



*General Conference 2024
Listening Session*

Agenda

- Opening Prayer
- Presentation by Delegation
- Questions and Answers
- Comments
- Closing Prayer



...and Know that I am God (Psalm 46)



Opening Prayer



General Conference Overview



- ❖ Held every four years, except 2020, which was postponed until 2024
- ❖ In Charlotte, NC, April 22-May 3, 2024
- ❖ 1st Week in Legislative Committees, 2nd Week in Plenary
- ❖ 14 Legislative Committees
- ❖ U.S. and all Central Conferences (Africa, Central and Southern Europe, Congo, Germany, Northern Europe and Eurasia, Philippines, and West Africa)
- ❖ U.S. Bishops have a goal of making U.S. church more broadly inclusive



- ❖ Peninsula-Delaware has two clergy and two lay delegates and one clergy reserve (as we lost three to disaffiliation, two resignations for personal reasons, and one lay reserve delegate who was commissioned)
- ❖ Our delegation:
 - ❖ Rev. Dr. Vicki Gordy-Stith (vgordy-stith@epworth.faith)
 - ❖ Rev. Megan Shitama Weston (megan@pecometh.org)
 - ❖ Mr. Bill Westbrook (wewestbrok@aol.com)
 - ❖ Ms. Regina Nichols (renjogn51@yahoo.com)
 - ❖ Rev. Jackie Ford (jford@pen-del.org) Clergy Reserve



Legislation Overview



- ❖ Regionalization
- ❖ Revised Social Principles
- ❖ GBHEM and Ministry Report
- ❖ Disaffiliation Petitions
- ❖ UMC Budget



Regionalization

Proposal to make U.S. a region and change the name of the Central Conferences to regions, creating equal partners



- ❖ Central Conferences created in 1968 merger, allowing the areas outside the U.S. to adapt the Book of Discipline to their own context (examples: Deacon and tenure of Bishops)
- ❖ Para. 101 states BOD parts I-V only adaptable by GC but part VI is adaptable currently
- ❖ Parts I-V include Constitution, General BOD, Doctrinal Standards and Theological Task, The Ministry of All Christians, Social Principles
- ❖ Several step process: Constitutional Amendments which delegates must approve by 2/3 vote, Annual Conferences must approve by 2/3 vote in aggregate, then create structure for U.S. Region



Rationale:

- ❖ Equity between regions and de-centering the U.S.
- ❖ Respect for contextual ministry while maintaining global unity
- ❖ Unity is redefined and strengthened
- ❖ Stewardship of all gifts (playground analogy)
- ❖ Renew our focus toward mission and ministry
- ❖ Maintain Wesleyan theological doctrine and identity
- ❖ Only regions would be allowed to adapt BOD



Revised Social Principles



- ❖ 1908 MEC first Social Creed to address industrialization–10 points
- ❖ 1939 Uniting Conference agreed that Social Creed would remain part of the BOD in perpetuity
- ❖ 1968 Merger with EUB–they had Moral Principles (member-focused behavior) and Methodist Church had Social Principles (outwardly-focused public policy) and we have been arguing since
- ❖ 2016 GC voted for GBCS Leaders to revise the Social Principles, allowing for variations in context



Revised Social Principles

- ❖ Integrate Scripture and Wesleyan theology
- ❖ Reflective of worldwide social concerns, not just U.S.
- ❖ 52 members of team from all Central Conferences and Jurisdictions
- ❖ Justice oriented, in four sections: Community of All Creation; Social Community; Economic Community; and Political Community
- ❖ Uses Quadrilateral to wrestle with issues: Scripture, experience, tradition, and reason
- ❖ Not law but GC adopted social teachings



- ❖ The Community of Creation section added language about indigenous peoples in the sections Environmental Racism, Food Justice, and Affirming Science and Traditional Wisdom.
- ❖ The Political Community section added new language on extrajudicial killings to speak to contexts where political acts are practiced by governments, including but not limited to the Philippines. The writing team also added a new section called Colonialism, Neocolonialism and their Consequences based on conversations with Africa and the Philippines.



- ❖ The Economic Community section added new language in Poverty and Income Inequality that rejected the prosperity gospel teaching that the accumulation of wealth was a sign of God's favor.
- ❖ The Social Community section included language on inheritance rights and widows as African United Methodists expressed concern about denying inheritance rights for vulnerable women, children, and grandchildren upon the death of the husband.



GBHEM and Ministry Report



- ❖ Remove age barrier for licensed local pastors (LLP's) and increase options to retain their license even if not under appointment
- ❖ Allow LLP's to complete Course of Study online (currently 50%)
- ❖ Shift more of the responsibility from GBHEM and the University Senate to Annual Conferences to determine, i.e., coursework required, approved seminaries,
- ❖ GBHEM would oversee but not dictate licensing schools and Advance Course of Study requirements
- ❖ Other



Disaffiliation Petitions



- ❖ Three petitions allow Annual Conferences (and two of those include Central Conferences) to disaffiliate
- ❖ Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace is still on the table
- ❖ Several petitions to extend the deadline for disaffiliations (December 31, 2026 or 2027 or 2028)
- ❖ One brand new petition for disaffiliation which includes the Annual Conferences continued payment of disaffiliated pastors' retiree health insurance plan and allows churches to use property for collateral in paying the Annual Conferences to disaffiliate
- ❖ Many delegates want to discontinue disaffiliations



UMC Budget



- ❖ Total General Conference Budget: \$346.7 million for the next four years, a reduction of 43% total
- ❖ General Agencies adapting and utilizing reserve for transition
- ❖ Reductions: (these funds paid by U.S. churches only)
 - ❖ World Service Fund~49%
 - ❖ Africa University~47.8%
 - ❖ Ministerial Education Fund~47.8%
 - ❖ Black College Fund~47.8%
 - ❖ Interdenominational Cooperation Fund



- ❖ Episcopal Funds~ 15.2%, reducing number of Bishops 54
 - ❖ Central Conferences pay 3.9%
 - ❖ 32 Bishops in the U.S. vs. 39 current
 - ❖ 22 Bishops in the Central Conferences vs. 20 total
- ❖ General Administration Fund increased by 15.4% in anticipation of a Special General Conference in 2026 (Central Conferences pay 3.9%)
- ❖ Contributing factors:
 - ❖ Closed 32.2% of U.S. churches with 80% of those through disaffiliation
 - ❖ U.S. church pays roughly 99% of general church budget



*My Goals (from Mainstream UMC and
Reconciling Ministries Network)*



- ❖ Regionalize
- ❖ Revise Social Principles
- ❖ Remove: Harmful LGBTQ language and disaffiliation process



Questions and Answers



Comments



Closing Prayer