

General Conference (April 23-May 3, 2024)

# Regionalization Proposals

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Wespath strongly supports the concept of a U.S. regional governance body within The United Methodist Church (UMC) to address issues that affect only the United States, such as benefit plans for U.S. clergy. Wespath supports regionalization proposals from the **Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters**, as well as prior regionalization proposals including the **U.S. Regional Conference** proposal (from the Connectional Table) and the **Christmas Covenant** proposal.

## Why Wespath Recommends Regionalization

Establishing a U.S. governance body to address U.S.-only matters offers several advantages:

- *It's efficient and practical*—In 2024, about 44% of General Conference delegates live outside the United States. Yet, the majority of petitions considered and time spent by the General Conference are U.S.-focused and irrelevant to the entire UMC Connection. This is an inefficient use of General Conference resources and delegates' time.
- *It would save time and money*—Moving votes on U.S.-only matters to a U.S.-only governance body could shorten General Conference and therefore reduce costs. It also would allow more time during General Conference to dialogue about topics that are important to the entire denomination.
- *It's fair*—The U.S. is the only part of the UMC whose adaptable matters (like clergy benefit plans) are decided by the full international General Conference body. *All other regions of the Church have local/regional governance over their own region-specific matters.*

## What Regionalization Does

The various regionalization proposals under consideration would realign the current seven Central Conferences (in Africa, Europe and Philippines) and the United States so that each becomes a United Methodist regional conference.

- Each of these United Methodist regional conferences would have the same duties and authority to pass legislation that is specific to their respective regions—such as legislation about clergy benefits or national holiday observances.
- Regional conferences would have authority to amend adaptable parts of *The Book of Discipline*, such as benefit plans and policies related to national laws. *The regional conferences would not make decisions on matters that affect the entire denomination.*



General Conference: *denomination-wide matters*



National/Episcopal Governance: *adaptable, local matters*

## What Doesn't Change

- Regionalization would not change how bishops are elected.
- Regionalization would not separate the U.S. from the rest of the Church. *The U.S. would remain in connection with the worldwide UMC for all connectional, denomination-wide matters.*

# Regionalization Proposals

## 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 worldwide Church) 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 General Conference time available for connectional matters for the worldwide Church (much less focus on U.S.-only petitions).
- May save the Church millions of dollars per quadrennium (potentially shorter General Conference, 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 for amending adaptable parts of the *Discipline*. Matters like clergy pensions are typically set at the central conference, episcopal area or national level. They do not need General Conference approval.
- *U.S. is the only part of the Church whose adaptable matters are decided by the full General Conference.*



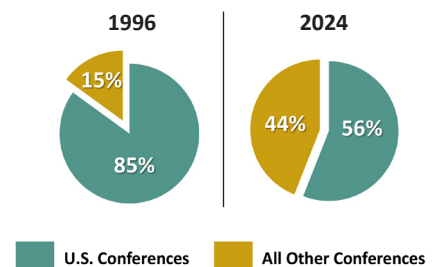
United Methodist Jurisdictions and Annual Conferences in the U.S.

## 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 General Conference time on decisions that affect only U.S. clergy and church members.

*Regionalization is not a new idea.* The first proposal for a U.S. governance structure similar to Central Conferences emerged in 1928. As worldwide demographics continue to shift (growing UMC in Africa and Philippines; shrinking UMC in U.S.), there is renewed momentum for regionalized governance on non-Connectional matters.

General Conference Delegates  
(reflects UMC membership changes)



## Learn More

Visit the UMC's [General Conference website](#) to learn more about [regionalization proposals](#) and other major issues to be considered by the General Conference in 2024.