



## **Q&A for North Georgia United Methodists The United Methodist General Conference**

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### **What stands out about this General Conference?**

The delegates to the General Conference in Charlotte showed tremendous sensitivity to both the local church and the worldwide nature of our church. You will see evidence of this in decision after decision made by this General Conference.

### **How did the General Conference act on major legislation?**

#### **Budget**

The General Conference passed a denominational budget that is more than 40% lower than the 2016-2020 budget. Debated in committee and twice on the floor of General Conference, by the time the final vote was cast, many were calling the work a strong example of holy conferencing. "The denominational budget passed by the General Conference will provide significant relief to our annual conference budget," explained North Georgia Conference Treasurer and CFO Allison Berg.

#### **Regionalization**

The General Conference overwhelmingly passed all the petitions required to shift The United Methodist Church into a structure that more truly reflects a worldwide denomination. Under the plan, the seven current central conferences and the U.S. would become United Methodist regional conferences with the same duties and powers to pass legislation for greater missional impact in their respective regions. This item will now go before Annual Conferences for ratification.

"The shift from central conference to regional conference is a recognition of the maturity of the current central conferences, which were once mission points of the then missionary-sending churches in the U.S.," Bishop Mande Muyombo, Connectional Table chair, said earlier. "No region can claim to be the center and others the peripheries. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ remains the center of God's mission."



## **Clergy Retirement Plan**

The General Conference adopted a new, more affordable, and sustainable clergy retirement plan called Compass. Compass is a defined contribution plan — more like a 401(k) offered by corporate employers. Compass will go into effect in 2026. Clergy will retain CRSP benefits earned through the end of 2025, then begin earning benefits through Compass. Clergy who have already retired are not affected by the plan. More information and guidance from Wespath and Conference Benefits Office is forthcoming.

## **Removing Restrictive Language and Adding Protections**

General Conference voted to remove the language from the Book of Discipline that prohibited the ordination of clergy who are “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” — a prohibition that was added in 1984.

Also, delegates voted to allow churches to hold — or refrain from holding — same-sex weddings. Your pastor and church leadership will have the authority to decide if you are a church that will officiate and host those weddings – just as you have the authority to decide if you will host *any* wedding and your pastor decides if they will officiate *any* wedding.

Ordination will strictly be based on the qualifications of becoming a pastor in The United Methodist Church. Those qualifications include years of education and discernment with the assistance of one’s local United Methodist congregation, district, and annual conference board of ordained ministry.

## **Reaffiliation**

General Conference delegates voted to delete the church disaffiliation policy, paragraph 2553, from the Book of Discipline. The paragraph expired in December 2023, but this action removes the text.

Delegates also approved a reaffiliation policy to welcome churches that wish to rejoin The United Methodist Church. “With a spirit of grace, we welcome those churches which have disaffiliated or withdrawn to rejoin The United Methodist Church,” the newly adopted policy says. “Where applicable, every annual conference shall have a policy of reaffiliation for the churches seeking to return to the connection.”



## **New Social Principles**

Delegates to General Conference have adopted revised Social Principles. The goal of revision was for these statements that guide United Methodist public witness to be more succinct, more theologically grounded, and more globally relevant.

Over the last 8 years, Church and Society held listening sessions around the globe (including a session in North Georgia) to learn from United Methodists what they thought of the social teachings and how they might be improved. A writing team of 52 United Methodists from Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the U.S., drafted the proposed revised Social Principles. That draft then received input from more than 4,000 United Methodists worldwide before the final submission. The Social Principles represent the denomination's public stand on issues of the day (they are not church law). The Social Principles are for the whole church and will not be subject to change by regional conferences.

The revised Social Principles are simplified, going from 65 to 40 pages and from six to four sections. They are general enough that they can be applicable in contexts around the world. The first such revision in nearly 50 years.

