

Resolution to Create a Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Parental Leave Policy

WHEREAS, our United Methodist Social Principles affirm, “[We] endorse policies that guarantee every worker paid time off, including but not limited to... parental leave for those caring for newborns or newly adopted children”;¹ and

WHEREAS, “Maternal Health: The Church's Role” in the United Methodist *Book of Resolutions* issues this call to action: “Align church policies to support maternal health, including paid family, parental and medical leave”;² and

WHEREAS, The United Methodist Church proclaims, “Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received”³ and “Nurture and support are fundamental to the proper functioning of families,”⁴ and

WHEREAS, Scripture calls us to provide care for each other as members of Christ's family (“But if someone doesn't provide for their own family, and especially for a member of their household, they have denied the faith.” 1 Timothy 5:8, CEB); and

WHEREAS, The World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization advocate for at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave;⁵ and

WHEREAS, The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* states, “Maternity or paternity leave, not to exceed one-fourth of a year, will be available and shall be granted by the bishop and the cabinet, and the executive committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry to any local pastor, provisional member, associate member, or clergy member in full connection who so requests it at the birth or arrival of a child into the home for purposes of adoption”;⁶ and

WHEREAS, the parental leave policy as written in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* only guarantees paid leave for eight weeks, has been considered open to interpretation, and has not always applied equitably across the connection, since “one-fourth of year”⁷ is thirteen weeks; and

WHEREAS, several annual conferences have adopted policies maintaining compensation for thirteen weeks and assisting local congregations in paying for coverage during the leave; and

WHEREAS, congregations have disproportionate access to resources, and generous parental leave policies positively affect clergy well-being, recruitment, and retention throughout the annual conference; and

WHEREAS, supporting families lives up to our calling to welcome all generations as Christ welcomes children (Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:15, Luke 18:16), expressed in our baptismal covenant when we promise to “nurture these children in Christ’s holy Church” and “surround these persons with a community of love”;⁸

¹ 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline* ¶161, The Economic Community, Economic Justice, C. The Dignity of Work.

² 2020/2024 *Book of Resolutions*, 4203. Maternal Health: The Church’s Role.

³ 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline* ¶161 The Economic Community, Economic Justice, C. The Dignity of Work.

⁴ 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline* 162 The Social Community, The Nurturing Community, A. The Family.

⁵ Maternity Protection, Compliance with International Labor Standards.

<https://www.who.int/data/nutrition/nlis/info/maternity-protection-compliance-with-international-labour-standards>

⁶ The 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline*, 356.

⁷ The 2020/2024 *Book of Discipline*, 356.

⁸ "The Services of the Baptismal Covenant of The United Methodist Church as Revised to Align with the 2008 Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions," Copyright ©1976, 1980, 1985, 1989, 2009 The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference directs the Board of Ordained Ministry, in consultation with COSROW, the Cabinet and other stakeholders deemed appropriate by the Board of Ordained Ministry, to develop a Parental Leave Policy for Clergy to be submitted to the clergy session of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference for approval and presented to the 2026 session of the Annual Conference for final action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in so doing, the Board of Ordained Ministry give attention to addressing concerns presented by disproportionate access to resources in local churches and other ministry settings and to adopting and implementing a policy that will be adaptable to various church sizes and to a variety of ministry settings and contexts; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference directs the Human Resources Committee to review the current parental leave policy for lay employees of the Conference and consider potential revisions consistent with these principles; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Conference Council on Finance and Administration shall be consulted as to any impact such a Policy may have on the 2026-27 budget of the Annual Conference as well as future annual budgets; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference will advocate in Tennessee and Kentucky for parental leave and foster/resource family support in order to assist clergy families, laity, and local churches in caring for families in the church and beyond the church.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Sarah McWhirt-Toler, COSROW Chair