

General Conference Webinar

April 9, 2024



Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference



General Conference Overview

Rev. Dr. Robert Martin



General Conference

Charlotte, NC

April 23–May 3, 2024

Matters of Interest

- Regionalization
- Revised Social Principles
- Inclusivity
- Wespeth Retirement Plan—COMPASS
- General Church Budget

Delegation Members to General Conference

- TWK Delegates—12
 - Legacy Memphis Delegation—4
 - Legacy Tennessee Delegation—8

Delegation Members to General Conference

- Total Delegates—862 (half Lay and half Clergy)
 - US—55.9%
 - Africa—32%
 - Philippines—6%
 - Europe and Russia—4.6%
 - Concordant Churches

Bishops

- Are not delegates
- Have no vote
- Cannot offer amendments
- Preside over the plenary sessions

Petitions

- 1,099 Petitions submitted
- First week of GC is legislative committees
- Not all petitions make it to plenary session
- All that do will receive a vote

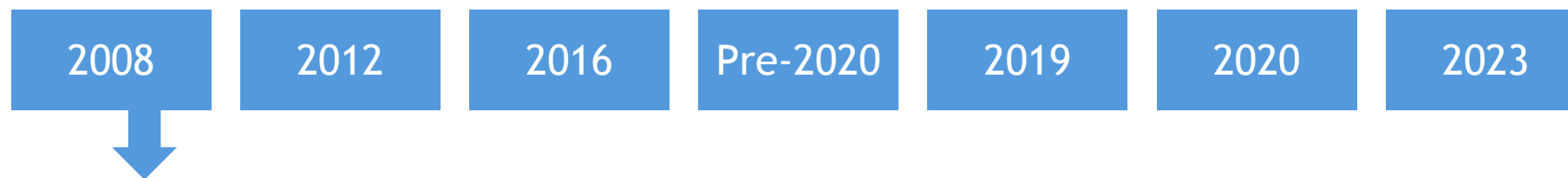
General Conference Purpose

- Revise the Book of Discipline and adopt Book of Resolutions
- Approve general church budget and allocate connectional giving (apportionments)
- Approve theological statements
- Approve membership of some boards and agencies and elect judicial council

Regionalization

Rev. Harriet Bryan and Rev. Dr. Stephen Handy

Regionalization—A Brief History



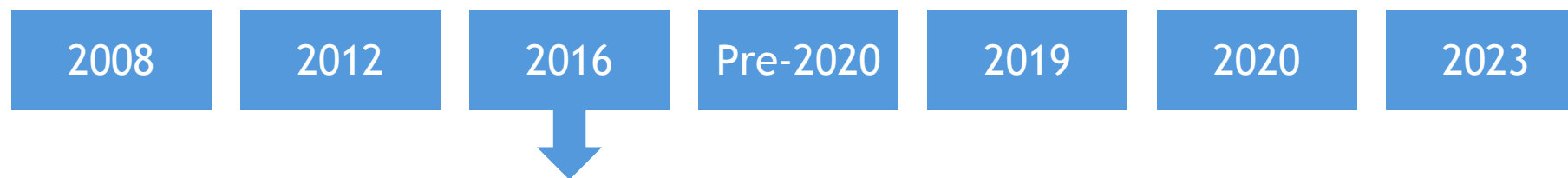
- Proposal for the U.S. to become a central conference to deal with national issues.
- Central conferences could adapt parts of *The Book of Discipline*.
- Constitutional amendments passed at GC but were not ratified by Annual Conferences.

Regionalization—A Brief History



- Study on the worldwide nature of the church
- Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters tasked with developing a *General Book of Discipline*

Regionalization—A Brief History



- The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters recognized need for U.S. to do adaptable work but believed this outside of their mandate.
- The Connectional Table partnered with Wespath to address adaptable work and attend to U.S. specific matters.

Regionalization—A Brief History



- The Connectional Table submitted legislation for a U.S. Regional Conference and an Interim U.S. Regional Legislative Committee.

