

US



Regional



Conference



Connectional Table
The United Methodist Church

connectionaltable.umc.org

The purpose of the Connectional Table is to discern and articulate the vision for the church and the stewardship of the mission, ministries, and resources of The United Methodist Church as determined by General Conference and in consultation with the Council of Bishops.

What is a regional conference?

The 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. It will not change the role and authority of U.S. jurisdictional conferences, including the election of bishops.

What's the goal?

The goal is to ease the burden of U.S. legislation on General Conference and give U.S. churches parity with those in central conferences.

Why the name "regional conference"?

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.

Where did this proposal come from?

The Connectional Table has been working with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters since 2013 to find a way for U.S. churches to do the adaptable work proposed by a *General Book of Discipline*.

What makes this proposal different?

Our work on this legislation pre-dates the 2019 Special Session and is a response to needs expressed by the global church. We spent the last quadrennium thoroughly vetting the proposal by engaging in conversations with individuals and groups from central conferences and the U.S., Wespath, directors of connectional ministry, legal counsel, the Council of Bishops, the Commission on the General Conference and others.

How will the regional conference be created?

- 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.

How does the USRC work with the Protocol and Christmas Covenant legislation?

Christmas Covenant | The CT affirms that the Christmas Covenant accurately reflects the CT legislation which proposes creating a U.S. Regional Conference. It also makes the regional conference structure consistent worldwide. Like the CT USRC legislation, the Christmas Covenant legislation creates a two-stage process in the U.S. It starts with an interim U.S. Regional Committee that does not require constitutional changes. It then creates a U.S. Regional Conference, which requires amendments to the Constitution. In addition, it includes the CT's non-disciplinary petition creating an Interim Committee on Organization for the U.S. Protocol | The CT USRC legislation is complementary to the Protocol, which includes regionalization as an ideal. The Protocol legislation has no path towards regionalization as it is written. The CT's USRC legislation would be a way to achieve regionalization.

How have Central Conferences shown support of the plan?

The Central Conference College of Bishops stated that they will promote and support the U.S. Regional Conference proposal. The Philippines Annual Conference Cavite has endorsed and forwarded the Christmas Covenant legislation that incorporates and expands upon the USRC legislation. In addition, the Connectional Table (CT), of which 17% are members of Central Conferences, voted to send this legislation to the 2020 General Conference.

Do central conferences have votes in the new U.S. body?

The legislation in Stage I sets the U.S. Regional Committee as all U.S. delegates, and one lay and one clergy for the central conferences, all of whom have a voice and vote. In Stage II, once the U.S. Regional Conference is developed, the legislation provides for one lay and one clergy person from each of the central conferences with voice and no vote. Inclusion of this representation was intentional because it is important to have the perspective of central conference members as to what is U.S. specific. However, in the same way that U.S. delegates do not vote in central conferences, the central conference delegates would not vote in the U.S. regional conference.

Is it possible to implement a shorter timeline for establishing and implementing a U.S. Regional Conference?

The USRC legislation as it is now written would be fully in effect by 2024. There may be interest in moving up the ratification of votes on the constitutional amendments for the USRC legislation at annual conferences. If that is the will of the delegates, and if all constitutional amendments are ratified, then it is possible to convene a U.S. Regional Conference mid-quadrennium. At this point there are many unknowns and many other newer developments that could impact these decisions, including the Protocol legislation and the Christmas Covenant legislation. Ultimately, these decisions will be up to the delegates at General Conference.

If adopted at General Conference, can constraints to marriage and ordination of homosexual persons be removed from the current UMC Discipline?

Based on the current Book of Discipline (BOD), these constraints are in the non-adaptable portion. A U.S. Regional Conference can adapt items that are adaptable by Central Conference. However, if a General Conference voted to change the non-adaptable portions of the BOD that removed those restrictions, the language concerning marriage and ordination of homosexual persons would become adaptable or changed.

The purpose of this legislation is to facilitate more contextualized ministry. The intent of this legislation allows the U.S. to make adaptive missional decisions. By giving the U.S. the same authority as Central Conferences and a venue to reflect on our unique context, we could find creative, innovative ways to do ministry that is U.S. specific.

What are the adaptable portions of the Book of Discipline?

According to ¶ 101 and ¶ 543.7 of the Book of Discipline, "The following parts and paragraphs are not subject to change or adaptation except by action of the General Conference. Parts I-V I) Constitution ¶1-61; II) General Book of Discipline ¶101; III) Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task ¶102-105 IV) The Ministry of all Christians ¶120-143; and V) Social Principles Preface, Preamble and ¶160-166."

Does the General Conference really spend a great deal of time on U.S.- focused matters?

Yes.

Regarding US-only Pensions, the upcoming GC will include a 45-minute plenary presentation, a report from the legislative committee, and time to vote on this subject.

The National Plans are very important for ethnic ministry in the U.S., but they are national plans, as their name says, and are U.S. focused. They do not have an effect outside the U.S., but will take up time during General Conference.

Grants to change jurisdictions are an added expense.

Will the U.S. Regional Conference save the denomination money?

Yes.

General Conference will be shorter, which will reduce conference costs. If the U.S. Regional Conference meets directly before or after General Conference or a joint Jurisdictional Conference, delegates will only travel once, and might be able to use the same venue. The smaller gatherings will save money as well. US-only legislation will no longer need to be translated in the ADCA. For the upcoming General Conference, 78 pages of the ADCA were translated for US-only Pensions.