriage and burial. The rites approved would need to be in line with core doctrines of The United Methodist Church and in accordance with local laws.**
- Allow the annual conferences to adopt structures adequate to their mission while upholding General Conference-mandated structures.**

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REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIVE LANGUAGE

General Conference removed the ban on LGBTQ restrictive language on May 1, 2024. The vote on the consent calendar was 692-51, with approval at 93%.

With the removal of restrictive language, several areas of the Book of Discipline will be revised.

- **The removal of the restrictive language places the Book of Discipline back to “neutral.” Meaning before 1972 the words “incompatible with Christian teaching” were not included in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. Most mainline denominations do not have this stance in their disciplines; including the recent denomination, the Global Methodist Church.**
- **Clergy and churches are now permitted to perform and host same-sex weddings. However, this legislation explicitly protects the right of clergy and churches not to officiate at or host same-sex weddings. Local churches may create wedding and building-use policies around this topic to reflect their theological interpretation.**

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REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIVE LANGUAGE (CONT'D)

- **Ordination will strictly be based on the qualifications of becoming a pastor such as faith, spiritual disciplines, commitment to leading the church; to name a few. While the entire body of clergy of each annual conference will continue to ascertain and vote upon the moral character of each candidate for ordination, the individual's sexuality will no longer be a mandated barrier in becoming an ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church.**
- **A church is not required to receive a gay pastor. Like any clergy appointment, an extensive consultation process will happen between the local church, district superintendent, cabinet, bishop, and SPR committee to ensure the church and incoming pastor are honored.**

This empowers our United Methodist local churches to make their own theological interpretation of human sexuality as it governs its local body, thus moving us to focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

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REVISED SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

The United Methodist Church, including its predecessor bodies, has a long and rich history of concern for social justice.

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 2012 General Conference set the UMC General Board of Church and Society on a journey to revise the Social Principles. The goal was for the statements that guide United Methodist public witness to be more succinct, more theologically grounded, and more globally relevant.

These revised Social Principles were reviewed by over 4,000 United Methodists; ensuring that the work was comprehensive and thorough. This 40-page document reflects the United Methodist response to today's most pressing social issues.

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REVISED SOCIAL PRINCIPLES (CONT'D)

A lay delegate from the Zimbabwe East Conference proposed an amendment to a line pertaining to marriage.

- **The amendment for “a double-barrel” definition of marriage that reincluded the traditional language “a man and a woman,” in order to support the many traditionalists in the church and in line with law in much of the world including her home country, but it retained “two adults,” to support those who believe that the definition should be expanded.**
- **The amendment also incorporates three other parts of the newly adopted Social Principles — the rejection of child marriage, the stance against polygamy, and support for consent in sexual relationships.**

A section of the revised Social Principles deletes the phrase “the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching.” This line has widely been noted as restrictive language and many delegates named it a priority to see it removed.

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DEACONS & THE SACRAMENTS

Deacons can now administer the sacraments in their appointments without needing explicit permission from the bishop. In what presiding Bishop David Graves called a “historic moment,” General Conference passed new legislation granting authority to deacons to preside over the sacraments.

This means deacons can now offer Holy Communion and conduct baptisms where contextually appropriate, whether that is a church, outreach ministry, or mission. Deacons and elders are ordained clergy in The United Methodist Church. Deacons are ordained for ministries of word, service, compassion, and justice — serving as a bridge between the church and the world. Elders are ordained for ministries of word, sacrament, order, and service.

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NEW CLERGY RETIREMENT PLAN

An overwhelming majority of delegates approved a revised retirement plan for clergy. The name of the new plan is Compass, which originated from Wespeth.

Changes to the clergy retirement plan were needed so that the UMC can continue to provide reliable and sustainable retirement income to those who serve. The new retirement plan is designed to uphold the longstanding values of the Church retirement programs, which include:

- **Providing lifetime income**
- **Ensuring adequate retirement income for lower-paid clergy**

Clergy will retain CRSP benefits earned through the end of 2025, then begin earning benefits through Compass. The benefits of clergy who already have retired are not affected by the plan.

With Compass, clergy will have retirement accounts that they control. They are encouraged to contribute at least 4% of their salary to receive a full matching contribution from the church. All U.S. clergy, regardless of their church's size, will get at least a \$150 monthly contribution plus 3% of pay for their account balance — and beyond that will get another dollar for dollar match on up to 4% of pay.

Compass also will provide matching contributions to help clergy pay off student loans.

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REVISED BUDGET

General Conference passed a much-needed updated budget that reduces local church apportionments. As a result, 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 increase to 2.9% for 2027 and 2028.

This is positive news for our local churches. The operation of the local church has not changed. The General Conference placed significantly more trust in the local church to determine the best use of its resources for local ministry by dramatically reducing the rate that determines apportionments.