Regionalization—A Brief History



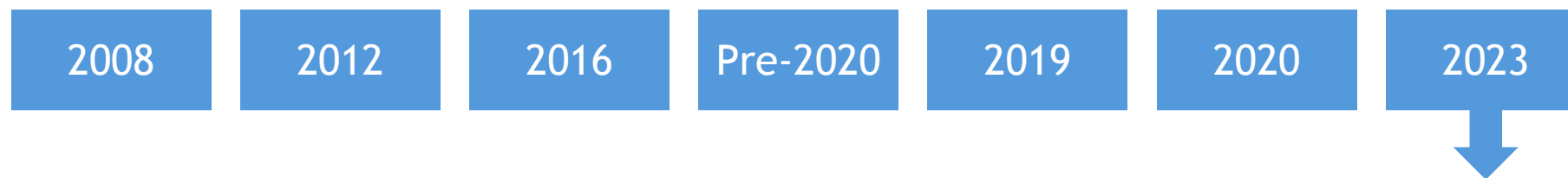
- Christmas Covenant team wrote regionalization legislation
- Legislation submitted by Philippines Annual Conference

Regionalization—A Brief History



- Connectional Table voted to affirm the Christmas Covenant

Regionalization—A Brief History



- The Connectional Table and the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters created a joint task force on regionalization using the Christmas Covenant petition as the template.
- The Worldwide Regionalization legislation was submitted to GC by the Standing Committee in late 2023.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKNrqeWVxpE>

Worldwide Regionalization

- Proposes formation of 4 Regional Conferences:
 - Africa
 - Europe
 - Philippines
 - United States
- Each Regional Conference can adapt portions of *The Book of Discipline* based on their context and cultures

Advantages to Regionalization

- Regionalization would strike a balance of power between the United States and central conferences.
- Regionalization would allow future General Conferences to focus solely on issues that affect the whole UMC—including matters of doctrine, church growth, and evangelization.
- Regionalization would allow better stewardship of resources.

What Would Not Change?

- Retain General Conference, Judicial Council, Council of Bishops, and General Boards and Agencies
- Regional Conference cannot adapt the Constitution, Doctrinal Standards (Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith), or the Social Principles

Who Could Approve Adaptations to *BOD*?

- Only the regional conferences, not the jurisdictional conferences or annual conferences

What Could Regional Conferences Adapt?

- Criteria for ordained and licensed ministry
- Criteria for specialized lay ministries
- Criteria for admission of and care for lay members
- Organization of the regional, annual, district, and charge conferences
- Hymnals and rituals

Ratification Process

- GC needs to approve the constitutional amendments by a 2/3 vote
- Amendments must be ratified by all annual conferences worldwide by a 2/3 aggregate vote of all members present and voting
- Council of Bishops certifies ratification by 2/3 aggregate vote
- Amendments take effect after ratification

What Does Regionalization Mean for TWK?

- No noticeable or immediate change
- May take multiple years for ratification and implementation
- TWK would not take up ratification of amendments until 2025

Revised Social Principles

Rev. Sam McGlothlin

What Are the Social Principles?

- The Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to human issues from a sound biblical and theological foundation.
- The UMC Social Principles advocate for social justice (marry faith and action). This work dates back to John Wesley, founder of Methodism in the 1730's.

Social Holiness—A Brief History

- **18th Century:** John Wesley advocates for prison reform, abolition of slavery, ending hunger and poverty, elimination of child labor
- **1908:** Methodists adopt first Social Creed
- **1968:** G.C. authorized commission to draft statement
- **1972:** G.C. adopted the first Social Principles document
- **2012 and 2016:** G.C. mandated Church and Society to guide revision as a whole

Why Church and Society?

- This General Church Agency is called to seek the implementation of our Social Principles and other policy statements on social concerns
- It has headquarters on Capitol Hill in Washington, D. C., and at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York City
- It communicates with policymakers and leaders around the world with the mission of transforming the world

The Revised Social Principles Process

- 52 Writing Team Members representing all Central Conferences and all five Jurisdictions
- Over 4,000 United Methodists read, reviewed, and commented on the draft
- In Spring 2019, the Church and Society Board approved document for adoption at the 2020 General Conference (which has been postponed to 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUsdhm7u49c>

What Has Changed?

