

THE MISSION IS YET ALIVE

2018 | STATE OF THE CHURCH REPORT



DEAR SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN CHRIST,

Fifty years ago, amidst a world divided by social unrest and challenged by growing public protests, a new expression of unity emerged in the form of The United Methodist Church. People from different faith traditions, different cultures and different parts of the world identified the common purpose and identity of their shared Wesleyan heritage and took a bold step forward together in mission and ministry. Today, some 50 years later, our ministry around the world is thriving, and the mission of The United Methodist Church is yet alive!

We celebrate all that Jesus Christ has done through the faithfulness and leadership of the people of The United Methodist Church these last 50 years. Yet, as a leader of our church today, you are aware that we are standing at a pivotal point in the life of our connection. We are discerning how to more fully live into our identity as a worldwide church. We are seeking to make our polity more globally relevant through a General Book of Discipline, a global apportionments formula and a revised global Social Principles. And, we are seeking a way forward, in unity, amidst differing cultural and theological understandings of human sexuality. In all of this, we seek to honor our worldwide covenant. As it states:

“Integrally holding connectional unity and local freedom, we seek to proclaim and embody the gospel in ways responsible to our specific cultural and social context while maintaining ‘a vital web of interactive relationships.’”¹

We realize that fully living into this covenant portends change, and we are uncertain about the changes ahead.

Yet, this we know!

Despite the uncertainty of our times, God is still calling us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Despite the challenges we face, God is still calling us to bring the saving love of Jesus Christ to God’s people everywhere. Despite our fears about what may happen, our central mission remains — to join in God’s work in the world and to take faithful steps to live as a worldwide church in mission to the world.

Our mission is yet alive! This 2018 State of the Church report is a story of our mission. As this report will show, we are seeing growth and innovation across our worldwide connection. Indeed, the Holy Spirit is bringing vitality to local congregations as the people called United Methodists are sharing Christ’s love in their communities by engaging our four areas of missional focus:

- By engaging in ministry with the poor,
- By improving global health,
- By developing principled Christian leaders and
- By creating new and renewed congregations.

The world continues to be in need of the love of Jesus Christ. For 50 years, The United Methodist Church has been an effective witness of Christ’s love. It is vitally important that we continue to be obedient to God’s call to go into the world. Therefore, today and every day, God’s mission is yet alive.

BISHOP CHRISTIAN ALSTED
President
The Connectional Table

BISHOP KENNETH CARTER
President
The Council of Bishops

BISHOP MICHAEL MCKEE
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General Council on Finance and Administration



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¹ The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, ¶125, p. 95.

Students study at the Bishop Judith Craig Children's Village in Duahzon, Liberia.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



‘The mission is yet alive’ through the Four Areas of Focus

As it ended its meeting in early April, the Connectional Table offered a message of hope to the people of The United Methodist Church. Acknowledging that the denomination is engaged in difficult and complex times, a pastoral letter from the Table affirmed, “The mission is yet alive, and we believe:

- ▶ “God is still calling us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- ▶ “Our central mission is to join in God’s work in the world. No matter what, we are still invited into the mission of God.
- ▶ “We must take faithful steps to live as a worldwide church in mission to the world.”

The letter continues to say that God still calls The United Methodist Church to engage in the ministry and mission encompassed in the Four Areas of Focus.

In the decade since they were introduced, the Four Areas of Focus have brought United Methodists together in mission and ministry to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. General Conference 2008 first adopted them with the hope the focus areas would offer a vision of ministry and mission and encourage United Methodists around the world to continue and increase what they do best.

For 10 years, the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table and the general agencies have worked collaboratively to increase congregational vitality as they meet specific goals for each focus area. Together, they have developed and implemented strategies and plans and refined them to meet changing needs and contexts. The Connectional Table has fulfilled its role of discerning and articulating the vision for the church, being a steward of the mission, ministries and resources and providing a

forum for collaboration among the key stakeholders. This quadrennium, the bishops who chair the Council’s leadership teams that correspond with the Four Areas of Focus have joined with the general secretaries of the focus-area convening agencies. Together with Connectional Table leadership, they serve as the Vital Congregations through Four Areas of Focus Strategic Team.

At the same time, local congregations and annual conferences have continued their mission and ministry in the focus areas. Many congregations and conferences – regardless of location or size – have begun or expanded their mission and ministry in one or more of the four areas and become more vital and vibrant. As we individually participate in these efforts, we live our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Just how have congregations, conferences and general agencies been engaged in each of the areas? How have they lived as disciples of Jesus Christ through their mission and ministry?



GLOBAL HEALTH: HULA-HOOPING FOR HEALTH

The United Methodist Abundant Health movement, seeking vibrant mental, physical and spiritual health for all people, was embodied in crowds of hula-hoopers around the world in April. Thousands of United Methodists in Berlin, Germany and in New York and South Carolina in the United States, gathered to host the first Hulapalooza events, nurturing a unique spirit of unity through smiling faces and physical activity.

Hulapalooza is an easily-replicable event designed to support local churches as they seek to boost holistic well-being in their congregation and community. In addition to learning how to hula-hoop, attendees might also be able to participate in health screenings, community-building activities, hoop art projects and spiritual practices.

