

Central Conference Bishops Wholeheartedly Support Proposal for a U.S. Regional Conference

For Immediate Release

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Chicago, IL – At last week's Council of Bishops Meeting, the United Methodist Central Conference College of Bishops stated that they will promote and solidly support the Connectional Table's (CT's) legislation to General Conference 2020 that will create a new structure for churches in the United States. This structure will be called the United States Regional Conference.

The central conference bishops made this decision at their meeting on November 1, then shared the decision with the entire Council of Bishops on November 6 following the CT's presentation to the full Council. The full council had previously affirmed the CT proposal. In addition, the central conference bishops asked their steering committee to invite representatives of the CT to present their proposal to central conference delegates to General Conference.

"I am grateful for the strong support of the Central Conference bishops for the proposal for the U.S. as a regional conference," said Bishop Christian Alsted, Chair of the Connectional Table and bishop of the Nordic and Baltic Episcopal area. "I believe this proposal will enable us to live more fully as a world-wide church. It will give the church in the U.S. a structure to deal with its unique missional challenges and to do its visionary, strategic and administrative work. The Central Conference bishops know the value of being able to make adaptations and to supplement the general Book of Discipline, and I believe they wish to extend this privilege to the entire church. Furthermore, this will free the general conference to focus its work on world-wide concerns and to become a forum that leads the church forward in God's mission."

The proposed U.S. Regional Conference will comprise the current U.S. jurisdictional conferences and the geographical boundaries congruent with the territory of U.S. annual conferences. Naming this new structure for U.S. governance a regional conference rather than a central conference acknowledges the painful, racist history and still-existing wound associated with the former Central Jurisdiction in the U.S.

Currently, many General Conference petitions pertain mostly or exclusively to the UMC in the U.S. However, the U.S. Church currently has no venue other than General Conference for considering this legislation. As a result, U.S.-specific petitions dominate General Conference time, burden central conference delegates with matters that are outside their purview, and impact the efficiency of the legislative process.

A U.S. regional conference will provide an organizational structure for the U.S. to have parity with existing Central conferences for doing work on the adaptable portions of The Book of Discipline.

The legislation is designed to be implemented in two stages:

Stage I forms a committee of the General Conference, with legislative function, to deal with U.S. region – adaptable disciplinary provisions, U.S.-related resolutions, and non-disciplinary petitions concerning U.S. matters.

Stage II forms the U.S. Regional Conference, after which the Stage I committee will end its work, and creates a temporary Interim Committee on Organization to organize the Regional Conference.

“I am very encouraged by the enthusiastic support of our College of Central Conference Bishops,” said Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, Chief Connectional Ministries Officer of the Connectional Table. “They have a deep passion for our worldwide connection and have been consistently working for the unity and health of The United Methodist Church. For our church to move forward, we must find ways to provide equity between the U.S. and the central conferences. We must ensure that we take a worldwide perspective, and are not overly U.S.-centric. I am deeply thankful to our central conference bishops for their leadership in this regard.”

More information about this legislation can be found at bit.ly/USRClegislation.

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About the Connectional Table: The Connectional Table works to steward the mission, vision and ministries of The United Methodist Church. For more information, please visit connectionaltable.umc.org.

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