- Four main sections
 1. Community of All Creation
 2. Social Community
 3. Economic Community
 4. Political Community
- Legislation for the Revised Social Principles crosses several legislative committees
- To read a full copy, visit:
<https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124>

Inclusivity

Tom Lee

The UMC Constitution—¶4

- “The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth.”
- “All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.”

Sexuality and Ordination

- The Ministry of the Ordained
- ¶ 304.3 “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- “Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as members, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.”

Sexuality and Marriage

- The Ministry of the Ordained, Unauthorized Conduct
- ¶ 341.6 “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

The Social Principles

- Human Sexuality
- ¶ 161(G) “Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant of monogamous heterosexual marriage.”
- “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.... We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.”

Clergy Retirement—Wespath

Jim Allen

https://youtu.be/h_W-OF5ypSs

Current CPP + CRSP

Salary		\$60,000	\$77,000	\$100,000
CPP	3.00%	\$1,800	\$2,310	\$3,000
DC	3.00%	\$1,800	\$2,310	\$3,000
DB	7.00%	\$4,200	\$5,390	\$7,000
Total Cost		\$7,800	\$10,010	\$13,000
% of Salary		13.0%	13.0%	13.0%

CPP + Proposed Compass

Salary		\$60,000	\$77,000	\$100,000
CPP	3.00%	\$1,800	\$2,310	\$3,000
Match	4.00%	\$2,400	\$3,080	\$4,000
DC	3.00%	\$1,800	\$2,310	\$3,000
Fixed \$150/M		\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800
Total Cost		\$7,800	\$9,500	\$11,800
% of Salary		13.0%	12.3%	11.8%

General Church Budget

John Pearce

Church Year Closures by Year

Closure Reason	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Grand Total
Abandoned	3	8	15	21	8	55
Disaffiliation	20	76	145	1835	5597	7673
Discontinued	456	348	287	237	200	1528
Financial	17	38	58	53	65	231
Merger	12	32	54	52	39	189
No longer Ecumenical Shared Ministry		1				1
Grand Total	508	503	559	2198	5909	9677

Impact of Disaffiliation on Local Church Net Expenditures

Jurisdiction	Actual Net Expenditure Reduction through 12/31/2023	Projected 2024 & 2025 Net Expenditure Reduction from 2018 Base Year ²	Total Projected Reduction due to Disaffiliation since 2018
North Central	19.6%	4.1%	23.7%
Northeastern	11.5%	4.4%	15.9%
South Central	30.9%	3.7%	34.6%
Western	2.0%	2.6%	4.6%
Southeastern	30.4%	3.1%	33.5%
Total	24.3%	3.6%	27.9%

² This estimate is from the survey received from the annual conferences in January 2024.

Base Rate Changes for the Next Quad

Base Percentage	Base Percentage Rate	Rate Change from 2017-2020
2017–2020 GC Approved	3.293%	0.0%
2025–2028 ADCA	2.539%	-22.9%
Add \$15M to EF by increasing Base %	2.652%	-19.5%
Add \$15M to EF by increasing Base % for \$7.5M and reducing Benefit Trust agency allocations by \$7.5M	2.595%	-21.2%
TWK Base Rate =	10%	