Fun and creativity are also present at Hulapalooza as people come together to celebrate life, health and community.

“I can’t tell you how much fun we had,” said Bishop Thomas Bickerton of the New York Annual Conference. “From tai chi to Zumba, to spiritual prayer and nutrition, and all this crazy hula-hooping, we had an amazing time.”

Pictured above: Bishop Thomas Bickerton hula-hoops during the New York Annual Conference Hulapalooza event in April.

Photo by Janni Snider, United Methodist Communications

Here are a few examples from the last two years. (You will find several more throughout this report.)

GLOBAL HEALTH

- ▶ Spirit, mind and body are all nurtured in the Mountain Cathedrals ministry at St. John's United Methodist Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A monthly hike includes worship and Holy Communion. Parish nursing and counseling, support groups for mothers of preschoolers, families of people with Alzheimer's disease and those struggling with addiction, yoga and financial health programs are also part of the health and wellness ministry.
- ▶ In Zimbabwe, Sekai lost four children to malaria. Her church forbids believers from seeking care at health facilities. However, when her fifth child became ill, Sekai took him to a clinic where he tested positive for malaria, received immediate treatment and survived. Sekai now encourages other mothers to go to the clinic at the first signs of malaria. "I am happy to be doing what I am doing and helping the community," she said. "I am also happy that the current training on malaria is being sponsored by a church organization." (Imagine No Malaria of The United Methodist Church)
- ▶ "Rachel's Fun for Everyone Playground" grew from the dream of a nine-year-old who noticed that children with disabilities were unable to join others on traditional playground equipment. Five years ago,

Rachel Ritchie began inspiring Vine Grove United Methodist Church in Kentucky to join the effort to make the dream reality. The congregation was among those who contributed \$100,000, land and labor for the playground.

- ▶ The Abundant Health Project of the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) gives women confidence to raise their voices in their community and unites and empowers them to work and share their knowledge and skills with each other. Trained Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV) hold mothers' health group meetings and lead discussions on safe motherhood practices, family planning, nutrition and sanitation.

DEVELOPING AND RENEWING CONGREGATIONS

- ▶ Erlöserkirche-München (United Methodist Church of the Redeemer), a thriving German congregation in Munich, is in a new building that also houses a Farsi-speaking congregation of immigrants. An indoor playground, a music school, taekwondo and ballet classes help bring 500 to 600 people to the building each week. The new building was part of a plan to reach people in the neighborhood. One mother of two – unchurched before she found the congregation – said it's uncommon for German churches to have a lot of children, the main reason her family attends.
- ▶ Discipleship Ministries'



DEVELOPING AND RENEWING CONGREGATIONS: SEEING THE PEOPLE OF OKLAHOMA

Endless possibilities for ministry and discipleship surround every United Methodist church, but it can be a challenge to know how to begin exploring those opportunities. This challenge is one the Oklahoma Annual Conference has overcome through the #SeeAllthePeople initiative of Discipleship Ministries.

"We seek to create and strengthen discipleship offerings in local churches that serve the congregation and the community," said the Rev. Derrek Belase, Oklahoma Conference director of discipleship. "The questions we hope to answer are: How do we see people inside and outside of the church, and how do we help them grow?"

These questions have spurred a movement to refocus existing ministries to make them more community-centric, as well as to inspire creative approaches to establishing new ministry efforts. To make community discovery easier, the annual conference developed an interactive map that local churches can use to learn essential community information, such as demographics.

Partnerships with other organizations that already connect with people in the community have also been essential and are allowing for meaningful work in issues ranging from poverty relief to suicide prevention.

The work of seeing people in new ways is gaining momentum. "Our next conference-wide focus is on first responders. We'll resource churches so that they can offer special worship, discipleship and community building experiences just for them," said Belase.

Pictured above: United Methodists participate in interactive domestic violence awareness training through a partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Photo by Derrek Belase, Oklahoma Annual Conference.



Yarely Arellano travels home to Mexico after crossing the border from the United States, where she studies at the Lydia Paterson Institute, a United Methodist-sponsored high school in El Paso, Texas.

Photo by Paul Jeffrey

Path 1 and Global Ministries piloted in Honduras a strategy for leveraging small groups to serve in congregational development among United Methodist Mission Initiatives. The initiatives plant and nurture a Wesleyan movement in parts of the world where there is no or a limited Wesleyan presence.

- ▶ In early 2017, Wilshire United Methodist Native American Fellowship in Portland, Oregon – the last Native ministry in the Oregon-Idaho Conference – faced closure. That summer a new pastor arrived, the Rev. Allen Buck, a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. The congregation has doubled in size and focuses on connectedness, love, spirituality and tradition. Its doors are open to other Native organizations. The Mending Broken Hearts curriculum offers healing to help with grief, loss and intergenerational trauma.
- ▶ Spurred by the #SeeAllthePeople movement, congregations and annual conferences across the United

Methodist connection are engaging people in their communities to form new relationships that can lead to disciple making. Discipleship Ministries has released a second book and study guide and a third short film to help lay leaders, clergy and annual conference leaders reach out to new people with intentional discipleship.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ More than 19,000 Muslim and Christian youngsters attend the eight secondary, 50 primary and 24 United Methodist preschools in Côte d'Ivoire. While most of the schools' 900 staff members are United Methodist, only 20 percent of the student body is. More students are Muslim. Côte d'Ivoire Bishop Benjamin Boni said the schools have the potential to build peace. "When people work together and every day share the same realities, a feeling of brotherhood will grow," he said.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: CONNECTING WITH LEADERS IN MONGOLIA

The Clergy Lifelong Learning Office at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) and six laypeople from local churches across the United States spent seven days in Mongolia learning, building relationships and experiencing the rich heritage and culture of Southeast Asia.

