

Proceedings

Morning Proceedings for April 25

Worship

ASHLEY DAVIS (Alabama-West Florida): Call to worship.

We gather in the presence of God.

ALL: We believe we have been anointed.

DAVIS: We gather in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: We believe we have been empowered to proclaim the good news to those who are suffering.

DAVIS: We gather in a safe space where we can challenge each other in love.

ALL: We gather with thanksgiving for Jesus, who taught us how to love. Let us praise the God in whom we believe.

DAVIS: Please remain standing as you are able and join in our opening hymn.

(music)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Amen.

SCOTT BREWER (Great Plains): Please be seated.

And will you join me in prayer?

ALL: Merciful God, you are our refuge and our strength in times of trouble. We come to you knowing that as we sit in a privileged space, there are so many suffering among us. We remember today those who have been unseen by us, by the church. Give us the wisdom to open up to those who suffer in silence. Remind us of your calling to proclaim the good news to those in the margins. Give us the heart to stand in solidarity and love with all your children. Give us the voice to speak up for those who have no voice. Help us, shape us, mold us to be your church. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

And now will you please join in singing our prayer of illumination.

(music)

(applause)

TONY LOVE (Baltimore-Washington): Siblings, as you are able, would you rise in heart and posture for the reading of God's word?

(pause)

Our scripture lesson comes from Luke chapter 4, verses 14 through 21:

"Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

“When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood to read, and the scroll from the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

“Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he said to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

The word of God for the people of God.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

LOVE: Blessings. You may be seated.

(music)

(applause)

(music)

BISHOP LATRELLE EASTERLING: Won’t you pray with me?

Gracious and holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Speak, God, for your people and your servant is listening.

(pause)

Silence. That has often been the church’s response to domestic abuse. Intimate partner violence, rape, as a weapon of war, incest; violence against the transgender community as well as the abduction and disappearance of indigenous women—silence.

The question that often looms is, Why do we have to talk about this in the church? Isn’t this best cared for in the pastor’s office or in counseling sessions? Why are we discussing intimate relationship issues in worship?

We don’t come to church to hear about these matters and so we, the church, remain silent. Perhaps it is out of our fear or embarrassment in discussing what we call “delicate matters.” Or perhaps it’s because we have turned worship into entertainment, rather than a sanctuary where confession, and healing, and transformation can take place. Perhaps it’s because our society is uncomfortable talking about sex at all. But, beloved, this isn’t about sex. It is about power. It is about domination. It is about abuse. It is about a bastardization of God’s word; God’s very essence, and God’s intent for creation.

(applause)

But our silence gives safe harbor to those in our pews who are perpetrators of abuse. Our silence gives cover to those who quote scripture out of context and use it to justify their violence. Our silence does not hold authorities and governments accountable for their failure to take these matters seriously and

enforce justice. Our silence, oh, listen beloved, our silence doesn't give those who are perpetuating violence an opportunity to understand the very nature of their sin and to repent.

Our silence is deafening, and it exacerbates the burden many survivors endure. Too many survivors carry the guilt and stigma of shame as they blame themselves for their abuse. The church's silence implies that there is in fact something wrong with you if you've been abused, and your silence is warranted.

As I entered ministry, I was told not to talk about the fact that I survived domestic abuse. I was told to be silent about that painful part of my past. They said it would make me look weak, and women in ministry already have enough battles to overcome. And I believe the individual who gave me that advice was well meaning. They thought they were preventing my ministry from being negatively impacted. They thought they were helping me because, don't you know we still live in the world that blames the victim. You know the questions. We ask, "Why did you stay?" "Why didn't you just leave?" "What were you wearing?" "Why were you walking alone?" "Why were you jogging at that time of night?" "Why were you in that part of town?" "Why didn't you fight back?" "Why didn't you scream?"

Or we say, "Um, if you had just been better to your partner, taking better care of their needs, maybe they wouldn't have abused you." "If you weren't transgender ..." "If you weren't so effeminate ..." "If you weren't ..." "If you ..." You. Society still blames those who were violated, abused, or raped.

So beloved, not only have you, if you've been through any of this, not only have you survived the violence, but you have survived carrying the blame for the actions of others as well. You are a survivor! You are not to blame! You are an overcomer! You are strong! You are brave! You are beloved of God! You were fearfully and wonderfully made. You are created in the *Imago Dei*, don't you ever let anybody tell you otherwise.

(applause)

You are of sacred worth, and, yes, if you are here, you are resilient.

(applause)

Never let anyone shame you into being silent about your abuse, for in the words of Zora Neale Hurston, "If you are silent about your pain, they will kill you and say you enjoyed it."

Thursdays in Black celebrates the resilience of those, female and male, who have overcome heinous acts of unspeakable violence and abuse. It acknowledges that we are here. And beloved, I want you to know we are here. We are in your homes. We are in your churches. We are in your pews. We are in your Sunday schools. We sing in your choirs. We are on your Cabinets. We are in this Episcopacy. We are here! See us! Don't ignore us. Don't look past us. Stop making us invisible. Speak our names. Minister to us, and speak words of hope, and health, and healing, and holistic sacredness into our lives.

I'm grateful that Thursdays in Black celebrates the resilience of survivors. But, I don't want us to stop there. I hope we ask the deeper question of why the resilience is necessary, and what we as a denomination are doing to prevent it. It is good that we are acknowledging intimate partner abuse, and recognizing the horrors of rape, and calling attention to violence against our LGBTQIA community. But, in the words of Miroslav Volf, "There is something deeply hypocritical about praying for a problem you are unwilling to solve."

(applause)

It is not enough for us to bandage the wounds of the abused; we need to speak to the abuse itself. Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled that scroll and found the place where it was written, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

(applause)

And then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. He then announced, he proclaimed, he prophesied, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And with that, Jesus, unequivocally, laid the foundation for his entire ministry. He declared for all eternity that this is why I have come, and this is what I will do. This is who I am, and if you claim to be one of my followers, this is who you are as well.

I have come to liberate, free, uplift, unbind, and love. I have come to end oppression, bondage, domination, abuse, and hate. I have come in power—the power of almighty God, and the fullness of the Trinity to model my intent for all creation. Christ chose this passage to establish the center of his existence and the center of the gospel. Beloved, do we not know that whatever we privilege to be the heart of the word of God will be the shaping force in our life of faith.

Jesus said if you know nothing else, know that this is my center. This is my essence. This is my plumb line. This is who I am. Measure your life against this standard. Measure your preaching against this standard. Measure your teaching against this standard. Measure your theology against these words. Keep coming back to this to check yourself before you wreck yourself.

(applause)

If you find that you’ve deviated from this in word or deed, then course-correct, beloved. Because you are no longer representing me, you are now representing the world.

