

Current Structure of the United Methodist Church

3 Branches of Government

1. Legislative—Conference
2. Executive—Bishops
3. Judicial—Judicial Council

Legislative

- The Conference: The global United Methodist Church (UMC) is divided into conferences and regions for connection and accountability
- The General Conference: is the official governing body of the UMC, akin to our nation's congress. Regions around the world send elected delegates, equal number clergy and laity, to the session of General Conference, held every four years. The General Conference debates and votes upon petitions and resolutions seeking changes to our governing document, the *Book of Discipline*.
 - The Book of Discipline: consists of several different types of legislation. The constitution of the UMC can only be changed by a vote of General Conference and 2/3 ratification of all Annual Conferences globally. The Social Principles are ongoing discussions on our stance as a denomination on social issues, and it is very comprehensive. The articles of religion are our statement of core beliefs. And there are many pages detailing the administrative life of the church.
 - Special Session of General Conference: In February of 2019, a special session of General Conference has been called to specifically deal with the current division in our denomination on issues of theology, that have been manifested in our division on inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. No other topic may be discussed or voted upon at the special session.
- The Jurisdictional Conference: exists only with the UMC of the United States. The US UMC is divided up regionally:
 - Northeastern (our jurisdiction)
 - Southeastern
 - North Central
 - South Central
 - Western
 - The Jurisdictional Conference is also made up of elected delegates, clergy and laity, from the Annual Conferences within the jurisdiction. It meets every four years following the session of the General Conference. The Jurisdictional Conference plans ministry, elects and appoints bishops, and sees to the implementation of legislation from General Conference.
- The Central Conference: exists only with the UMC outside the United States. Again, these Central Conferences are regional. Africa has three central conferences, Europe has three, and the Philippines has one. These function much in the same way that the US Jurisdictional Conferences function. However, the Central Conferences may alter parts of the *Book of Discipline* due to cultural and legal differences between their region and the United States.
- The Annual Conference: Within each Jurisdiction or Central Conference, the local churches are gathered into regional groups called Annual Conferences (AC). In most cases, each Annual Conference is overseen by a bishop. The AC works within their much smaller region in mission and ministry, working locally in each local church, and together in the larger connections. The AC meets each year, with equal representation of clergy and laity, to vote on a budget, on petitions and resolutions regarding our work together, and to learn and worship together. Our AC is the Upper New York Annual Conference.

- Districts: Within each AC, the local churches are further gathered into districts, overseen by a District Superintendent, appointed by the bishop. They coordinate ministries and oversee pastors. Our district is the Finger Lakes District, and our District Superintendent is Jeff McDowell. His office is in Seneca Falls.

Executive

- Council of Bishops: Together serve as the executive branch of the UMC. The council meets periodically all year to coordinate the work of the church globally, and to put into practice the legislation passed by the General Council.
- College of Bishops: The bishops serving Annual Conferences within a particular Jurisdiction or Central Conference work closely together in a 'college' to coordinate ministry more locally.
- Each bishop is appointed to an Annual Conference for four years. Bishops may not serve more than two appointive sessions per Annual Conference—8 years. Our current bishop is Mark Webb. This is his second appointive session with us, so his term with us ends in 2020.

Judicial Council

- The Judicial Council is the highest judicial body or "court" of The United Methodist Church. Its nine members are elected by the General Conference. The Judicial Council determines the constitutionality of acts or proposed acts of the General, Jurisdictional, Central, and Annual Conferences. It acts on these either on appeal of lower rulings or through requests for declaratory decisions. It also rules on whether acts of other official bodies of the denomination conform to *The Book of Discipline*. This is done in accordance with procedures established in *The Book of Discipline*.
 - There are also Jurisdictional Councils for Jurisdictional and Central Conferences.
- The Judicial Council will be meeting October 23-26 in Zurich specifically to review the proposals coming before the Special Session of General Conference in February of 2019.

Special Session of General Conference

The Council of Bishops has called a Special Session of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church to be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. The purpose will be to receive and act on a report from the Commission on a Way Forward based on the recommendations of the Council of Bishops. The 32-member Commission was authorized by General Conference 2016 and appointed by the Council of Bishops to examine paragraphs in The Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the church.

The Commission on a Way Forward developed three plans for moving forward as a denomination: The One-Church Plan, The Connectional Conference Plan, and the Traditional Plan. These were presented to the Council of Bishops in May of this year. The Council of Bishops voted to recommend (narrowly) the One-Church Plan to the Special Session of General Conference. However, all three plans will be placed before the special session. The Judicial Council ruled earlier this year that resolutions and petitions may be sent to the special session as long as they concern the commission's work. Two more plans have now been submitted through resolutions: The Simple Plan and the Plan of Dissolution.

The Special Session of General Conference is February 23-26 in Detroit.