The educational mission trip helped to enhance global ties between GBHEM, the Southeast Asia and Mongolia Provisional Central Conference of The United Methodist Church and the faculty and students at Huree University, a Methodist-related school.

"Young people in Mongolia want to know Jesus Christ and have opportunities to learn and succeed in life. I was moved by the dedication and commitment of faithful Christian educators at Huree University," said the Rev. HiRho Park, GBHEM's executive director of Clergy Lifelong Learning.

While in Mongolia, the group created a plan to help address the educational and ministerial needs of the conference, identified ways to collaborate with Huree University and connected with the mission of the Mongolian United Methodist Church.

Work to support Huree faculty and students is now underway, including identifying English-speaking teaching resources, creating scholarships and establishing study abroad connections for students and faculty.

Pictured above: The GBHEM delegation visits Mongolia on their educational mission trip in October 2017.

Photo courtesy of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.



▶ The Rev. Rob Hutchinson, of Unity United Methodist Church in Thomasville, North Carolina, U.S.A., saws a tree felled by Hurricane Maria on the grounds of the Methodist seminary in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

- ▶ The Academy for Clergy Young in Ministry is a pilot program to develop leadership of clergy and their local churches in the Mountain Sky Conference and Mountain Sky Area. The missional, church-based and integrated leadership development approach offers group and online community learning and individual coaching.
- ▶ The Arkansas Conference Center for Vitality coaches and mentors laity to demonstrate passion, boldness and excellence in faith sharing, servant ministry, stewardship and using their spiritual gifts. Leadership Unleashed conversations and Lay Leadership Cohorts bring together laity interested in making new disciples and leading new ministries.
- ▶ Faculty at United Methodist-related colleges and universities are on the front lines of preparing principled Christian leaders who will make a difference in the

world. Recently, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry named 45 outstanding educators at those institutions as recipients of the Cutting-Edge Curriculum Award and Exemplary Teacher Award of the Year for 2018.

MINISTRY WITH THE POOR

- ▶ Metropolitan Memorial United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C. has a chef who turns surplus food from restaurants and grocery stores into made-from-scratch, healthy meals for the homeless and hungry. Metropolitan Memorial's Campus Kitchen partners with nearby American University, but volunteers come from all over the city and from within the congregation to pull in the food, prepare 1,300 meals a week and transport them throughout the city.
- ▶ United Methodists in the Philippines provided relief — including prayers, food, medicine, bottled water and clothing — to wounded soldiers and people displaced because of violent conflicts in their country. Davao Area Bishop Rodolfo A. Juan led the two-day effort that began with a group of about 85 displaced Lumad families. On the second day, the Filipino United Methodists visited soldiers wounded in the fighting between the military and the Islamic State group or ISIS.
- ▶ The General Board of Church and Society has identified 62 relationship-based ministries working with individuals and communities that are economically poor and

marginalized. Church and Society will continue to survey annual conferences each quarter and conduct in-depth interviews with pastors and conference leaders.

- ▶ After completing the Minnesota Conference's Missional Church Consultation Initiative, Christ United Methodist Church in Rochester was advised to collaborate in a downtown ministry to meet the needs of its community. Three years later, the congregation is poised to launch two new initiatives — a childcare center that will give scholarships to low-income families and a hospitality house for out-of-town visitors receiving care at the Mayo Clinic.

Engaging in the ministry and mission encompassed in the Four Areas of Focus allows United Methodists to live our common identity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As the Connectional Table's pastoral letter concluded, "The world is in need of the saving love of Jesus Christ, and The United Methodist Church has always been an effective witness of Christ's love. It is vitally important that we continue to be so now. Therefore, today and every day, the mission is yet alive."

The stories of mission and ministry were excerpted from articles originally published on the denominational website, UMC.org, and on the websites of United Methodist News, UMNews.org; Abundant Health, UMCAbundantHealth.org; the General Board of Church and Society, UMCjustice.org; Discipleship Ministries, UMCdiscipleship.org; the General Board of Global Ministries, UMCmission.org; the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, GBHEM.org; the Arkansas Annual Conference, arumc.org; and the Rocky Mountain Conference, rmcumc.org.



MINISTRY WITH THE POOR: EUROPEAN CHURCHES OFFER REFUGE AND HOPE

With the arrival of thousands of migrants and refugees seeking safety, stability and a better life in new places, the human landscape of Europe has changed remarkably in the last four years. The new arrivals often need help along the way. United Methodists in Europe continue to answer the call to love and serve their new neighbors.

Stephany, a 19-year-old Syrian immigrant and member of the United Methodist Church of the Redeemer in Bremen, Germany, now reaches out to those seeking the kind of support her family received upon its arrival. She said, "We are happy to be here. I have my freedom. We love this church."

United Methodist and Methodist-affiliated churches across Europe are establishing ministries that offer more than just support, they also offer hope. Warm welcomes, radical hospitality and openness are the most healing things offered to migrants, so mission efforts extend well past short-term assistance. People can also find language classes, translation and tutoring services, housing and feeding assistance, and field trips that broaden awareness of culture and country.

On Dec. 3, 2017, United Methodists around the world joined to mark Global Migration Sunday, a day to recognize and better understand the plight of migrants. Funds raised through a special offering are supporting ministries with those who have made the decision to leave their homes in search of a better life.

Pictured above: A group of youth plays a game at the United Methodist Church of the Redeemer in Bremen, Germany.

Photo by Mike DuBose UMNS.

Denominational Statistics

MEMBERS AROUND THE WORLD

The United Methodist Church reports a professing membership of 12.6 million disciples worldwide, a 12 percent increase over the last 10 years. While there has been a decline in the United States and Europe, the church has grown in Africa and Asia. This is seen through increases in total members, annual conferences, clergy and churches.

MEMBERSHIP STATISTICS				
	2006 Membership	2016 Membership	10-Yr Change	10-Yr % Change
Africa Central	374,090	623,138	249,048	67%
Congo	1,216,257	2,999,242	1,782,985	147%
West Africa	1,462,457	1,779,958	317,501	22%
Central and Southern Europe	18,410	14,267	(4,143)	-23%
Germany	34,900	29,657	(5,243)	-15%
Northern Europe and Eurasia	15,731	9,888	(5,843)	-37%
Philippines	201,309	207,190	5,881	3%
United States	7,931,733	6,951,278	(980,455)	-12%
TOTAL	11,254,887	12,614,618	1,359,731	12%

UMC MEMBERSHIP, CONGREGATIONS, CLERGY, CONFERENCES, BISHOPS					
2006					
	Professing Membership	Total Congregations	Total Ordained Clergy	Annual Conferences	Active Bishops
United States	7,931,733	34,378	44,710	63	50
Africa	3,052,804	9,757	4,005	22	12
Asia	201,309	1,654	798	21	3
Europe	69,041	1,601	1,228	19	4
TOAL	11,254,887	47,390	50,741	125	69
2016					
	Professing Membership	Total Congregations	Total Ordained Clergy	Annual Conferences	Active Bishops
United States	6,951,278	31,873	44,387	56	46
Africa	5,402,338	19,682	5,963	33	13
Asia	207,190	1,836	619	26	3
Europe	53,812	1,232	695	21	4
TOTAL	12,614,618	54,623	51,664	136	66

FUNDS

In 2017, U.S. churches paid more than 93% of requested apportionment funding. Work is underway to fulfill a 2016 General Conference decision to expand apportionment collection for the General Administration Fund and Episcopal Fund in the central conferences. While some have contributed apportionment funds in the past, it was not in a formalized collection process.

The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) is constantly assessing the way in which data is collected from central conferences in an effort to make the process as efficient as possible. As planned, GCFA conducted Data Collection training in the central conferences in 2017. Comprehensive trainings on data collection were held in Africa and the Philippines in conjunction with annual conference extended cabinet meetings in each area. Approximately 50 trainees participated in each location.

GCFA received journals from all but one central conference in 2016, a record number.

PAID ON APPORTIONMENTS TO ALL GENERAL FUNDS, 1997-2017*			
Year	Total Funds Apportioned	Paid	% Paid
1997	\$118,425,273	\$104,496,463	88.2%
1998	\$118,431,010	\$105,394,783	89.0%
1999	\$119,630,756	\$107,857,724	90.2%
2000	\$121,999,757	\$111,187,769	91.1%
2001	\$127,256,750	\$114,676,537	90.1%
2002	\$127,860,750	\$113,095,935	88.5%
2003	\$129,634,750	\$112,418,090	86.7%
2004	\$132,656,250	\$116,808,070	88.1%
2005	\$139,955,000	\$121,703,502	87.0%
2006	\$142,849,627	\$126,427,676	88.5%
2007	\$145,693,841	\$130,564,022	89.6%
2008	\$150,973,581	\$130,210,994	86.2%
2009	\$150,308,000	\$126,303,259	84.0%
2010	\$150,232,058	\$129,428,321	86.2%
2011	\$149,472,006	\$130,885,848	87.6%
2012	\$147,268,131	\$132,743,590	90.1%
2013	\$143,302,750	\$128,613,187	89.7%
2014	\$143,132,984	\$130,069,948	90.9%
2015	\$142,579,036	\$130,649,815	91.6%
2016	\$143,115,210	\$131,444,245	91.9%
2017	\$144,449,153	\$134,778,605	93.3%

*Excludes the 25% of Ministerial Education Fund apportioned funds that are retained by the annual conferences.

The choir sings during worship at Nazareth United Methodist Church in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



MINISTRY WITH THE POOR: CHURCH PARTNERSHIP NURTURES EVANGELISM

A special partnership between an urban and a rural church in the Democratic Republic of Congo is bringing resources and the love of God to the people of Mvululu.

