

UNDERSTANDING VOTING AT CLERGY SESSION & ANNUAL CONFERENCE (2025)

A Guide for Clergy, Lay Members, CLMs, and Those Serving Local Churches

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO HOLY CONFERENCING

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the head of the Church and the One who calls all people to walk together in mission and ministry.

Each year, the Annual Conference is a sacred gathering—a time for clergy and lay members of The United Methodist Church to discern the Spirit’s leading, celebrate ministry, and make decisions that shape the future of the Church. This is not just a meeting. It is holy work. It is a time of deep connection, shared leadership, and covenant renewal.

Whether you are a full connection member, provisional member, associate member, local pastor, supply pastor, certified lay minister, newly elected lay member, you have a long-storied history serving as delegate to Annual Conference, or one of the many others faithfully serving, you may be wondering:

- What is my role?
- Do I have a vote?
- Do I have a voice?
- How can I participate?

This guide will walk you through those questions, so that you come to annual conference not just informed, but inspired.

SECTION 1: A WORD TO CLERGY – YOUR PRESENCE MATTERS

If you are a clergy person under appointment or in relationship with the Annual Conference, your presence at Annual Conference and Clergy Session is a covenantal responsibility and sacred expectation.

As clergy, you are expected to:

- Be present at all sessions of the Annual Conference, including Clergy Session
- Participate fully through worship, discernment, learning, and voting
- Represent your ministry setting faithfully
- Walk alongside your lay members in shared leadership

When clergy are present, covenant is modeled to the community and the world. When clergy are absent without cause, the connection suffers. If you are unable to attend, you must notify your District Superintendent and complete the [TWK Clergy/Diaconal Request for Excused Absence form](#).

Your presence matters—not just for what you vote on but for the spiritual and communal leadership you bring.

SECTION 1A: A WORD TO LAITY – YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Laity, your presence at Annual Conference is a gift to the Church. You are not just participants—you are leaders, disciples, and co-laborers in God's mission.

You have been elected or appointed to represent your local church, your community, your district, but most importantly, those whose voices might be absent from our midst. That calling is sacred. You bring with you the stories, needs, and hopes of the people you serve alongside week after week. You bring practical wisdom, compassionate perspective, and a prophetic voice.

As lay members, you are encouraged to:

- Prepare by reading legislation and understanding key issues
- Participate fully in worship, discussion, and holy conferencing
- Vote with prayerful discernment and spiritual maturity
- Share with your congregation and community about the work of the Annual Conference
- Encourage other laity in your congregation to grow in leadership and participation

Your voice and presence are a faithful reminder that the Church is not clergy-led but spirit-empowered by all the baptized. So, whether this is your first conference or your fiftieth, thank you for showing up. Thank you for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with clergy. Thank you for making decisions that shape our shared future.

Your voice matters. Your leadership matters. And the Church can only be the Church because of your faithfulness.

SECTION 2: VOTING AT CLERGY SESSION – WHO, WHEN, AND WHY

The Clergy Session is a unique gathering where the clergy of the Annual Conference:

- Discern the readiness and character of those called to licensed, commissioned, and ordained ministry
- Make decisions about clergy relations with the conference
- Celebrate transitions, retirements, and ministry milestones

You **MAY vote** in the Clergy Session if you are:

- A clergy member in full connection
- A member of the Board of Ordained Ministry (lay, associate member, or local pastors serving on the board)

You **MAY NOT vote** in the Clergy Session if you are:

- A provisional member
- An associate member or affiliate member (unless serving on BOM)
- A full-time or part-time local pastor (unless serving on BOM)
- Clergy from another annual conference or denomination
- Laity (unless serving on BOM)

Voice may still be granted, especially for those in the ordination process. Whether you vote or not, your presence and participation enrich our discernment.

SECTION 3: ANNUAL CONFERENCE – WHERE THE WHOLE CHURCH GATHERS

At Annual Conference, clergy and lay members come together to make decisions about the mission, budget, and direction of the Church.

You **CAN vote** at Annual Conference if you are:

- A clergy member in full connection
- A provisional member
- An associate member
- A full-time or part-time local pastor under appointment
- A lay member of the Annual Conference (elected or by office)

You **CANNOT vote** at Annual Conference if you are:

- Clergy from another conference or denomination
- Clergy on Honorable or Administrative Location
- Clergy on Involuntary Leave of Absence

Even if you don't have a vote, your presence and prayers contribute to the connectional discernment of the body.

SECTION 4: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS – A SACRED VOTE WITH GLOBAL IMPACT

In 2025, United Methodists around the world in every Annual Conference will vote on **constitutional amendments** to the Constitution of The United Methodist Church. These are not ordinary legislative changes—they are proposals to revise the foundational legal and theological structure that governs how the denomination is organized and functions globally.

