

UMC General Conference | April 23 – May 3, 2024

Summary of Key Decisions

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Background info about General Conference

General Conference is The United Methodist Church's top legislative body. It typically meets every four years but was postponed in 2020, so this gathering in 2024 was actually the postponed 2020 General Conference. Each annual conference is allotted a specific number of seated/voting delegates based on its number of professing members. Minnesota has two delegates, both of whom were elected by members of the 2019 Minnesota Annual Conference Session: one clergy (Rev. Carol Zaagsma, Good Samaritan UMC in Edina and incoming assistant to the bishop for connectional ministries), and one lay person (Dave Nuckols, Minnetonka UMC). Bishops preside at General Conference but have no voice or vote.

LGBTQ+ inclusion

- The United Methodist Church's [longtime condemnation of homosexuality—which sparked a half-century of conflict—is now no more](#). By a vote of 523 to 161 after about an hour and a half of debate, General Conference delegates eliminated the 52-year-old assertion in the denomination's Social Principles that "the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching." In the same vote, delegates affirmed "marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith [adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age] into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community."
- The United Methodist Church [removed a 40-year ban on the ordination of](#)

[gay clergy](#). Delegates approved this decision by a 93 percent margin, without debate. As of the conclusion of General Conference, the denomination's Book of Discipline will no longer include a statement saying: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice 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."

- United Methodist pastors no longer face potential penalties for officiating at same-sex weddings or being in a same-sex relationship themselves. Delegates struck down a ban that prohibited clergy from officiating and churches from hosting "homosexual unions."

- Delegates voted to protect the rights of pastors to choose which weddings to perform or not perform by adopting the statement: "No clergy at any time may be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple, including same-sex couples. All clergy have the right to exercise and preserve their conscience when requested to perform any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple."

- Delegates voted to eliminate parts of the Traditional Plan, which was approved at the 2019 General Conference and strengthened the denomination's longtime restrictions on same-sex marriage and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy. For example, delegates removed of a ban on annual conferences and denominational agencies from giving United Methodist funds to any "gay caucus group" or using funds to "promote the acceptance of homosexuality." Instead, the provision now says annual conferences and agencies should honor the denomination's commitment not to reject lesbian or gay members. Delegates also voted to lift a ban placed on boards of ordained ministry from considering candidates without evaluating whether they are "self-avowed practicing" gay people, and to strike the requirement that bishops rule gay candidates ineligible.

What do these decisions mean for us in Minnesota? In 2019, the Minnesota Annual Conference [named the inclusion of all persons, including LGBTQ+ persons, as one of our four core values](#) and we have been living out that value for the past five years. For example, we have already been evaluating candidates for ministry on the basis of [nine leadership characteristics alone](#)—and that will not change. But the General Conference votes are important because they bring the denomination into closer alignment with the ways we are already living and leading in Minnesota.

Other key decisions

- Delegates approved a series of petitions related to regionalization, which has become United Methodist shorthand for a package of legislation that would restructure the denomination. Under the legislation, the U.S. and each central conference—church regions in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines—would become regional conferences with the same authority to adapt the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s policy book, for more missional effectiveness. Currently, only central conferences have the authority to adapt the Discipline as missional needs and different legal contexts require. To be ratified, the regionalization plan will need at least a two-thirds total vote of annual conference lay and clergy voters, so this item will come to the Minnesota Annual Conference Session for a vote.

- Delegates voted to [grant sacramental authority to deacons](#). Deacons can now administer baptism and Holy Communion without having to obtain special permission to do so. Previously, a bishop could authorize a deacon to preside at a specific celebration of the sacraments and/or in a specific ministry context. But today’s vote changes the language in The Book of Discipline so that such authorization is no longer required. “For the sake of extending the mission and ministry of the church and offering the means of grace to the world, the deacon is authorized to preside at the celebration of the sacraments,” the sentence that was changed now reads.

- Delegates passed a petition to welcome “with a spirit of grace” churches that have disaffiliated or withdrawn from The United Methodist Church and wish to return. The legislation stipulates that every annual conference shall have a policy of re-affiliation for the churches seeking to return to the connection, so Minnesota Conference leaders will work to create such a policy.
- Delegates [voted to reduce the portion of church giving requested to fund the general-church budget](#). Minnesota will still set its own apportionment formula, but the bottom line is that U.S. annual conferences will be asked to pay apportionments to the general church that are 38% to 41% lower than what delegates passed at the 2016 General Conference. Also, denomination-wide ministries that rely on those apportionments—including general agencies and episcopal leadership—will need to be budgeted with those cuts in mind.
- Delegates [voted to enter a full-communion partnership with The Episcopal Church](#) after years of dialogue about this possibility. Full communion means each church acknowledges the other as a partner in the Christian faith, recognizes the validity of each other’s baptism and Eucharist, and commits to work together in ministry. Such an agreement also means Episcopalians and United Methodists can share clergy. The agreement still needs the approval of the Episcopalians—which might not happen until 2027.
- Delegates overwhelmingly [approved a new retirement plan for U.S. clergy](#). Called Compass, the plan was conceived and championed by Wespath, the denomination’s pension and benefits agency. The new Compass plan will mean benefit changes starting Jan. 1, 2026. Unlike previous clergy retirement plans that Wespath has offered, Compass does not include a lifetime benefit. Instead, Compass is entirely a defined-contribution plan similar to the 401(k) plans most U.S. corporate employees

now have. The benefits of clergy who already have retired will not be affected by the plan. Wespath says the switch to the Compass plan is needed to continue providing reliable and sustainable retirement income.

- Delegates [approved a resolution condemning racial-ethnic discrimination and gender-based violence against Asian Americans](#). It condemns increasing discrimination against racial-ethnic minorities, especially Asian Americans, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. It also condemns the violations against religious minorities in India. The resolution calls on annual conferences to urge local churches to be informed and to work against discrimination and gender-based violence.

- Delegates approved a variety of resolutions related to creation care. One resolution calls for every annual conference to name a “caretakers of God’s creation coordinator” who will be responsible for helping the conference develop programs to help it become more ecologically sustainable and to address environmental injustices. Another resolution calls for every local church to create a “green team” to provide people with inspiration, knowledge, encouragement, and practical means for caring for creation and justice. Additional resolutions call on church gatherings to avoid single-use plastics whenever possible and urge churches to conduct annual carbon footprint and/or greenhouse gas emissions audits of their buildings.

- General Conference has issued a heartfelt apology to all who experienced sexual misconduct in The United Methodist Church. On the final day of the denominational gathering, Rev. Gary Graves, secretary of the General Conference, apologized on behalf of the church for the way the denomination has prevented people from being held accountable for sexual misconduct, thus perpetuating harm within local churches and other ministry settings and damaging the United Methodist connection. Submitted by the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the apology was part of a resolution passed in the last hour of General

Conference on May 3. The apology statement was read in its entirety during General Conference, and all United Methodist bishops around the world are to read the apology at their own upcoming annual conferences.