Impact of Updated Projections

In Thousands of Dollars

	A	B	C	D	E	F
	2017-2020 Approved	2025-2028 Budget in ADCA	% Change from 2017- 2020	Revised 2025-2028 Feb. 2024	% Change from 2017- 2020	% Change from ADCA
Apportionment Projection						
Episcopal Fund	\$ 92,019	\$ 68,820	-25.2%	\$ 63,008	-31.5%	-8.4%
Ministerial Education Fund	\$ 104,950	\$ 60,421	-42.4%	\$ 55,318	-47.3%	-8.4%
Black College Fund	\$ 41,863	\$ 24,101	-42.4%	\$ 22,066	-47.3%	-8.4%
Africa University	\$ 9,369	\$ 5,394	-42.4%	\$ 4,938	-47.3%	-8.4%
Interdenominational Coop. Fund	\$ 8,003	\$ 2,467	-69.2%	\$ 2,259	-71.8%	-8.4%
General Administration Fund:						
GCFA (Incl. Fixed Charges from WS & ICF)	\$ 24,307	\$ 12,680	-47.8%	\$ 11,609	-52.2%	-8.4%
Archives & History	\$ 4,134	\$ 4,150	0.4%	\$ 3,800	-8.1%	-8.4%
General Conference	\$ 11,822	\$ 14,900	26.0%	\$ 13,642	15.4%	-8.4%
Other General Administration	\$ 4,211	\$ 2,760	-34.5%	\$ 2,527	-40.0%	-8.4%
Total General Administration & GCFA						
Fixed Charges	\$ 44,474	\$ 34,490	-22.4%	\$ 31,577	-29.0%	-8.4%
World Service Fund:						
CT, COSROW, GCORR, Ethnic Plans	\$ 27,134	\$ 27,134	0.0%	\$ 24,843	-8.4%	-8.4%
All Other World Service	\$ 276,221	\$ 147,708	-46.5%	\$ 135,233	-51.0%	-8.4%
Total World Service Fund	\$ 303,356	\$ 174,842	-42.4%	\$ 160,076	-47.2%	-8.4%
Total All Funds	\$ 604,034	\$ 370,535	-38.7%	\$ 339,240	-43.8%	-8.4%
Change from ADCA				\$ (31,294)		
Change from 2017-2020				\$ (264,794)		

Other Considerations

Request from Council of Bishops

- The changes necessary to bring the Episcopal Fund from the current funding level to one commiserate with the economic changes of the denomination can't be done all at once without harm.
- COB Leadership initiated with GCFA and the General Agencies on how to solve the issue.
- Final request is for an additional \$15 million in apportionments be added back to the Episcopal Fund by some means.

Fund Issues

Episcopal Fund Pays For:

- Salaries and Benefits for Bishops
- Travel and meetings
- Housing, office and equipment
- Council of Bishops office and staff

Fund Issues—Jurisdictional Bishops

- Currently 39 bishops in US (5 Jurisdictions)
- 7 will retire 9/1/24 = 32
- ADCA Budget will fund 20–22 for 2025-2028
- Need ~\$15 million more to fund the 32 for quadrennium
- 14 mandatory retirements in 2028
 - 5 mandatory retirements if 2026 Jurisdictional Conferences are held

Fund Issues—Jurisdictional Bishops

- What is target for number of bishops?
- Need no elections in 2024
 - NE wants to elect two
 - West wants to elect two
- Disciplinary formula for determining number of bishops needs updating
- Need denomination-wide study to examine role and function of episcopacy and what we can afford

Fund Issues—Central Conference Bishops

- Currently 20
- Elect only 2 in 2024; not 5 as planned

Episcopal Fund Funding Source Options

1. **\$7.5 million**

Change the current proposed base rate of 2.54% to 2.596%

- This will raise the overall budget by **\$7.5 million**
- All \$7.5 million would be allocated to the **Episcopal fund**
- This new base rate equals a decrease of 21.2% from the base rate of 3.28% approved by the 2016 General Conference for 2017-2020
- This change costs TWK about \$50,000 / year

Episcopal Fund Funding Source

2. \$7.5 million

Decrease allocations to General Agencies by \$7.5M and shift it to the Episcopal Fund

- Offset the decreased allocation to the General Agencies by increasing the distribution from the Benefit Trust in 2025-28.
- Benefit Trust—estb. 1996 to provide funds for GA benefits
- Source was excess plan assets from legacy defined benefit plans
- Additional legacy plans with excess funding were identified by Wespath, totaling ~\$17million.
- This additional Benefit Trust funding is available upon passage of 2020 legislation from Wespath to end these additional plans

Two Funding Source Options

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Change from ADCA				\$ (23,794)		
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Questions and Answers

Rev. Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland