



Introduction To The 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences

Author's Note: This year at our 2015 Annual Conference we will elect delegates to both The General and The Southeastern Jurisdictional Conferences which will be held in 2016. The following is intended to be informational in nature, neutral on issues and hopefully helpful to those in the South Carolina Annual Conference that would enjoy and benefit from knowing more about these two Conferences.

Lay Servant Leadership Team

I. Organization

One of the forerunners of The United Methodist Church was The Methodist Episcopal Church in America which was established in 1784 at the Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, Maryland.¹ Not surprisingly, part of our Church structure was patterned after the United States Government:



The Council provides general oversight of the ministry and mission of the church and spiritual leadership to the entire church connection. Composed of all active and retired bishops, the council meets as a group at least once a year.

The primary legislative body of The UMC, and is the only body that speaks officially for the church. Meets every four years to determine legislation affecting connectional matters. It is composed of delegates elected from every Annual Conference. Half of the delegates are lay and half clergy.

The UMC's highest judicial body or "court," the Judicial Council interprets church law and determines constitutionality of proceedings at all levels of church life. Its nine members (laity and clergy) are elected by the General Conference and normally meet twice a year

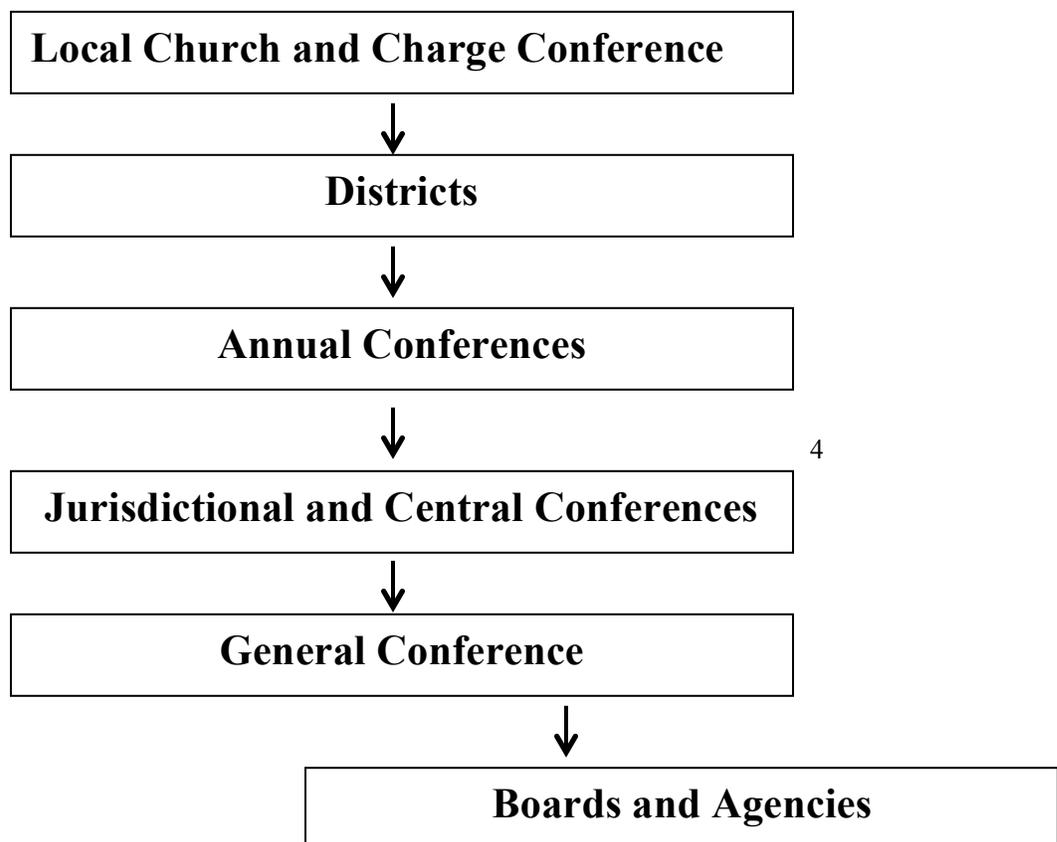
¹ The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 by the union of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church (Germanic roots).

II. “The Connection”

Our founder, John Wesley, recognized that to effectively accomplish the mission of “spreading scriptural holiness”, we need to work together, he therefore established what he referred to as the “connexion”

Today, “*Connectionalism is an important part of our identity as United Methodists. It is a vital web of interactive relationships..., with the purpose of equipping local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry throughout the world, all to the glory of God. It provides us with a wonderful opportunity to carry out our mission in unity and strength.*”²

The following is a description of the organizational aspect of our connection starting with the local church. The organization is designed to support the local church since the “local church provides the most significant area through which disciple making occurs”.³



Brief descriptions of the functions of these components of our Church can be found in Appendix A

² The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012, ¶701 (hereafter referred to as BOD 2012).

³ *ibid*, ¶201

⁴ There are five Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States and seven Central Conferences outside the United States.

III. General and Jurisdictional Conferences

a. Overview

Our Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church is the official document that defines our organization, what we believe, and how we (laity and clergy) work together to accomplish our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Contents include:

- The Constitution
- Doctrinal Statements and General Rules
- Social Principles
- The Local Church
- The Ministry of the Ordained
- The Superintendency (District Superintendents and Bishops)
- The Conferences (from Local Church The General Conference)
- Administrative Order
- Church Property
- Judicial Administration

The General Conference is the top policy-making body of The United Methodist Church which meets once every four years. The Conference can revise church law, as well as adopt resolutions on current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for church-wide programs. Changes are reflected in revisions to The Book of Discipline.

Topics come to the General Conference through a petition process. “Any organization, clergy member, or lay member of The United Methodist Church may petition The General Conference...”⁵ The General Conference runs two weeks. During the first week delegates review petitions and formulate recommendations. The second week is a plenary session where items are voted up or down.

b. Delegates & the Election Process

“The General Conference shall be composed of not less than 600 or more than 1,000 delegates, one half of whom shall be clergy and one half lay members, to be elected by the annual conferences”.⁶ The Commission on the 2016 General Conference has set the target number of delegates at 850. That number is not exact. It could vary by a few people either direction to meet representation requirements under church law. The SC Annual Conference has been allocated 16 delegates (8 lay and 8 clergy). The first 16 elected will serve both General and Jurisdictional Conferences We will elect an additional 16 (8 lay and 8 clergy) as Jurisdictional Conference Delegates. All 32 that are elected will be Jurisdictional Delegates.

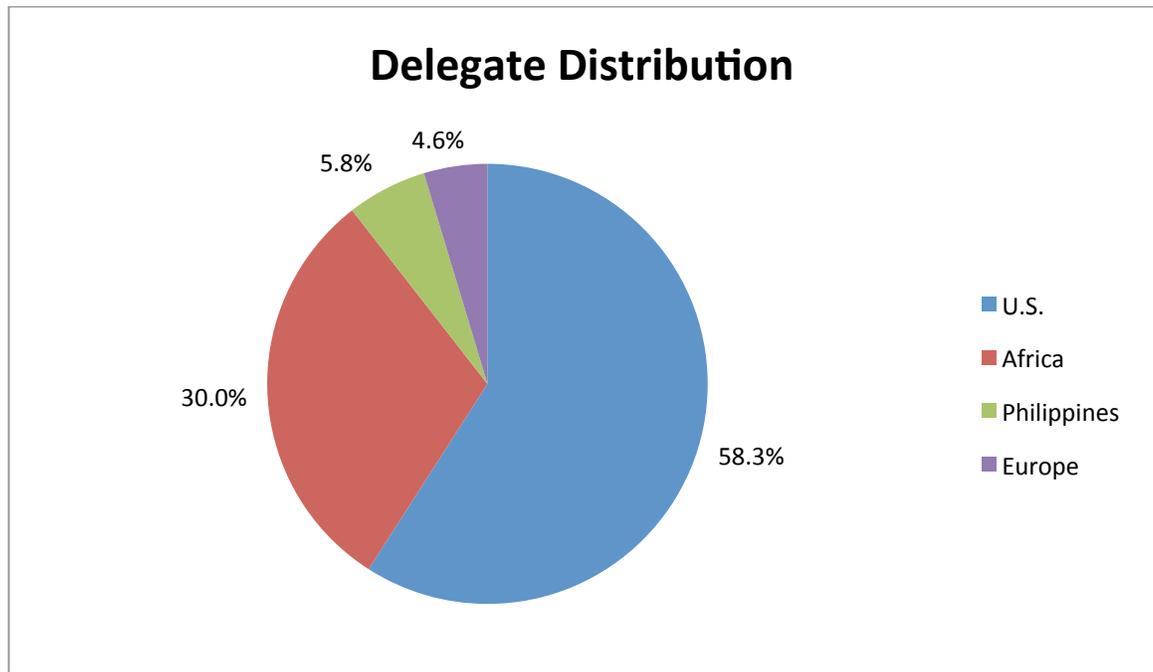
This year at our 2015 Annual Conference, we will elect our delegates for the 2016 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. Clergy vote for and elect clergy and laity vote for and elect the lay delegates. Instructions for voting will be given at the Annual Conference. We will have electronic voting devices which should speed up the process.

⁵ BOD 2012 ¶507

⁶ BOD 2012 ¶13

There are 51 lay people who have been nominated. Biographical information can be found on the Conference web site, umcsc.org.

The global distribution of delegates follows:



The United Methodist Church has about 12 million members worldwide. We are growing in Africa and the Philippines and slowly contracting in the U.S. and Europe. Hence, the percentage of delegates from Africa and the Philippines is gradually increasing. Some projections suggest the U.S. will have less than a majority of the delegates by the 2020 General Conference.

c. General Conference: Known Key Legislative Topics

- i. Introduction: While the General Conference will address multiple topics, the two subjects that follow are likely to take a significant percentage of The Conference's time and receive the bulk of the press coverage.
- ii. Globalization of the Church: The question is: Are there essentials of Our Church that need to be globally uniform, and are there parts of our structure where we would benefit from regional flexibility. Decisions around this topic should be clearly reflected in our Book of Discipline.

These thoughts have been under consideration since the 2004 General Conference. The 2012 General Conference directed the *Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters* in cooperation with the *Committee on Faith and Order* to recommend to the 2016 General Conference which sections of The Book of Discipline are and which sections are not subject to regional adaptation. These suggestions will be reviewed and perfected by the 2016 General Conference with a final vote to be taken at the 2020 General Conference. Considerations include, but

are not limited, to the election and term of office for Bishops; current rules require seminary training for clergy prior to ordination at approved schools, there are no approved seminaries in the Philippines; and property rules are based on U.S. law which not globally applicable. For additional information see: <http://www.umc.org/news-and-media/plans-under-way-to-make-discipline-truly-global>.

iii. Homosexuality and The United Methodist Church:

Note: It is the author's intention to attempt to present, in this paper, facts and a neutral position on this topic. Readers are asked to prayerfully draw their own conclusions.

The United Methodist Church is divided over this issue as is the nation. A few bullets may be helpful:

- **LGBT** stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.
- National status –
 - As of mid-April, 37 states have legalized gay marriage and 13 have same sex marriage bans.
 - The press and broadcasting enterprises seem mostly pro LGBT rights. Some feel the LG “battle” has been won and are moving to transgender issues.
 - Churches are split on the topic. See the latest Pew report in Appendix C
- The United Methodist Church
 - The United Methodist Church is deeply divided on this issue. Our 2012 Book of Discipline bans gay marriages in our churches and prohibits self-avowed practicing homosexuals from being ordained or being appointed to a church. “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers the practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.” References to homosexuality in The Book Discipline are included herein as Appendix D
 - There is a resolution in our pre-conference material related to ¶160F to recommend to the 2016 General Conference to change the language in this paragraph. Please read this resolution. The issue is: should the tension between the language that says homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching and the language imploring us not to reject lesbian and gay members and friends be removed or is it an appropriate tension.
- 2016 General Conference
 - Lobbyists on both sides of this issue have been active at UMC meetings since the 2012 General Conference and in some cases preventing much needed meaningful dialog.
 - There are groups drafting legislation to split the Church over this issue.
 - Heavy lobby activity is anticipated at General Conference as the body attempts to deal with this issue.
- Scriptural Authority
 - The most often quoted Scriptural references are: Genesis 19:1-29, Judges 19:22 (these two references discuss rape and power), Leviticus 18:22,

Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:23-27, 1st Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1st Timothy 1:10. The Gospels do not mention homosexuality per se, however, Jesus does affirm marriage between a man and a woman when asked about divorce (Matthew 19:3-12 & Mark 10:2-12)

- Some view Scriptural references to love of neighbor as more authoritative than the previously mentioned references. Some seek a middle way. It is a complex question.

d. Jurisdictional Conference

- i. It is expected that the Southeastern Jurisdiction will need to elect 3 – 5 Bishops in 2016.
- ii. The 2016 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will be held at Lake Junaluska Conference Center July 13-16, 2016.
- iii. The SC delegation to the General Conference tries to meet with Episcopal nominees within the Jurisdiction during General Conference, simply to get to know the nominees better prior to the election process at the Jurisdictional Conference.
- iv. Bishops are assigned to episcopal areas by the *Jurisdictional Episcopal Committee*. The Committee is made up of one clergy and one lay person from each Annual Conference's General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation. The first elected lay and clergy persons normally join the Episcopal Committee.

Appendix A: Organization of the Connection

- **Local Church and Charge Conference**
 - *It is primarily at the level of the charge, consisting of one or more local churches, that the church encounters the world. The local church is a strategic base from which Christians move out to the structures of society...Therefore, the local church is to minister to persons in the community where the church is located...to cooperate in ministry with other local churches...and to participate in the worldwide mission of the church....⁷*
 - A charge is one or more local churches to which a pastor is appointed.
 - There are slightly more than 1,000 churches in the SC Annual Conference.
- **Districts**
 - Groups of churches within a geographic area. The SC Annual conference has 12 Districts. Churches within a District are encouraged to cooperate in ministry.
 - Led by a District Superintendent (“DS”) who normally serve 6 to 8 years. DSs are elders who return to serve a local church when their term is over. DSs are part of the Bishop’s cabinet.
 - The DS oversees the ministry of the district’s clergy and churches, provides spiritual and pastoral leadership, works with the bishop and others in the appointment of ordained ministers to serve the district’s churches, presides at meetings of the charge conference, and oversees programs within the district.
- **Annual Conference**
 - The annual conference is a geographical region (comprising districts), an organizational body (made up of elected lay and clergy members), holds a yearly meeting, ordains clergy and is led by a Bishop.
- **Jurisdictional (U.S.) and Central Conferences (non-U.S.)**
 - Elects and assigns bishops
 - Elects members of General Agencies
 - Sets Annual Conference and Episcopal area boundaries
 - Supports regional ministries and institutions
- **General Conference**
 - **Connectional Table**
 - **Boards, Agencies and Commissions**
 - **General Council on Finance and Administration**
 - **General Board of Church and Society**
 - **General Board of Discipleship**
 - **General Board of Global Ministries**
 - **General Board of Higher Education and Ministry**
 - **General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits**
 - **General Commission on Archives and History**
 - **United Methodist Communications**
 - **United Methodist Women**
 - **General Commission on Religion and Race**
 - **General Commission on the Status and Role of Women**
 - **General Commission on United Methodist Men**
 - **The United Methodist Publishing House**

⁷ BOD

Appendix B:

Annual Conferences of the Southeastern Jurisdiction

- Alabama / West Florida
- Florida
- Holston
- Kentucky
- Memphis
- Mississippi
- North Alabama
- North Carolina
- North Georgia
- Red Bird Missionary
- South Carolina
- South Georgia
- Tennessee
- Virginia
- Western North Carolina



Where Major Religions Stand on Same-Sex Marriage



Sanctions Same-Sex Marriage

- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Conservative Jewish Movement
- Reform Jewish Movement
- Society of Friends (Quaker)
- Unitarian Universalist Association of Churches
- United Church of Christ
- Evangelical Lutheran Church*



Sanctions Blessing of Same-Sex Unions

- Episcopal Church



Prohibits Same-Sex Marriage

- American Baptist Churches
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)
- Islam
- Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
- Orthodox Jewish Movement
- Roman Catholic Church
- Southern Baptist Convention
- United Methodist Church



No Clear Position

- Buddhism
- Hinduism

Note: *The Evangelical Lutheran Church allows each congregation's minister to determine whether or not to marry same-sex couples.

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Appendix D: 2012 BOD Paragraphs Relating to Homosexuality

¶341.6: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

¶2702.1: A bishop, clergy member of an annual conference (¶ 370), local pastor, clergy on honorable or administrative location, or diaconal minister may be tried when charged (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶ 2702.4) with one or more of the following offensives: ... (b) practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies...

¶ 613: Responsibilities - The council⁸ shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions: ... 19. To ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to promote any gay caucus or group or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The UMC “not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends” (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church’s ministry in response to the HIV epidemic, nor shall it preclude funding for dialogs or educational events where the Church’s official; position is fairly and equally represented.

¶ 806.9 This paragraph basically repeats the language of ¶ 613.19 as it applies to the General Council on Finance and Administration.

¶ 304.3: While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all of the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

¶ 161F: we affirm the sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.

Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with other, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers the practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

⁸ “Council” in this paragraph refers to the Annual Conference Council on Finance and Administration