What is the Constitution of The United Methodist Church?

The Constitution, found in Part I of the *Book of Discipline*, defines the basic organization, governance, and rights of the Church. It includes the Restrictive Rules, which protect the denomination's core doctrines, and outlines the powers and limitations of various bodies such as General Conference, bishops, and the Judicial Council.

What is a Constitutional Amendment?

A constitutional amendment is a proposed change to the Constitution. Amendments can address issues such as regional governance (e.g., regionalization), inclusivity, voting rights, episcopal structures, and more. These changes are significant because they reshape how the global Church relates to itself and its members.

How Many Amendments Will Be Considered?

In 2025, United Methodists will consider four constitutional amendments passed by the 2024 General Conference. These include amendments related to regionalization, anti-racism, inclusiveness, episcopal accountability, and educational requirements for clergy members. Each one must be ratified by the Annual Conferences before it becomes part of the Constitution.

Who May Vote on Constitutional Amendments?

You **MAY vote** on constitutional amendments if you are:

- A clergy member in full connection (including those on sabbatical, voluntary, family, transitional, or medical leave)
- A lay member of the Annual Conference (elected or by office)
- A diaconal minister or active deaconess (lay members, per Discipline ¶33, Article II)

You **MAY NOT vote** if you are:

- A provisional deacon or elder (Discipline ¶602.1.b)
- An associate or affiliate member (Discipline ¶602.1.c)
- A full-time or part-time local pastor (Discipline ¶602.1.d)
- A clergy person on Honorable or Administrative Location
- A lay observer or alternate not seated for an absent member

What Is the Ratification Process?

- A constitutional amendment must first be passed by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference.
- It is then sent to all Annual Conferences for a vote.
- To be ratified, it must receive a two-thirds majority of **all votes cast across all Annual Conferences worldwide**.
- The Council of Bishops certifies the final results. An announcement concerning results is expected in late 2025.

Why This Matters—Even If You Cannot Vote

Our United Methodist polity is both connectional and representative. Not everyone votes on every matter, but everyone participates through prayer, presence, discernment, and leadership. Those who cannot vote still shape our identity by listening, learning, and supporting the decisions made. The Constitution protects the Church's integrity and unity, and the amendment process ensures broad global agreement before foundational changes are made.

If you cannot vote, your role remains vital. Your conversations, witness, and encouragement empower those who can vote. You help shape the spiritual climate of our connection.

Where Can I Learn More?

Full information about each amendment, including rationale and text, is available online:

- [Amendments to the Constitution - ResourceUMC](#)
- The TWK Conference leadership is putting together additional resources to help us discern and be prepared for discussions and the vote.

Let us be prayerful, informed, and engaged as we take part in shaping the Church's future together.

SECTION 5: IF YOU DON'T HAVE A VOTE—YOU STILL BELONG

You may not have a vote in every room. You may not cast a ballot. But let me be clear: you are not invisible. You are not on the margins. You are not less important.

If you are a lay observer, a supply pastor, or someone who serves the Church without a formal vote, your role is still vital to the life of our connection.

The United Methodist Church is not merely a system of votes and rules. It is a Spirit-led body, made up of hearts and hands, voices and visionaries, prayers and presence. And your presence is a sacred offering.

You bring wisdom born of ministry in the trenches. You bring care for your congregation and community. You bring the questions, stories, and hopes that remind us why we gather. You are part of the heartbeat of our Church.

So come.

Come with your insights and questions.

Come with your prayers and your hopes.

Come to listen, to learn, to bless, and to be blessed.

This is your Church, too. The table is wide enough. The Spirit is big enough. The mission is shared.

You belong here. And we are better because you are here.

CONCLUSION: WE'RE BETTER BECAUSE YOU'RE HERE

We are not just a church with a connection. We are a connected church. Your presence, your voice, your prayers, and your faithfulness are threads in this sacred fabric.

Thank you for saying yes to this calling.

Thank you for showing up.

Thank you for making space for others.

Thank you for being the Church.

Let us listen deeply. Let us speak truth in love.

Let us make room for the Spirit to move.

And let us trust that God is doing a new thing—through all of us.

Helpful Resources

- Constitutional Amendments (2024 General Conference): [resourceumc.org - amendments](https://resourceumc.org/amendments)
- United Methodist Book of Discipline (2020): Part I - The Constitution
- [TWK Clergy/Diaconal Excused Absence Request Form \(2025 edition\)](#)
- Additional resources from the Council of Bishops and General Conference websites