General Conference 2020 (rescheduled: 2024)

U.S. Regional Conference Proposal

Wespath strongly supports the concept of a U.S. regional body to deal with U.S.-specific matters, and helped develop the UMC Connectional Table’s General Conference (GC) legislation to create a U.S. Regional Conference.

After this legislation was submitted, the Christmas Covenant legislation was developed (largely by delegates and others from the central conferences), and submitted to the GC. The Christmas Covenant proposal provides a path for regional equity, contextualization and governance throughout the Church. Both proposals would meet the need for a U.S. regional entity to handle U.S.-specific matters. Therefore, both the Connectional Table and Wespath have affirmed their support for the Christmas Covenant legislation.

While this document outlines features of the original proposal (U.S. Regional Conference), the rationale for creating a U.S. regional entity for U.S.-specific matters described here also applies to the Christmas Covenant proposal.

Proposal At-a-Glance

The U.S. Regional Conference proposal is designed as a two-stage process:

**Stage 1: U.S. Regional Committee**
- Committee of the GC (temporary until Stage 2 is implemented)
- Effective at the close of General Conference
- Functions as a legislative committee at next General Conference after adoption
- Processes legislation for U.S.-specific matters; refers petitions to full GC plenary (consent calendar or calendar item)
- Representation:
  - All GC delegates from U.S. annual conferences
  - One clergy and one lay person from every central conference

**Stage 2: U.S. Regional Conference**
- Creates forum for U.S. annual conferences to address regional/national issues
- Requires Constitutional amendment (ratification by 2/3 of annual conferences’ voting members)
- Representation:
  - All GC delegates from U.S. annual conferences
  - One clergy and one lay person from every central conference

Decision-Making for U.S. Matters

A U.S. Regional Conference could make decisions that affect only the U.S. For example:

- Compensation and pension plans for U.S. clergy
- Policies related to U.S. laws
- Adaptable parts of *The Book of Discipline*

What would not change:

- The proposal makes no change in how bishops are elected
- The proposal does not change jurisdictional structure or duties
- The U.S. would remain in connection with the worldwide UMC

Cross-Connection Support

The Connectional Table’s proposal for a U.S. Regional Conference was created through collaboration by many groups, including representatives from:

- Connectional Table
- Several general agencies (including Wespath)
- U.S. annual conferences
- Central conferences

The proposal also received favorable support from:

- Council of Bishops
- Central conference bishops

More Info: Petition and FAQs at Wespath.org/gc2020
Why Create a U.S. Regional Conference?

Helps The United Methodist Church (UMC)
- Upgrades UMC governance to meet needs of demographic shifts.
- Aligns with work toward General Book of Discipline—distinguishes between connectional issues (for entire UMC) vs. adaptable issues (regional/national).
- Allows for U.S. decision-making on adaptable matters for the U.S.

Simplifies General Conference proceedings; reduces GC costs
- Makes more GC time available for connectional matters for the entire Church (much less focus on U.S.-only petitions).
- May save the Church millions of dollars per quadrennium (potentially shorter GC, fewer petitions to translate into multiple languages).
- Delegates from outside the U.S. would not spend time studying and voting on hundreds of petitions that have no impact on their local churches or ministry.

Creates consistent governance between U.S. and Central Conferences
- Each central conference already makes its own decisions at the episcopal or national level. They do not need GC approval for local matters like clergy pensions, pastors’ salaries or adaptable parts of the Discipline.
- U.S. is the only part of the Church whose adaptable matters are decided by the full General Conference.

UMC’s Changing Demographics
When the UMC was formed in 1968, about 90% of UMC membership lived in the U.S. As the UMC becomes less U.S.-based, it is inefficient and even illogical for a growing majority of non-U.S. delegates to spend so much GC time on decisions that affect only U.S. clergy and church members.

UM News article: U.S. dips below majority of membership (Nov. 25, 2019)

Timeline
1928
First proposal for U.S. governance structure similar to Central Conferences
2005
Connectional Table (CT) and Council of Bishops begin work on this issue
2008
GC creates worldwide UMC committee to advance the worldwide connectional Church
2012
General Book of Discipline work begins; more awareness of need for a place for U.S.-adaptable work (outside of GC)
2013
CT partners with Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters; forms Worldwide Nature Collaboration Group
2019
CT submits GC 2020 legislation for U.S. Regional Conference
2020
Nearly half of delegates elected for GC 2020 live in Africa, Asia and Europe; majority of GC petitions focus on U.S.