"As we reach out to this poor village, we are taking the good news through visible acts of love and compassion," said the Rev. Desire Tiriwepi, pastor of the 130-member United Methodist International English Church (UMIEC), located in Kinshasa.

The church is just 62 miles from Mvululu, home of Mvululu United Methodist Church and its 110 members. Three years ago, UMIEC members saw an opportunity to support the impoverished rural village. That has led to annual mission trips and a partnership with Mvululu UMC.

UMIEC members bring clothing, food, school supplies, household items and other goods; they also bring funds to help with construction of the Mvululu church's new chapel. The churches share in worship and invite people living around the church to join them for the family meal that follows.

"This is allowing us to make a deep evangelism, doing actions with visible impact in the villages," said the Mvululu pastor, the Rev. Georges Okitolenga. He will soon baptize eight youth and adults, a result of recent ministry efforts that he hopes will continue to thrive.

Pictured above: United Methodist International English Church supplied stones and concrete for the foundation of Mvululu United Methodist Church's new chapel.

Photo by Pierre T. Omadjela, UMNS.



DEVELOPING AND RENEWING CONGREGATIONS: HOPE FOR A BETTER LIFE

When the Rev. Mienie N. Tolentino learned of an opportunity to serve as a spiritual counselor in a government-led drug trafficker reformation program called "Banyuhay," she prayed, "Lord, you brought me here because you want me to do something for you. Here I am to fulfill my utmost and best through your help. I commit everything that I can and can't do."

Tolentino and her 25-person congregation at Danga United Methodist Church in the Philippine province of Bulacan offered a three-month, weekly Bible study to seven men who were participating in the rehabilitation program. Upon completion, five of the men joined the church, as did their families and neighbors.

Aby Sacro, the wife of one of the men, said that joining The United Methodist Church has had a huge impact on her husband. "Because of the church, he has changed his ways and all of his vices are gone," she said.

The church has now grown to 70 weekly attendees, almost tripling in size as the first new members have begun bringing others to experience worship and other community events.

Tolentino continues to minister to all of the rehabilitation program participants and their families, visiting their homes and telling them, "Aside from being your pastor, I am also your friend."

Pictured above: A growing congregation gathers at Danga United Methodist Church in the Philippine province of Bulacan.

Photo courtesy of the Rev. Mienie N. Tolentino.

Global Mission Fellow Yvonne Agduyeng (left) leads singing with recent immigrants at the United Methodist Church of the Redeemer in Bremen, Germany. Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



Making a worldwide church reality

The United Methodist Church is a global church – a part of the Body of Christ that celebrates a common faith and claims a common mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. United Methodists, connected in multiple ways, serve through unique congregations shaped both by their Wesleyan heritage and by the context and culture in which they serve.

With General Conference 2020 a little less than two years away, United Methodists throughout the world are responding to work done over the last two quadrennia to help us better live the reality of being a worldwide church. Their thinking will be incorporated into a General Book of Discipline to be proposed to General Conference as well as in proposals for revised Social Principles and a statement on United Methodist ecclesiology

that will be proposed to the assembly. General Conference will also respond to the increased role of central conferences in supporting general church apportionments.

The Connectional Table is working closely with the groups developing the various proposals as it supports the church living into its worldwide nature. Read more at umc.org/who-we-are/our-work-worldwide-nature-of-the-church.

GENERAL BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

Leading the work on the General (worldwide) Book of Discipline is the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

The Book of Discipline 2016 states, “We are a worldwide denomination united by doctrine, discipline and mission through our connectional covenant. The General Book of Discipline expresses that unity. Each central conference may make changes and adaptations to the General Book of Discipline to more fruitfully accomplish our mission in various contexts.” (§. 101, The Book of Discipline 2016) Parts of the Discipline not subject to adaptation and which can be revised only by General Conference are the “Constitution,” “General Book of Discipline,” “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task,” “The Ministry of All Christians” and The Social Principles.

The Standing Committee is continuing work on its proposal to change the structure of the Discipline to divide the material now in Part VI, “General Organization and Administration” into two parts. The paragraphs in the revised Part VI would not be subject to change or adaptation by central conferences, while those in a new “Part VII, Additional Organization and Administration,” could be adapted. Major topics in Part VI of the 2016 Discipline are The Local Church (including church membership), Ministry of the Ordained (including requirements and standards), The Superintendency, The Conferences, Administrative Order (general

agencies), Church Property and Judicial Administration.

Consulting with the Standing Committee in its work are the Commission for the Study of Ministry, the Committee on Faith and Order and the Connectional Table, specifically its advisory group on U.S. Contextual Ministries. The advisory group is working with the Standing Committee to raise awareness of the need for a setting or means other than General Conference to consider matters affecting only United Methodists in the United States. Such a setting would be a place where the paragraphs that will be in the new Part VII of the Discipline could be adapted for the U.S. context just as they can for the central conferences in Africa, Europe and the Philippines.

Judi Kenaston, a member of the advisory group, notes that when

the first Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church was adopted in 1968, it included the language specifically giving central conferences the right of adaptation. United Methodists in the United States do not have that right.

