

## Ballot 1: Regionalization

There will be four ballots taken at annual conference on the proposed amendments to our constitution. The first ballot covers all the changes related to restructuring our church into an organizational vision called Worldwide Regionalization.

The goal of Regionalization is to allow United Methodists to best connect to their communities - whether they be in Africa, the Philippines, the United States, or Europe. We all live in unique circumstances. Our neighborhoods are different. The needs of those around us are different. Our cultures are special.

With Regionalization in place, we can all better minister to the people around us because each region of the church can make decisions that will ensure ministry and outreach efforts will be successful in each of our specific settings. Every United Methodist can better live into our shared mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

With Regionalization, all parts of the denomination will be equal, which will help us all to build our trust in each other as we continue to work and minister together. We all will have the same rights and privileges. No longer will it seem that The United Methodist Church is centered in the United States. Regionalization also dismantles colonialism as all parts of the denomination embrace their autonomy. Regional conferences will all stand strong on equal footing.

The Worldwide Regionalization legislation proposes to change the names of the existing Central Conferences (Central Conferences include all churches outside of the U.S.) into regional conferences. It would also create a new U.S. regional conference, enabling The UMC in the U.S. to decide on specific U.S. matters. The U.S. regional conference will have the same powers and duties as all other regional conferences. An interim regional committee will ease the transition as the U.S. Regional Conference prepares for its first meeting. The five U.S. jurisdictions will continue, with a committee studying the future of those jurisdictions.

Regionalization does not change what all United Methodists believe. Our beliefs are at the center of everything we do. They are what ground us, unite us, and lead us forward. These beliefs are detailed in our Book of Discipline, and outline what we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the importance of scripture, and other foundations of our faith. The Book of Discipline helps to define who we are as a worldwide denomination. It acts as a compass, bringing clarity and consistency among local churches around the world. As such, there are some foundational parts of our Book of Discipline that all regional conferences will continue to share: the same Constitution, Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task, The Ministry of All Christians, and Social Principles enacted by General Conference. These are NOT adaptable by regional conferences.

Another thing that will NOT CHANGE is our ministries. Our annual conference is carrying on with the important work of evangelism, care and prayer. We are putting our faith into action in world-transforming ways.

The only change Regionalization will bring to this type of work is more power and freedom to be sure our ministries engage people in our unique settings and our culture.

With regionalization, we will also see NO changes when it comes to the Council of Bishops, the Judicial Council, the General Agencies of the church, and General Conference.

Knowing that regionalization will not change these things, what will regionalization do?

Regionalization WILL transform General Conference. The agenda of General Conference sessions will no longer be dominated by U.S.-specific topics. The UMC in the U.S. will have our own regional conference in which we will deal with these matters. This is the same way central conferences have dealt with topics specific to them for a long time.

As we gather for General Conference, the business at hand will be issues that apply to topics that impact all of us. This will save us a lot of time and will better unite us because no business dealt with at General Conference will feel as if it does not apply to each and every United Methodist around the world. General Conference will keep full legislative power on “all matters distinctively connectional,” and will decide with a 60% majority what portions of the Book of Discipline regional conferences are allowed to adapt.

Outside of transforming General Conference, Regionalization will allow regional conferences to contextualize ministry in their own setting in several ways. First, regional conferences will be able to draft and publish their own regional Book of Discipline, hymnals, books of worship, and other liturgical resources. This is what Central Conferences have been doing for some time, and that will not change. The biggest change is that the U.S. Regional Conference would now be able to do the same thing.

Second, regional conferences will be able to set requirements for ordination and licensed ministry with respect to their needs and resources. This also something the Central Conferences have been doing all along.

Third, regional conferences will set standards for lay membership. This too is not new for Central Conferences.

Fourth, regional conferences will be able to develop practices around marriage ceremonies, funerals, and other rites that align with cultural contexts and laws in each country.

Fifth, regional conferences will reorganize their annual conferences, districts, or charge conferences to best serve their missional needs and convene their own judicial courts.

Sixth, regional conferences will be able to work with annual conferences to ensure policies and practices align with the laws in each country.

For Regionalization to be put into place, we must amend the United Methodist Constitution. The legislation needed to make Regionalization a reality passed at our most recent General Conference, with an overwhelming majority of General Conference delegates adopting the plan in 2024. Now those changes to the constitution must be ratified, meaning clergy and lay delegates to annual conferences across the world must vote to approve the changes. While the vote is held at annual conference sessions, the vote is not counted by annual conference, but by individual voting member. It is therefore vital that every voting member of your Annual Conference cast their ballot. Unlike other Annual Conference items up for a vote, constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority of *every individual vote* cast across the globe. Each vote contributes to the overall outcome because they are part of an aggregate vote count, meaning the votes do not stay at the Annual Conference level. Each individual vote will be tallied by the Council of Bishops, hopefully by the end of 2025, and once all votes across the globe have been counted, we will know the outcome of the vote.

Regionalization is an important opportunity for our church to enhance adaptive evangelism, emphasize our denomination's global nature, and strengthen our connection by prioritizing our mission and ministry. Every vote counts, so when it comes time to vote at our annual conference, be present for the vote and voice your opinion, and encourage other delegates to do the same. Together, we can transform our ability to be the church God is calling us to be in the world and in our local contexts.