## **Sacramental Authority for Deacons in Their Ministry Setting**

The General Conference approved legislation allowing deacons to offer Holy Communion and conduct baptisms where they have been appointed to serve, whether that is a church, outreach ministry, or mission.

## **Full Communion with the Episcopal Church**

Delegates to the United Methodist General Conference approved full communion with the Episcopal Church. The agreement needs the approval of the Episcopalians before going into effect. One practical benefit of full communion would be that pastors could serve in the churches of the other denomination.

## **When does the legislation take effect?**

Most legislation approved by General Conference will become effective Jan. 1, 2025.



## What are some highlights beyond the legislation?

- It was an honor for UMCOR and the North Georgia Conference to showcase our disaster response solar trailer to delegates, guests, and passersby this week! For two days we greeted conference-goers in front of the Charlotte Convention Center.
- We enjoyed seeing Rev. Dr. Terry Walton serve as a liturgist in worship.
- Rev. Jasmine Smothers was a familiar face by the end of General Conference. She was elected chair of the Committee on Presiding Officers and offered a report to the General Conference each morning.
- Esther Lloyd Stevenson, a member of Rivertown UMC, was commissioned as a Deaconesses through United Women in Faith.
- Michelle Joyce Kunce was commissioned by the General Board of Global Ministries as a missionary of The United Methodist Church.
- Nearly a dozen North Georgia United Methodists volunteered with the General Conference to make the gathering a success.
- There was one or more North Georgia Conference delegates on *every* General Conference legislative committee.
- We witnessed the passing of the gavel to Bishop Tracy Smith Malone as president of the Council of Bishops. She is the first Black women to hold this position.
- The denomination's first Native American bishop, Bishop David Wilson, preached and presided at General Conference!
- We celebrated 80 years of UMCOR!
- We celebrated Africa University, one of the greatest success stories in The United Methodist Church.
- Delegates marked the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of The United Methodist Building in Washington, D.C. The building is directly across from the U.S. Capitol.
- United Women in Faith captivated attendees with a presentation on the organization's substantial contributions to advocacy and education.
- United Methodist Men unveiled a new logo and celebrated getting out into the community through Scouting and other transformative ministries!
- Rev. Jasmine Smothers was elected as a member of the Commission on General Conference. The commission has oversight responsibility for all arrangements necessary for the meeting of the General Conference.
- Rev. Dr. Candace Lewis, president and dean of Gammon Theological Seminary, was elected as one of two CEOs of the University Senate.
- A class of 20 Candler students met at General Conference for two weeks, observing the decision-making process, researching legislation, and meeting with delegates.



## Who served on North Georgia's delegation?

### Clergy Members

Byron Thomas  
Phil Schroeder  
Alice Rogers  
Jasmine Smothers  
Shannon Karafanda  
Beth Larocca-Pitts  
Nora Colmenares  
Dalton Rushing  
Eric Lee  
Terry Walton  
Joya Abrams

### Lay Members

Randy Brown  
Odell Horne Jr  
Tonya Murphy  
Rachel Fullerton  
Nathaniel Abrams  
Lee Highsmith  
Amy King  
Jay Horton  
Maxine Easom  
Elizabeth Corr

### Clergy Alternate Members

Dana Everhart  
Will Zant  
Karen Kagiya  
Carolyn Stephens  
Jessica Terrell  
Catherine Booth Olson  
Dave Allen Grady

## About the 2024 General Conference

- The United Methodist General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church, which typically meets once every four years.
- General Conference met April 23-May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, NC.
- General Conference sets policy, worships and fellowships together, conducts the business of the church, and adopts a denominational budget.
- There are 862 delegates to this General Conference from around the world.
- The North Georgia Conference is allotted 22 delegates, however due to health reasons, status change, and departures from the denomination, 10 lay delegates and 11 clergy delegates will travel Charlotte, plus several clergy alternate delegates.
- There were 1,099 total petitions before the delegates of General Conference. The delegates acted on every petition.