Kenaston says having a means for United Methodists in the U.S. to adapt the Discipline would put all parts of the church on a “level playing field.” Decision-makers could consider technically difficult issues, such as pensions programs, with close attention to the context created by federal laws in the United States. At the same time, General Conference delegates from outside the U.S. would not have to spend hours considering legislation that did not affect them and on which there would be little reason for them to have expertise.

While work continues on the recommended changes for the



A volunteer team from South Roanoke United Methodist Church helps repair a home damaged by floods near Clay, West Virginia, USA.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

James Tokpah undergoes an eye exam at Ganta United Methodist Hospital in Ganta, Liberia.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.



new General Book of Discipline, the proposal will be finalized after the called session of General Conference in February 2019.

REVISION OF SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

Since early in the 2013-16 quadrennium, the General Board of Church and Society has led work to examine the denomination's Social Principles and prepare a draft of revised statements for the 2020 General Conference to consider.

During the first four years, listening consultations in Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States provided information as to how the Social Principles are actually practiced in the places where The United Methodist Church has members. Writing teams that included more than 60 people began work in early 2017 to fulfill the mandate of the 2016 General Conference to revise the statements to be more succinct, theologically grounded and globally relevant. First revisions to all sections except those on human sexuality are complete. Writers will revise the remaining section after the called session of General Conference.

The draft document includes numerous citations of Scripture and quotes from John Wesley. The section previously titled "The Natural World" is now named "The Community of All Creation."

The revised document, website and a video, all produced in English, French, Portuguese and Swahili, are available at UMCjustice.org/sp2020.

United Methodists throughout the world have contributed to the

revision of the document that The Book of Discipline notes is not church law but "intended to be instructive and persuasive." The Social Principles "are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation." Although there have been numerous additions and other changes to the Social Principles since they were first adopted in 1972, there has been no comprehensive updating until now.

'WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE'

Throughout 2017, The Committee on Faith and Order gathered impressions from throughout the church to its draft of "Wonder, Love and Praise: Sharing a Vision for the Church."

First developed during the 2013-16 quadrennium, "Wonder, Love and Praise" is a statement on United Methodist ecclesiology exploring how United Methodists understand what it means to be the church. General Conference 2016 commended the statement to the whole church for study and feedback. Leaders and members explored the document in small study groups and then submitted surveys expressing concerns and hopes related to the current draft and the potential shape a re-drafting might take. Others wrote blog posts, papers and detailed notes.

In its current form, one section of the document offers "A Renewed Vision for The United Methodist Church." The final section on



GLOBAL HEALTH: CHURCHES RESPOND TO THE OPIOID CRISIS

West Virginia has the highest rate of drug overdose deaths in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, opioids are to blame. United Methodists across the state are responding to the opioid crisis, led by the West Virginia Annual Conference and its "What If" program.

"What If" encourages all local church members to "fast, pray, listen and respond" to the opioid epidemic, whether by launching new ministries or by joining other community organizations who are already working to stem the tide of drug use.

"What if conversations about substance use disorder, alcoholism and addiction would take place with more frequency in our communities and churches so that youth, teens and adults were more educated and more focused on interrupting the cycle of addiction?" asked Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, whose family has a history of addiction.

United Methodists have already stepped up to serve families and individuals who need help. Ministries range from joining with other churches to support people recovering from addiction, to volunteering in local schools to offer time, resources and love to at-risk, drug-endangered children.

Pictured above: Neighbors in Action volunteers go door to door to give away flyers detailing resources and information about addiction recovery, including a 24-hour helpline for addicts and their families. The statewide, grassroots organization was founded by Wayne Worth, a United Methodist layperson.

Photo courtesy of Neighbors in Action.

“Vision and Practice” explores:

- ▶ the “particular role” of The United Methodist Church within the “Church Universal”
- ▶ how participation in ecumenical discussion might generate insights to help deal more constructively and effectively with the “vexing issues surrounding ‘legitimate diversity’”
- ▶ how might a renewed ecclesial vision inform discussions about polity – how the church is structured in service of the mission.

The committee will submit a revised draft to the 2020 General Conference. When adopted, “Wonder, Love and Praise” will carry the same weight as “By Water and the Spirit” and “This Holy Mystery,” the denomination’s official theological statements on baptism and Holy Communion.

According to The Book of Discipline 2016, General Conference 2008 created the Committee on Faith and Order to engage in ongoing and intentional theological reflection on behalf of the church. It resources the Council of Bishops as it carries out its teaching responsibilities; leads and coordinates studies commissioned by the General Conference in matters related to faith, doctrine, order and discipline of the church; and prepares and provides resources and study materials. Learn more about the Committee on Faith and Order and its work on “Wonder, Love and Praise” at UMC.org/who-we-are/the-united-methodist-committee-on-faith-and-order.

CENTRAL CONFERENCE APPORTIONMENTS

United Methodists in 2017 gave about \$133.2 million – about \$1.8 million more than in 2016 – to support connectional ministries around the world, reports the General Council on Finance and Administration.

The payout rate from annual conferences in the United States — that is, the percentage of requested apportionments collected — was 91.9 percent, an increase over 91.4 percent in 2016. The central conferences’ payout rate was 65 percent overall — 298 percent from Europe, 36 percent from the Philippines and 17 percent from Africa.

Nine central conference episcopal areas — which encompass 32 of the 80 annual conferences in Africa, Europe and the Philippines — paid at least 100 percent apportionments. They are the Central and Southern Europe, East Congo, Eastern Angola, Eurasia, Germany, Liberia, Mozambique, Nordic-Baltic areas and the Davao area in the Philippines.

United Methodists in central conferences have long financially supported the work of bishops through the Episcopal Fund. Beginning in 2017, central conferences were asked to support both the Episcopal Fund and the operations of denomination-wide administrative bodies, including General Conference, through the General Administration Fund.

Under the apportionment formula adopted by the 2016 General Conference, conferences in



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: EMPOWERMENT TODAY, LEADERS TOMORROW

Less than 14 percent of Hispanics in the U.S. have a bachelor's degree. The University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, has a student body that is 90 percent Hispanic. These statistics have led United Methodist Student Ministry leaders at the university to a central focus: Support students so they can thrive in college and earn their degrees.

Many of the ministry's students are Mexican-American and first-generation collegians who are seeking intentional relationships that will support them on their educational journey. The ministry's student center, located across the street from campus, is known as a safe, accepting space for students to connect through study, free meals, conversation and worship.

“This is a true community. The students treat each other in loving, affectionate ways. They take care of each other,” said the Rev. David J. Moreno, campus minister.

The ministry also offers leadership training opportunities and experiences that garner real-life skills necessary for success. The ministry was recently awarded a grant from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to develop and implement a leadership retreat called iAdelente!, meaning “move forward,” to encourage students to take on deliberate leadership roles.

“[Students] own this ministry... They are the leaders of the church today and the leaders of the church tomorrow, and we are trying to make that real for them,” said Moreno.

Pictured above: University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, students participate in a leadership and trust exercise.

Photo by the Rev. David J. Moreno, campus minister.



▶ The Rev. Anthony Tabucar prays with his congregants at Amazing Grace United Methodist church in Manila, Philippines.

Photo by Janni Snider, United Methodist Communications.

Europe were actually asked to pay less than they had previously. With that in mind, European United Methodists pledged not to reduce giving and in 2017 gave nearly three times what the apportionment formula required.

A record 29 of the 56 U.S. United Methodist conferences — 52 percent — paid 100 percent of their 2017 apportionments. They are Alaska, Baltimore-Washington, California-Nevada, Central Texas, Desert Southwest, East Ohio,

Greater New Jersey, Illinois Great Rivers, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota, New England, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma Indian Missionary, Oregon-Idaho, Pacific Northwest, Peninsula Delaware, Red Bird Missionary, Rocky Mountain, Susquehanna, Tennessee, Upper New York, West Ohio, West Virginia, Western Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Yellowstone.

“We not only want to thank the people of The United Methodist Church but also praise God for

their faithful witness through their giving,” said Moses Kumar, general secretary and treasurer for the General Council on Finance and Administration. “We are blessed to be in ministry with people who support the connectional nature of The United Methodist Church. Through this faithful giving, ministries of the denomination continue to thrive.”



Attendees at the United Methodist Council of Bishops meeting in Chicago join in the “Praying Our Way Forward” closing worship service.
Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

Moving toward a way forward

As this report is being written, we are midway through 2018. For United Methodists, it is the season of back-to-school and back-to-church. Ministries and programs that may have been on summer hiatus are resuming both to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to transform the world. Planning is underway for ways to respond even more faithfully to God’s call as individuals and congregations.

At the same time, this season is like many others, it has a different feel for a growing number of United Methodist clergy and laity. For many, even in the midst of trusting that God’s gracious, loving presence is with us today and in all days, there is anxiousness as the

denomination prepares for a called session of General Conference.

When General Conference convenes Feb. 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA, 864 delegates from around the world will receive and act upon a report from the Commission on a Way Forward based upon the recommendations of the Council of Bishops. Most of the delegates will have been part of the 2016 General Conference, which accepted the recommendation of the Council of Bishops to create the Commission to examine and possibly revise every paragraph of The Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and to explore options that help maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.

During the last week of April, the Council of Bishops formally received and discussed the Commission’s report. On May 4, the Council voted by an overwhelming majority to share the work done by the Commission and to recommend the One Church Plan for legislative action.

The One Church Plan removes the restrictive language of The Book of Discipline concerning ministry by and with LGBTQ people and adds assurances to pastors and conferences who, due to their theological convictions, cannot perform same-sex weddings or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals that they will not be required to do so.



The Grande Ronde Canoe Family plays the drums at the opening worship service at the United Methodist 2016 General Conference in Portland, Ore.
Photo by Maile Bradfield, UMNS.

A press release on the decision from the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, director of communications for the Council of Bishops, explained, “The One Church Plan allows for contextualization of language about human sexuality in support of the mission; and allows for central conferences, especially those in Africa, to retain their disciplinary authority to adapt The Book of Discipline and continue to include traditional language and values while fulfilling the vision of a global and multicultural church.

“This plan also encourages a generous unity by giving United Methodists the ability to address different missional contexts in ways that reflect their theological convictions.”

“With convicted humility, bishops want to be pastors and shepherds of the whole church in order to maximize the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible and with as much contextual differentiation as possible,” said Council of Bishops President Kenneth H. Carter, who also served as a co-moderator of the Commission.

The One Church Plan and two other plans – the Connectional Conference Plan, which was developed by the Commission, and a Traditionalist Plan, which was an appendix in the Commission’s report but was developed by a small group of bishops – were published in late July in the four official languages of General Conference – English, French, Portuguese and Swahili. The Traditionalist Plan affirms the current language in the Discipline and seeks to strengthen enforcement and penalties for not adhering to it and provides an exit

strategy for people who disagree with the church’s position. The Connectional-Conference Plan allows annual conferences to choose among three connectional conferences for affiliation based on theology or perspective on LGBTQ ministry – traditionalist, progressive or allowing for a variety of approaches. The plan would require multiple amendments to the constitution of The United Methodist Church.

The report the Commission is sending to General Conference includes a “conversation” around each plan with a summary of the plan, theological and biblical foundations, and its effect on various segments of the denomination, implementation plans and the petitions for disciplinary changes. The report also includes background information about the Commission’s work.

The Judicial Council ruled in late June that organizations and individual United Methodists were also allowed to submit petitions to the called session provided they were in harmony with the Conference’s purpose – receiving and acting on the report from the Commission. Other business is not permitted unless the General Conference determines by a two-thirds vote that it may be handled.

In early July, the bishops asked the Judicial Council for declaratory decisions on the constitutionality of the proposals related to each of the three plans that are included in the petitions to be considered by General Conference 2019. The Judicial Council has placed the items on its October docket.



PRAY DAILY

The Council of Bishops in partnership with The Upper Room has launched Phase 3 of “Praying Our Way Forward.” It will continue through the special session of General Conference in February 2019. All United Methodists are invited to:

- 1. Engage in a weekly Wesleyan 24-hour fast from Thursday after dinner until Friday mid-afternoon. Those for whom food fasts are unadvisable might consider fasting from social media, e-mails or another daily activity.*
- 2. Pause and pray for the church’s mission and way forward daily for three minutes from 2:23 through 2:26 a.m. or p.m. in their time zone or at another time. The suggested times correspond to the Feb. 23-26 dates of the called General Conference.*
- 3. Pray using a weekly prayer calendar posted on the UMCPrays.org website that runs through the end of February 2019.*

See the video, sign up for regular email prayer posts and download other resources at UMCPrays.org.

Pictured above: Bishop Tracy Smith Malone (left) offers Holy Communion to Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett during the “Praying Our Way Forward” closing worship service at the denomination’s Council of Bishops meeting in Chicago in May.

Photo by Mike DuBose, UMNS.

“We are asking for this so that we can gain greater clarity about constitutional issues within the three plans, and in service to and support of the delegations, who will do extremely important work in a very limited amount of time,” said Carter.

When the Commission on a Way Forward submitted its report to the bishops in late April, it was nearing the end of a 17-month process during which the 32 members met nine times. The Commission reviewed many of the petitions regarding human sexuality presented to previous General Conferences and examined how other faith communities and denominations have responded to the inclusion of LGBTQ people. Members received documents, ideas, testimonies and feedback from individual laity and clergy, candidates for ministry and seminary students as well as from local churches, annual conferences and general church agencies.

The Commission members – named by the bishops – came from nine countries and included younger people, LGBTQ people, professors, administrators, pastors, youth pastors and campus ministers, lay leaders and individuals identified with renewal and advocacy groups.

“The key part of the early work was to build trust and intentional community among a group of people who had good reasons not to trust each other,” said retired Bishop David Yemba from Democratic Republic of Congo, another co-moderator.

A key resource in the relationship building was the book “The Anatomy of Peace” from the Arbinger Institute. The book helps

people build their capacity for living through conflict with a heart of peace instead of a heart of war. A number of delegations and other groups are also using the book as they prepare for the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference.

The Commission also wrote a covenant to guide its work and help build community and trust.

“The Commission’s practice of voicing differing theological views and interpretations of scripture stands as a model for what kind of ministry we are both called and empowered by God to do,” said Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball of the West Virginia Annual Conference, the third co-moderator.

Addressing the Connectional Table in April, Steiner Ball expressed hope that the 2019 General Conference delegates will come to General Conference recognizing that their fellow United Methodists have “the same love of God, the same love of Christ, the same love of the church, the same passion for making disciples, the same passion for wanting this world to be transformed.”

She suggested United Methodists might help build relationships

across differing views if they followed the covenant, UMC.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-about-us, used by the Way Forward Commission. Specifically, she pointed to the members’ covenant “to treat one another with respect, to assume the best in others, to represent one another in the best possible light, to speak the truth with love, and to practice and expect trustworthiness.”

Parts of this report were excerpted from press releases issued by the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga, director of communications for the Council of Bishops and from a report on the meeting of the Connectional Table by United Methodist News Service, UMNews.org.

To learn more:


Report from the Commission on a Way Forward, UMC.org/gc2019

Council of Bishops’ News and Statements, UMC.org/who-we-are/council-of-bishops-news-statements

Commission on a Way Forward, UMC.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward

Videos and other resource materials, UMC.org/gc2019





This report is a collaborative effort of The Connectional Table and United Methodist Communications with statistical data provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration. To view this report online, visit UMC.org/SOTC.

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