(applause)

Jesus chose to begin his earthly ministry by reciting this text immediately following his Baptism and wrestling with evil in the wilderness. Just after God announced, “You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” Just after he refused to be corrupted and compromised by evil and the world’s definition of power. He rejected an endorsement of power over against and instead demonstrated that God’s power is always demonstrated through mutuality. It has to be that way because God’s power is never devoid of love. And I agree with feminist theologian and scholar bell hooks when she teaches that love and abuse cannot coexist. Love and abuse cannot coexist. Say it with me!

ALL: Love and abuse cannot coexist.

BISHOP EASTERLING: And after firmly laying this foundation, Jesus spends the remainder of his life, death, and resurrection putting these words into action. Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. With a sense of urgency, Jesus then got to work healing, calling, cleansing, teaching, dismantling, loosing, liberating, including, exegeting, living, and loving in accordance with God’s holy will. Today we

are hypocrites if we celebrate resiliency without acknowledging that the church has been complicit in supporting a pedagogy of patriarchy that fuels a hermeneutic of hubris while too often refusing to dismantle systems of domination.

(applause)

Beloved, until we preach, teach, mentor, counsel, covenant, sing, live, vote—huh?—vote, and elect in alignment with the principle that there is no longer Jew or Greek, bond or free, male and female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord, then we are living beneath the life, teaching, and very being of Jesus, the Jesus that we purport to follow. Until we acknowledge and affirm that each human being is whole, complete, and equal, endowed with agency and autonomy, we betray our adherence to God’s word and its corresponding precepts. For we have stated that we reject societal norms that assume difference standards for partners in marriage. Our very Social Principles reject complementarianism over egalitarianism. So let us be clear. Until we stop errantly teaching that the abused must remain in their abusive marriages, we are coconspirators in their bondage, and we have their blood on our hands. Until we stop turning a blind eye to missing and murdered indigenous women, we are participants in their peril. Until we stop insinuating that there is something wrong with individuals who are gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, or queer, we are complicit in their harm.

(applause)

We give license when we create a category of others. When we herald that there is any hierarchy of human worth, we contradict our own teaching and we then contribute to the harm. Human understandings of power often think of power as hierarchical with those representing patriarchy at the top and everyone else beneath them in the social schema. This perpetuates the notion that one human being is inherently superior and divinely designed to irrevocably wield authority and control over others. But God shows us in the Trinity a model of power that is relational and the very antithesis to abusive power. We must continue to exegete the fullness of God’s word and what it means for our transformed lives. Bonhoeffer said it this way, “You have only one master now, but with this yes to God belongs just as clear a no. Your yes to God requires no to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor, to all ungodliness, and to all mockery of what is holy. Belief means decision. In the synagogue on that inaugural day, Jesus Christ declared and then spent his life demonstrating that only when power is used to enhance another’s freedom is that power in line with God’s kin-dom. None of us can be silent in the face of violence. We must speak liberation and safety. We must speak equality and equity. We must create the opportunity for repentance and accountability. We must loose all from the bondage of abuse, perpetrator and victim alike, because until all are free, none are free. Until all are safe, none are safe. Until all are valued, none are valued. Until we say that all are of sacred worth, then none are of sacred worth. Until all are loved, then none are loved. God has called us, anointed us, consecrated us, empowered us, prepared us, for us to right these wrongs, and then, when we are finally free from all of this physical and verbal and spiritual and psychological and patriarchal and theological abuse, we will be able to join hands together and say, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me and I will be silent no more!” And we will be free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we’re free at last!

(applause)

(pause)

RENEE MIKELL (Western Pennsylvania): And now, siblings, if you are able, please join me in the prayer of confession and absolution.

ALL: Forgiving God, we confess that we choose comfort over truth. We have looked away from those who hurt. Moreover, we justify abuse. We created systems that silence and condemn the victims. Forgive us, O Lord.

We confess we have not used the gift of your anointment to set the captives free. We confess that we have allowed your children to feel broken, unimportant, and unseen. Forgive us, O Lord.

MIKELL: And I invite you to give God your personal prayer of confession.

(silent prayer)

Beloved, listen to God's word: The spirit of the Lord is upon you, anointing you to bring the good news to the poor. God has sent you to proclaim release of the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed. Believe that God has called you. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

And please join with me.

ALL: We are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

(pause)

(music)

(applause)

BISHOP EASTERLING: Siblings in Christ, the spirit of the Lord is upon us. Let us continue our work of liberation. Let us love one another with the love of Christ. Let us be a safe space for those who need it most. Let us use our voice, our privilege, and our faith to really and truly transform this world. Let us be God's people. Amen and amen.

(applause)

(pause)

Morning Plenary

BISHOP DAVID WILSON: Good morning, my friends. If you'll remain in your seats while our team gathers this morning.

(pause)

Good morning, my friends. The third plenary session of the postponed 2020 General Conference is called to order. Let us pray.

(speaking in Choctaw)

Creator God, may your Holy Spirit rest upon us for this session as we do your holy work. Amen.

My friends, I am David Wilson, a member—a male member—of the Choctaw nation of Oklahoma and Cherokee nation lineage, and my pronouns are he and him. It's an honor and privilege to preside this morning over this General Conference.

(applause)

Thank you.

(applause)

Thank you so very much. Thank you. Thank you. My joy of course is serving as the bishop of the wonderful, talented, gifted people, the Great Plains Annual Conference.

(applause)

A conference who is providing wonderful leadership for this gathering here. I am excited because you can see my backup behind me. I have the heavy hitters of the Council of Bishops, not only the incoming council president, Tracy Smith Malone, who is also bishop of East Ohio, and then her successor in a few years, Bishop Ruben Saenz Sr. [Jr.] of the Central Texas and North Texas annual conferences.

(applause)

So you can see, I am in a very good shape this morning.

Monitoring Report

BISHOP WILSON: At this time, the chair invites Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, general secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race, to provide a monitoring report, and Ms. Dawn Wiggins Hare, the general secretary of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

GIOVANNI ARROYO (Baltimore-Washington, General Secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race): *Bonjour*.

DAWN WIGGINS HARE (Alabama-West Florida, General Secretary of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women): Good morning.

ARROYO: General Secretary Giovanni Arroyo, Baltimore-Washington Conference.

HARE: General Secretary Dawn Wiggins Hare, Alabama-West Florida Conference.

(applause)

My people. Laywoman, White, older adult.

ARROYO: She jumped over me. Now I was going to finish saying that this clergyman (*laughter*) who's an adult.

HARE: Sorry.

ARROYO: Grace.

(laughter)

HARE: Thank you.

ARROYO: In today's and tomorrow's *Daily Christian Advocate*, GCORR and GCOSROW will be sharing examples of celebrations and concerns that our monitors observed through their equity and gender lenses. Today's report features the intersectionality of gender and race.

HARE: Friends, yesterday was the first time that you, as the body of Christ in this holy conferencing setting, had an opportunity, an opportunity to practice inclusion in decision-making and to model it to the rest the church and to the world. That opportunity was in the election of the officers of your legislative committees. So, how well did you do? Well, here it is.

ARROYO: Combining the chairs, vice-chairs, secretaries, and subcommittee chairs across the fourteen legislative committees, here is our report card.

(pause)

HARE: White female: 17. White male: 11. White nonbinary: 1.

ARROYO: Black male: 14. Black female: 10.

HARE: Pacific Islander female: 1. Hispanic/Latina female: 2. Hispanic/Latino male: 2.

ARROYO: Asian female: 4. Asian male: 3. Multiracial male: 1. Multiracial female: 4. Pretty amazing.

HARE: But, Gio, there were some hiccups yesterday.

ARROYO: Yes.

HARE: Yes, and. We are choosing to show grace in our reporting today and choosing to empower the elected leaders to set a tone of inclusion, hospitality, respect, and safety, as the legislative work continues today.

ARROYO: And hopefully with the opening jitters out of the way, we can settle down and honor every voice in the room, including those who English is not their first language. That's just a friendly reminder.

HARE: Actually, Gio, it's the second reminder. I'm just sayin'. So let's work a little bit harder on inclusion with language and interpretation. If we can wait on the Spirit, we can wait on an interpreter.

ARROYO: Amen.

(applause)

HARE: So may God's Spirit be present in your deliberations today.

ARROYO: *(repeats in Spanish)*

ARROYO AND HARE: Amen.

(applause)

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

Committee on Agenda and Calendar

BISHOP WILSON: The next up item of business are some of our administrative committee reports. The first committee report will be presented by the Committee on Agenda and Calendar. The chair

recognizes the chair of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar, Emily Allen, and the coordinator of the calendar, Susan Brumbaugh, to present their report. As she is approaching the platform, please get your voting devices ready because we'll begin voting soon.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you, Bishop.

EMILY ALLEN (California-Nevada, Chair of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar): Good morning. Today's schedule is printed on p. 1999 in today's *DCA*. That's p. 1999. The Committee on Agenda and Calendar recommends the following changes for the remainder of the day:

Following my report, we will hear reports from three other administrative committees: Journal, Courtesies and Privileges, and Presiding Officers. After the laity address we will hear a report from the Rules Committee. Next will be a report from the Credentials Committee, followed by an item of business brought by the secretary of the General Conference. After that, we will receive a report from the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters to lead us through calendar items that were printed in yesterday's *DCA*. If we finish the scheduled calendar items early, we will return to the report from the Jurisdictional Study Committee. I move the adoption of today's agenda with the changes I have described.

BISHOP WILSON: It is moved to adopt the agenda as presented. In a moment we will open the pool so that if you wish to speak, you may register.

The question is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the agenda. You may now register to speak. Is there any discussion?

(pause)

Those in favor—excuse me. I apologize.

We will now proceed to vote. The motion requires a majority vote. The question is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the agenda as presented. The motion again requires a majority vote. The question is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Those in favor, press *one (1)*, and those opposed, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Have all voted who wish to do so?

(pause)

Voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote?

(pause)

There's a flag, I believe, out here, maybe to my right.

(pause)

Thank you.

(pause)

Thank you. Will you project the votes? Thank you. There are 684 in the affirmative and 14 in the negative. The affirmative has it. The motion is adopted, and the agenda is adopted.

[Yes, 684; No, 14]

SUSAN BRUMBAUGH (New Mexico, Coordinator of the Calendar): To continue the report, I am Susan Brumbaugh, Coordinator of the Calendar. White, female, adult, she/her pronouns, and I am from the New Mexico Annual Conference. I am here to guide you through voting on our first consent calendars. They were announced yesterday. They were printed in yesterday's *DCA*, and as a reminder, consent calendars that begin with the letter *A* contain disciplinary items, consent calendars that begin with the letter *B* contain non-disciplinary items, and consent calendars that begin with the letter *C* contain referrals. The first consent calendar that we will be voting on appears on p. 1991 of the English, French, and Portuguese editions of the *DCA*. And on p. 1992 of the Kiswahili edition. That's pp. 1991 or 1992. In the middle of the page is Consent Calendar A01 containing disciplinary items. That's A01. The items on Consent Calendar A01 are correct as printed. No items were removed. Bishop, I move we accept the actions on consent calendar A01.

BISHOP WILSON: So the question is on the adoption of the Consent Calendar A01 found on p. 1991 of the English, French, and Portuguese edition of the *DCA* and pp. 1992 of the Kiswahili edition. That's pp. 1991 and 1992.

Please get your voting device ready. We will now proceed to vote. This motion requires a two-thirds vote. And again the question is on the adoption of the Consent Calendar A01 found on p. 1991 of the English, French, and Portuguese editions of the *DCA* and p. 1992 of the Kiswahili edition, and again pp. 1991 and 1992. Those in favor, press *one (1)*; those opposed, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Have all voted who wish to do so? Voting is now closed, and may we have the results of the vote?

(applause)

There are 646 in affirmative, and 73 in the negative. There are two-thirds in the affirmative, and the motion is adopted. The Consent Calendar is approved.

[Yes, 646; No, 73]

Susan, please continue.

BRUMBAUGH: Thank you. At the end of this General Conference, if someone comes up to you and says, "We didn't do anything at General Conference," we just did. Today's second consent calendar is B01 on p. 1992 for French, Portuguese, and English, and on p. 1993 for Kiswahili. Again, it's on the screen as well, pp. 1992 or 1993. The items on Consent Calendar B01 are correct as printed. No items were removed. Bishop, I move that we accept the actions on Consent Calendar B01.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Susan.

The question again is on the adoption of the Consent Calendar B01 found on p. 1992 for French, Portuguese, and English, and on p. 1993 for Kiswahili. And, again, that is p. 1992 or 1993. Please get your voting device ready. We will now proceed to vote. The motion requires a two-third vote. The question is

on the adoption of the Consent Calendar B01 found on p. 1992 for French, Portuguese, and English, and on p. 1993 for Kiswahili. Again, that is p. 1992 or 1993. Those in favor, press *one (1)*; those opposed, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Have all voted who wish to do so?

The voting is now closed, and may we have the results of the vote? Thank you. There are 618 in the affirmative, and 99 in the negative. There are two-thirds in the affirmative, and the motion is adopted. The consent calendar is approved.

[Yes, 618; No, 99]

(applause)

Committee on Journal

BISHOP WILSON: The next administrative committee report is on the Committee on Journal report. The chair recognizes the chair of the Committee on Journal, Rachel Miller.

RACHEL MILLER (West Ohio, Chair of the Committee on Journal): Good morning, church. I'm Rachel Miller, clergy delegate from West Ohio.

(applause)

I'm a beloved child of God who feels like a young adult, even though the numbers say something different. I'm reporting on behalf of the Committee on the Journal, and I'll begin with the schedule that was printed in Tuesday's *DCA* was incorrect but was rectified in Wednesday's publication. We have reviewed *DCA*, volume 5, no. 1, April 23, and I'd like to call your attention to the *errata* which can be found on p. 1990 of the April 24 *DCA*.

P. 1858, in the list of petitions submitted by those who are no longer United Methodist, petition 20062 should be 20662.

We have reviewed *DCA*, volume 5, no. 2, April 24, and I would like to call your attention to the *errata* which can be found, again, on p. 2005 of the April 25 *DCA*. P. 2005.

In the French version of the *ADCA*, volume 3, supplement for 2024, p. 1135: the General Conference Parliamentary Procedure Chart list several expressions that are unhelpful. A more accurate and more useful version of the chart has been added to the *ADCA* website. Printed copies of the updated version are also being distributed to the French-speaking delegates at their plenary seats.

Bishop, I move the adoption of the schedule as corrected.

(pause)

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Rachel. It is moved to adopt the schedule as corrected. Is there any discussion? If you'll get your devices ready, we will vote.

The question is on the adoption of the schedule as corrected. Again, the question is on the adoption of the schedule as corrected. Those in favor, press *one (1)*. Those opposed, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Have all voted that wish to do so? May we have the results? There are 684 in the affirmative and 42 in the negative. The motion is adopted.

[Yes, 684; No, 42]

Thank you, Rachel.

Committee on Courtesies and Privileges

BISHOP WILSON: The next administrative committee report is the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges. The chair recognizes the chair of this committee, Courtesy and Privileges, Raquel Feagins.

RAQUEL FEAGINS (Rio Texas, Chair of the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges): *Buenos dias*.

ALL: *Buenos dias*.

FEAGINS: *Bom dia*. Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

FEAGINS: My name is Raquel Feagins, and I am a clergywoman from the Rio Texas Conference in the United States. I'm so happy to see your beautiful faces this morning.

Today, the committee brings three brief announcements.

The first one is that we have an email address. It is gccourtesies@gmail.com, and you can find it on today's *Daily Christian Advocate*. If you have any matters of privilege that you would like us to consider, please email us at that address. And also, if you would like us to consider resolutions, accommodation, courtesy, appreciation, *et cetera*, you may submit those in writing for consideration. Thank you so much for that.

Our committee would like to acknowledge the worldwide nature of our denomination. And we are very thankful to be in fellowship with all of you, and we are thrilled that we get to be in fellowship with each other. Just last night I made some new friends, and I was able to speak in French to some of my friends, some of my new friends here, and so we know that language is very important. And so we want to acknowledge the translators who have done a very beautiful job helping us throughout our conference.

(applause)

Finally, we would like to invite everyone to visit the exhibit hall. We realized yesterday that not everyone knew where the exhibit hall is. If you're sitting on this side of the room, we're just leaving right here in this area. But if you leave this room, to my left, go to the very back, then go past the press area. To the left you will find the exhibit hall. We encourage everyone to visit the displays, including from our general agencies, from some of our United Methodist colleges and universities, as well as several vendors and Cokesbury. So please take some time to go visit. They are open from 10 A.M. to 7 P.M. Thank you so much and have a great day today.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Raquel.

(applause)

Committee on Presiding Officers

BISHOP WILSON: The next report is the report of the Committee on Presiding Officers. The chair recognizes the chair of the committee, Jasmine Smothers, and vice-chair, Audun Westad, to present their report.

JASMINE SMOTHERS (North Georgia, Chair of the Committee on Presiding Officers): Good morning. I'm Jasmine Rose Smothers, clergy, female, African American, clergy delegate from the North Georgia Conference in the United States of America. And our incredible bishop, Robin Dease, allows me to pastor a really cool church in downtown Atlanta, Georgia. My pronouns are she and her, and this morning I want to invite you to put on your headphones and turn on your translation equipment.

In the meantime, I want to remind you that at this General Conference I have the privilege of working alongside an incredible team of delegates who work tirelessly to select and notify diverse and skilled presiding officers for each plenary session. Didn't Bishops Merrill and Rapanut do a great job yesterday? Let's thank them.

(applause)

AUDUN WESTAD (Norway, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Presiding Officers): Good morning, delegates! *(speaking in Norwegian)* Before I go on with the business, there is something that I would like to say. I'm one of those delegates who do not get to use the first language here at General Conference. There is no translation, neither written nor spoken. That means that I will always be working in a landscape that isn't home, never quite being able to come off as I want to had this been in my first language. Nonetheless, and in the spirit of inclusion, I will try something that I have never done before. I will leave my second language be for a few minutes to test my third language on you guys. So, bear with me as I try to use my third language, a language that is one of the official translated languages here at General Conference. And, in the spirit of inclusion, I do so acknowledging it's not perfection that is our goal when we are communicating, but understanding.

(simultaneous interpretation from German)

Audun Westad, I'm come from the annual conference in Norway. I'm vice president of the Committee of Presiding Officers. The committee, we have to make sure to find where our presiding offices come from, and until the end we try to represent our conferences as well as possible. If you don't have seen the bishop from your part of the world, or nobody looks familiar to you, please don't become impatient, you will still get your turn.

(applause)

SMOTHERS: Tomorrow, we are excited that Bishop Héctor Burgos-Núñez, from the Northeastern Jurisdiction of the United States, will preside.

(applause)

(simultaneous interpretation from German)

WESTAD: Bishop Gregory Palmer will follow him. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation with our presiding officers. See you tomorrow.

(applause)

Laity Address

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Jasmine and Audun. I'm excited about this next piece in our agenda for the day, the Address of the Laity. To see the power of laity at work here in this General Conference and where I come from in the Great Plains, the wonderful, extraordinary work of our laypeople. And so, this next item is our Laity Address, and the chair is pleased to recognize these individuals to provide this address: LaToya Redd Thompson, Micheal Pope, John Hall, Jennifer Swann, Mele Maka. Let's welcome them.

(applause)

LATOYA REDD THOMPSON (Mississippi): Great morning to you. I am LaToya Redd Thompson, African American female, young-ish adult, and I am honored to be the president of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders. The AACLL, we call it. I'm also honored and privileged to be the conference lay leader of the Mississippi Annual Conference.

I would like to acknowledge the rest of our diverse—and please note that we all wearing black—AACLL Executive Committee, some of whom are to my left.

Micheal Pope, African American female, is the vice president of the AACLL and the conference lay leader of the California-Nevada Annual Conference.

(applause)

Jennifer Swann is the AACLL secretary and conference lay leader for the Louisiana Annual Conference.

(applause)

John Hall is the AACLL treasurer and conference lay leader of the North Carolina Annual Conference.

(applause)

Mele Maka, Tongan Pacific Islander, is an AACLL Executive Committee member at-large and conference lay leader for the California-Pacific Annual Conference.

Rich Hughen is also an at-large member for the AACLL Executive Committee and serves as conference lay leader for the New England Annual Conference.

Margaret Borgen is the AACLL Nominations Committee chair and conference lay leader for the Iowa Annual Conference.

And Nancy Tam Davis is the past president of the AACLL and conference lay leader for the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.

Dr. Herman Totten, African American male, is the president of the Conference Directors of Lay Servant Ministries and former lay servant ministries director for the North Texas Annual Conference.

And last, but certainly not least, David Teel is the director of Laity and Leadership and staff liaison with Discipleship Ministries for the AACLL and the Executive Committee.

Now the central purpose of the AACLL is to enable and equip lay ministry. Accordingly, the ministry of the laity is the lens from which the AACLL makes decisions and plans programming. Paragraph 127 of the 2016 United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, my favorite paragraph, titled The Ministry of the Laity, states,

JOHN HALL (North Carolina): “The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ’s outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

JENNIFER SWANN (Louisiana): Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20; every layperson is called to be missional.”

MELE MAKI (California Pacific): “The witness of the laity, their Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of the gospel, is the primary evangelistic ministry through which all people will come to know Christ and United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission.”

MICHEAL POPE (California-Nevada): The Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders focuses its efforts to amplify this witness based on the quadrennial theme for the 2025 through 2028 quadrennium, we felt led as a body to guide ourselves under the theme of “Together by Grace.”

The scripture for that theme, Ephesian 3:14-21: “This is why I kneel before the Father. Every ethnic group in heaven and on earth is recognized by him. I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith.

“As a result of having strong roots in love. I ask that you’ll have the power to grasp love’s width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you’ll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.

“Glory to God who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by the power at work within us; glory to him and the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.”

These passages, coupled paragraph 127 of *The Book of Discipline* and Ephesians 3:14-21, are our guiding post for the next quadrennium of the AACLL. These passages led us to ask ourselves three very important questions: How do we start together by grace? How will we remaining together by grace? And how do we go forward together by grace. Jack Corn, a Methodist, layperson and retired photo journalist for the Tennessean, lives his witness through the lens of a camera. Listen to how he became a witness to grace in a disciple in the marketplace:

(video playing)

(applause)

POPE: Jack Corn reminds us that we the people called Methodists can begin to answer our “how” questions by becoming active witnesses. Being there to witness the stories of our siblings, seeing there by embracing the spirit of Jesus when we observe and shed light on the stories, and we live into our faith by gathering others to bring care to every place that needs it. We answer the questions by revisiting our start.

THOMPSON: How did we start together by grace? That's our first question. At our fall 2023 AACLL gathering, the General Secretary of the General Archives and History, Dr. Ashley Boggan, spoke to our AACLL membership about lay ministry in our Wesleyan history. The secretary described Susanna Wesley, John Wesley's mother, as "rebellious," "skeptical," "strong-willed," and, thankfully, "influential" on her nineteen children, including John and Charles. When John was eight or nine years old, his mother Susanna held home services where she preached after Sunday worship while her husband Samuel was out of town fulfilling his priestly duties in the Church of England. Her audience grew to over 200 in her kitchen and outside leaning in each Sunday as many preferred her teaching and exhortation to official parish services. Imagine that! John Wesley learned from his mother and her active lay witness that being where the people are, seeing the people, and gathering the people can require unconventional and even unsanctioned actions. Susanna embodied the "open minds, open hearts, open doors" slogan. She also taught John to focus on spreading God's love to those who need it by being open minded, Spirit-led, and need-led over being accepted, standard, and the typical church of the time.

John Wesley's younger brother Charles was also profoundly impacted by their mother, as well as by another laywoman witness. Charles converted from high church to evangelical Christianity on May 21, 1738 when a laywoman called Mrs. Turner stood outside a gravely ill Charles Wesley's door and said, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities." Charles believed and was healed. Mrs. Turner was tuned in to the Spirit's call, and because she was a thirty-year-old old cleric, poet, and musician, Charles Wesley was healed and freed. On the one-year anniversary's conversion, May 21, 1739 he wrote an eighteen-stanza poem that became the first song in almost every Methodist hymnal for 250 years. It was called "On the Occasion of my Conversion". Do you know what it is called today? Oh, we've got some Methodist scholars in here. "O for a Thousand Tongues." Charles Wesley said to himself, "O that Christ would speak to me." He decided to trust this laywoman's voice with the very voice of God, and he was healed and believed, rising up with confidence in God's love and pardon. Thanks to Mrs. Turner, who was tuned into the Spirit's call.

How did we start together by grace? We started as a movement spurred by two men inspired by two laywomen (and many more)—

(applause)

Yeah, let's clap for that! Those two lay witnesses were active advocates of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as described paragraph 127 of our *Book of Discipline*. Because of them, we the people called Methodists, started as a radical and maybe even rebellious answer to God's call to fulfill the Great Commission. A call that the Wesley brothers recognized is issued to lay and clergy alike.

POPE: How are we remaining together by grace siblings? Since we last met at General Conference, we have been living through a time of transition and transformation. COVID eased us into a consciousness and became a pandemic. They closed the doors of our churches and halted all our traditional ministries. The pandemic required laity and clergy to learn and embrace this wonderful thing called Zoom. And I wish I had invested, as I'm sure you all do, too.

(laughter)

Some of us, we were not allowed to witness the loss of family members and friends and neighbors during this time. COVID prevented this, causing greater isolation that has now developed into a mental

health crisis that will be with us with decades to come. The economy, homelessness, wars, gun violence, and other things remind us that we—the world—needs the love of Christ more than ever. As the people called Methodists, we braced ourselves for the disaffiliations that have taken place to date. Many of us witnessed the departure of siblings who we once worshiped with and performed ministry with. We mourn loss of this connectional life while we anticipate an outcome for our time together here in Charlotte that allows us all to become like Jack Corn, disciples in the marketplace, revived by our witness to be beautiful, diverse, and our beautiful and diverse lives. “Together by grace” means our decisions as the people called Methodists will impact our current reality. Creating a legacy that embraces our youth and young adults, while also joyfully caring for those of us, like me, that are aging.

How do we remain together by grace? In the California-Nevada Conference where I serve, we have seen laity and clergy working together to share the love of Christ through ministries that are reaching out to the brokenness in the lives of so many people living in northern California and Nevada in their context. We have seen a certified lay ministry and LSM—lay servant ministry—programs become filled with laity that long to partner with clergy as together they witness the power of the Holy Spirit when we all live into the freedom that grace provides. Our ethnic ministries have contributed to the translation of the lay servant courses being offered through Discipleship Ministries. The partnership between lay leadership development board, conference staff, laity, and clergy has created an environment of love that is not perfect you guys, but it’s fueled in love. The California-Nevada Conference is one of the most diverse conferences in the U.S. with 200 diverse languages being spoken, creating an opportunity to embrace a new kin-dom of God. I want to give a big shout out to our Tongan siblings who stepped up and showed out by translating the lay speaker and certified lay minister curriculum into Tongan.

(applause)

Siblings, when we work together, the impossible becomes the possible and we begin to see a kin-dom manifested in every neighborhood, whether it’s urban or rural. We remain together by truly seeing each other as siblings and shedding light onto each other’s lives. We remain together by sharing our stories. We remain together by living into a future that witnesses something new.

THOMPSON: We remain together by fortifying our witness. The Mississippi Annual Conference, like many, has experienced great loss over this quadrennium. In one quadrennium, my annual conference lost about half its churches. COVID-19, a growing culture apathy and disinterest concerning traditional religion and, of course, the dreaded “d word”—disaffiliation—are just a few of the things that we, the people called Methodists, have faced. I struggled at times along with my husband, a local pastor, as part of a small crew doing livestream worship services for well over a year in 2020 and 2021. Missing the interaction with and feedback from congregants alongside whom we had grown so accustomed to worshiping with in person. We also lost six members of our Board of Laity over the last quadrennium as they left with their churches. The church where I had my membership for over ten years left my annual conference in December 31, 2023. The grief from affirming the separation of each church at Annual Conference session, as well as saying goodbye to my own church in person, was unfathomable. But there’s something quite resilient about the people called Methodists.

(applause)

One of my Board of Laity members, a district lay leader whose church chose to disaffiliate, asked Bishop Sharma Lewis on a Board of Laity call, “Bishop, my church has left, but I am staying. What are you going

to do for people like me, Bishop?” Now, Bishop Lewis, if you know her, never one to shy away from a challenge, responded, “Sarah, I think we have something for you.” She explained the concept of lighthouse churches and how the Mississippi Conference was creating and supporting ministries for persons who choose to stay United Methodist. Dr. Sarah Sanders, the district lay leader who asked Bishop Lewis the question, not only found a lighthouse church, she founded a lighthouse church as well.

(applause)

Starting with a nucleus group of seven—like a Wesleyan band, you could say—they began meeting and having worship services in the spring of 2023, and as Methodists grateful to God for providing a way for them remain together by grace, they decided to name their new church Grace United Methodist Church. They acquired a regular meeting space and more than doubled their weekly attendance with more people joining their numbers. People looking for fresh ways to remain together with grace. To date, the Mississippi Conference has trained and certified fourteen lighthouse churches for those who want to remain United Methodist. And five of these churches are new church plants started by displaced church members. In Mississippi, these are just a couple of examples of how we continue to fortify our witness together by grace.

POPE: How do we go forward together by grace? This is a hard question, but we can hard things. We answer it best when we engage in holy conferencing and decision making that allows us to bring our faith to the brokenness of the world. We do this by forgiving ourselves first and forgiving those around us. We the people called Methodists are being guided into a future where we see “other” as a valuable creation. The Holy Spirit is moving us to live from the inside out. We do that by asking how can I or we walk aside my or our siblings. How do I or we honor the multiple thoughts which enrich our spiritual journey together. We let go, siblings, of our guilt, judgement by being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Together as laity and clergy, we are asked to build the bridges. We do this by remaining grounded in our faith by sharing the love—*(spells out L-O-V-E)*—of Christ in every circle where we show up.

One of my favorite movies—I love animated movies—is *Finding Nemo*. And in this animated movie, a fish named Nemo is caught in a net with a group of other fish from all over the ocean. And then the fish are in this net, and they are scared, and they are frantically swimming about in all different directions; and meanwhile they are being pulled up into this boat, making it easier for them to be a part of a catch. Nemo recognizes this, the smallest fish and the fragile fish that he is, and he says to them, “Come on! Let’s work together to save our lives!” He shouts that out. “Swim in the same direction. Let’s swim down!” And they do. The weight of them swimming together breaks the crane holding the net, and they are set free. Siblings, together by grace we swim together in hope and love to create the spiritual freedom that promotes curiosity, imagination, forgiveness, and love. May God’s will be done as we build a new church that is filled with transformative ministries that bring the love of Jesus to the brokenness of the world.

THOMPSON: Together by grace, we swim to freedom and to a new transformative church, my sister said. Together by grace, even if smaller than before, we are victorious. In Judges 7 the story of Gideon’s army we learned that we serve a God who delights in showing his power by doing much with little. Gideon’s army went from tens of thousands down to ten thousand down to three hundred against countless Midianites and Amalekites. God used a remnant to battle the enemies of a faithful people in radical and even unorthodox ways. God used a few to make a fantastic impact. And God will do the

same with the people called Methodists. Together by grace we remember that nothing is impossible for God. So he said to Abraham and Sarah. So he said to Mary about her and Elizabeth having babies. Together by grace not only is nothing impossible for God but nothing is impossible for us.

Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 17:20 when they said, “Why can we not cure the demon?” He said, “Nothing is impossible for you if you will only believe.” And then lastly, to our God, Ephesians 3:20-21 God who can do more than we can ask or imagine, may he make our dreams come true. May we dream a dream in which we love each other in a fearless and unconditional way. May we love God without bounds. May we do the kind of lay ministry that is described in paragraph 127, where it is our witness and our example that fulfills the Great Commission of the church, that makes the mission of the church come to pass, that all the world might be made disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. May that Ephesians 3:20-21 guide, make us so effective that the whole world might become one on fire for Jesus Christ. Will we go forward together by grace?

(applause)

Amen. It is so, and we thank you for your attention to our Laity Address.

(applause)

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you for that wonderful presentation. Thank you. Thank you.

Committee on Plan of Organization and Rules of Order

BISHOP WILSON: Friends, during opening session, the General Conference referred three amendments to the Plans and Organization and the Rules of Order to the committee. The chair recognizes Stephanie Henry, chair of the Committee on Plans of Organization and Rules of Order to present their report.

Is Stephanie in the house? Thank you, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE HENRY (Pacific Northwest, Chair of Rules Committee): Thank you, Bishop. Good morning. Good morning? OK, making sure y’all are there. Did everyone receive this morning’s copy of the *Daily Christian Advocate*? Great. So you have our report.

Good morning, Bishop, members of the conference. My name is Stephanie Henry. I am the chair of the Rules Committee. I am a layperson for the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.

Members of the Rules Committee met Tuesday night to bring our recommendations to you regarding the amendments proposed on Tuesday afternoon. I will address each one at a time.

First, regarding plenary floor motion no.1 to the Plan of Organization. This amendment to section 7, subsection d, would add to line 339 the rules—excuse me—the words “except petitions with financial implications to expand review and governance equity.” So, the whole sentence shall read,

“To this Standing Committee shall be referred all petitions, resolutions, etc., relating to the Central Conferences, and Autonomous Methodist Churches, Affiliated Autonomous Methodist Churches, and Affiliated United Churches within the Central Conferences except petitions with financial implications to expand review and governance equity.”

Book of Discipline paragraph 2201, subsection 2 says,

“All resolutions and petitions related to central conferences presented to the General Conference shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters for consideration.”

Our rules cannot contradict *The Book of Discipline*. Therefore, the Rules Committee recommends that you do not support this amendment. For information we’d like to appoint delegates to our Plan of Organization, sections 8, subsection b, starting on line 507, which states,

“Any action proposed to the General Conference plenary that involves the expenditure of funds shall be referred to the General Council on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table or their executive committees or their expenditure review group for advice and recommendation before final action is taken.”

Therefore, Bishop, the rules committee recommends that delegates do not support plenary floor no. 1.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. The chair would like to share with the delegates that this is an example of the good use of Rule 41 that allows the body to do its best work by referring the proposed amendments to our Committee on Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. The referral of this amendment allowed us to identify this conflict. So based on the report from the committee, the chair rules that the proposed amendment to Plan of Organization section 7, subsection d, is out of order. *The Book of Discipline* paragraph 2201, subsection 2 says,

“All resolutions and petitions related to Central Conferences presented to the General Conference shall be referred to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters for consideration, and the committee shall report its recommendations directly to the General Conference.”

The General Conference cannot take any action on this proposed amendment because we cannot adopt any rules that conflict with *The Book of Discipline* if the proposed amendment to create this exception would create a conflict. Stephanie, please continue with your report.

HENRY: Thank you, Bishop.

Regarding plenary floor motion no. 2 to the Rules of Order. This amendment to Rule 6 would add to line 725, following the sentence that ends with “microphone,” the sentence, “The digital queue speaker pool seen by the presiding officer shall be projected and made visible to the body.”

I’d like to reference Rule 42, which states that the General Conference is governed by Robert’s Rules of Order for any parliamentary situation not covered by the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. Therefore, on Tuesday night the Rules Committee consulted with Maurice Henderson, the professional parliamentarian. Maurice shared with us there are many rules that must be taken into consideration when it comes to recognizing speakers who wish to speak. It’s not as simple as alternating between those who wish to speak in favor and those who wish to speak against. Maurice explained to us that there are very detailed and complex rules that the presiding officer must follow under various circumstances based upon five specific areas of parliamentary procedure through Robert’s Rules of Order when we talk about recognizing speakers. So, we’re all in this together.

The five specific areas are: There are unique rules when more than one person tries to be recognized at the same time; there are unique rules dealing with preference in recognition when a debatable question is immediately pending; there are unique rules dealing with preference in recognition when a non-debatable question is immediately pending; there are unique rules dealing with preference and

recognition when no question is pending; and there are multiple rules regarding interruption of a member assigned the floor.

It's the chair's responsibility to know and implement these rules and is a huge part of why the bishops added two additional bishops to assist the chair. And why we've hired a professional parliamentarian to guide our work. Beyond the complicated nature of the chair's responsibility, one concern raised by the Rules Committee was that even the amendment mentions "queue" when we don't have a queue. "Queue" implies a particular order. But instead we have a pool of people who wish to speak. And no matter how many times we say "pool" instead of "queue," there is always confusion around why some people are selected to speak and why some people are not.

Another concern raised by the Rules Committee is the possibility that potential speakers would be intimidated from speaking or bullied for registering to speak a particular way. Obviously that would be against our rules of Christian conferencing. But we want to be sure that all delegates are free to speak and vote according to their conscience without interference. The Rules Committee agrees that transparency and trust are great intentions. It is our job as the Rules Committee to enable you, the body, to do your best work. The Rules Committee agreed unanimously that this amendment would not support the body to do their best work. We believe there are other ways, one of which is we encourage the presiders to provide the number of speakers in the pool as much as possible. With all this, Bishop, the Rules Committee recommends the delegates do not support this amendment.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. You have heard the report of the committee.

The question is on the adoption of the amendment to Rules of Order, Rule 6 to add to line 725 after the sentence that ends with "microphone" the sentence, "The digital queue speaker pool shall be seen by the presiding officer shall be projected and made visible to the body."

This motion is debatable. In a moment we will open the pool so that if you wish to speak, you may register.

Again the question is on the motion to amend Rule of Order no. 6 by adding to line 725 after the sentence that ends with "microphone" the sentence, "The digital queue speaker pool seen by the presiding officer shall be projected and made visible to the body."

You may now register to speak. Is there any discussion?

The chair recognizes Becca Girrell. Come to the microphone. Thank you. Mic. no. 1.

BECCA GIRRELL: Thank you, Bishop. Becca Girrell, queer, clergy, female, White person from New England Annual Conference. I rise to propose an amendment to this proposed rule amendment.

BISHOP WILSON: OK, thank you.

GIRRELL: I propose we amend by striking the word *queue*.

BISHOP WILSON: Is there a second?

(*second*)

BISHOP WILSON: Please continue.

GIRRELL: I simply want to try to address one of the concerns that the Rules Committee helpfully named by clarifying that it is a pool and not a queue. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. Anyone else wish to speak for the amendment?

(pause)

If not, we will now proceed to vote.

The question is on the adoption of the motion to amend by striking out the word *queue*. If the amendment is adopted, the main motion—excuse me—the motion would just not include the word *queue*.

Those in favor of adopting the amendment please press *one (1)*. Those opposed to the amendment, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

Have all voted who wish to do so? Voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote? Thank you.

There are 457 in the affirmative and 250 in the negative. The affirmative has it, and the amendment is adopted.

[*Yes, 457; No, 250*]

The motion doesn't include the word *queue*. Is anymore discussion on the motion as amended?

(pause)

The chair recognizes Milton Loyer. Would you please come to the microphone? Mic. no. 1.

MILTON LOYER (Susquehanna): Milton Loyer, lay, male, older adult, Susquehanna Conference. I have a question. What information is on the screen that the chairman gets to see for those in the pool? Is it just the name? Is it the name and the conference? Or, could you tell us what information is on that screen?

BISHOP WILSON: Yes, for now, Milton. It has your name and your annual conference.

LOYER: Milton Loyer, Susquehanna Annual Conference.

BISHOP WILSON: Yes. Yes, I'm sorry. That's what is on the screen right here that I read.

It has your name and your annual conference.

(laughter)

Thank you.

Stefan, please forgive me. But, the chair recognizes Stefan from Austria Provisional, whose name I'm not even going to attempt to say. So, Stefan, if you'll come to the microphone.

STEFAN SCHRÖCKENFUCHS (Austria Provisional): Bishop, please forgive my name. Stefan Schröckenfuchs.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

SCHRÖCKENFUCHS: Austrian Provisional Annual Conference. I want to speak against the motion to adopt or against this rule.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

SCHRÖCKENFUCHS: I think it would only bring confusion when we shall have the queue, or however it is called, on the screens. And if it's used accordingly, it will slow down the whole procedure of our conferencing, and I think it should be a sign of trust to the chair, to the presiding persons here, that we do not need to see this. That there are three bishops usually sitting there and deciding how to deal with it. I have full trust that what you do is the right thing. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. A speech for, we call upon Harriett Olson. Harriett will you come to the microphone?

HARRIETT OLSON (Greater New Jersey): Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

OLSON: Harriett Olson, lay, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, White adult woman. Bishop, I'd like to speak in favor of the motion as amended. I do think that we are all learning how to use the technical capacity that we have. As we do, we do need to trust each other. We trust our presiders, and we trust the body. For those in the body for whom this information would be helpful, I would appreciate if we could have it. For those for whom it would be confusing, we can let it go. I think the information will help us to understand how the capacity is enabling the process, and I support the proposed amendment as adopted.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. The chair calls for Andy Call to speak against. If you could come to the microphone? Mic. no. 3.

ANDY CALL (East Ohio): Good Morning, Bishop. Andy Call. White, cisgender, male, clergy, adult, East Ohio Annual Conference. I think the intent behind the proposed change to the rules is a good one. The intent is to provide as much transparency as possible. The risk that we have, of course, is that in solving one problem, we create another. I think if we were to see on the screen what the presider sees on the screen, it would be obvious to us that it's not as clear as we think it would be. The risk, of course, with that is that when we see a speaker pool on screen, what ends up happening is that everybody in the house thinks they know who should be called on next, and in what order. Moreover, all the people observing think they also know who should be called upon, and what order. That can create a lot of chaos and confusion. While we're seeking transparency, I think that it's a good thing to have that information provided by the presider to share with us the number of people who are in the pool; some sense of how many people are in there and what it is they want to accomplish, but I don't think that having all of that information... If we saw what you saw, in fact that would be a great thing if we could see for just a moment for the sake of this proposed amendment, what you see, I think it would provide a lot of clarity and realize that it will not solve the problem we are trying to solve. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

We have a speaking for, Amanda Bonnette-Kim. Amanda, proceed to the microphone.

AMANDA BONNETTE-KIM (New England): I'm at mic. 1, Bishop.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. Thank you.

BONNETTE-KIM: Good Morning, my name is Amanda Bonnette-Kim. She/her/her, laity delegate from New England Annual Conference. I am speaking for. One point I want to clarify: as a pool, and not a queue, we have the understanding that the names we see is not the order in which we'll hear people speak, which is why it's a pool. I want to speak from personal experience; back in 2021, during my conference's annual conference. I was in the pool, and I was purposely skipped and ignored for three hours to talk about a time-sensitive issue during that time. By the time I had finally gotten someone to recognize me, the issue that we were talking about had passed, which made my question null and void. Thankfully, through grace, my conference allowed me to ask the question, which was needed at the time voting was being done. And I do believe the question that I had asked, which was a clarifying question for information that seemed to be misinformation, had not been answered, and we learned there no answer due to unclarity around a situation.

I think we need to see this pool to hold accountability for one another and to create equity in these moments, with the understanding that we are not going to be called in the order in which names are listed. Because, as you've said, Bishop, it is name and conference, not if we are speaking for, against, clarifying question—we must all act with grace and understand we're all in the pool for different reasons. It's going to be a long two weeks. You're probably going to see my name in the pool a lot. My conference knows that. My jurisdiction learned that last year. But, this is a time of trust and coming together, and in order to do that, there needs to be transparency and patience. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. For a speech against, Alexe Johnson. Proceed to the microphone.

ALEXE JOHNSON (Iowa): Mic. 5.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

JOHNSON: And, I'm Alexe, by the way. Alexe Johnson, laity from Iowa, young adult, and please mark me as female even though I am transgender. Thank you. I wish to speak against this rule.

My conversations with other delegates, I've heard multiple schools of thought. One of those would be about transparency, and we've had that discussion. I've heard other speakers talk about transparency. But, I've also heard from newer delegates who are confused about how the rules work, and just I want to point out that I think a lot of us are confused about how the rules work. But, that is exactly why we have a parliamentarian who is hired to know how the rules work. We have people who have been here for a long time, learning over and over again how the rules work.

This is my first General Conference, and like many of you, I didn't intend on my first General Conference taking this long to get here. And I have had a lot of time to learn, and I am still learning. Aren't we all still learning? I want to encourage our more senior members of the delegation to take on a more mentor role to those of us who are younger, and encourage us to learn more, to keep learning together, because it is hard for those of us who haven't done this before, and I don't think we do enough naming how difficult it is. But, I also think that we need to do a better job of being there for one another and supporting one another to make sure we all know what's going on.

So, while the logistics of this amendment, I think, are just too messy for us to get done what we want, to have enough clarity, I think a good course of action is to just encourage us all to work through this

together, help each other understand what's happening. We are a connectional denomination. We are here to support one another. And I think the intention behind this amendment is to support one another, but the actual logistics of it do not get that done. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. The chair calls on Jorge Lockward from the New York Conference. Please come to the microphone.

(pause)

Mic. no. 3.

JORGE LOCKWARD (New York): Thank you, Bishop. Jorge Lockward, queer, child of God, lay delegate, New York Annual Conference, cisgender male. I rise in support of the motion as amended. And because the crucial matter of transparency has been addressed, I would like to focus on another matter. Mainly the ways that seeing the pool can assist the helpful discernment of the body.

The blessing of electronic voting has brought us great benefits, particularly in terms of speed and expediency. But, we have lost another very important part, which is the feeling, the sense of where the body is. In the old times, when we would hear one another, when we would lift pieces of paper of colors, and so on and so forth, we would know where the body was. Right now in the isolation of these wonderful machines, we don't know. By seeing what the presider sees, I think we'll be able to have a better sense, in the same way the presider does, of where the body is.

As a simple example I would say, that if I see eighty persons in favor of something and one against, I'm not going to dismiss that one, but I will pay attention to what the body is saying.

Another benefit that I think this rule, or this change of the rule, will give us is that it will show us the beauty of our body. We will see people from different conferences, different continents, different ways of being, all willing and putting their names forward. So, I ask this body to support this change.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. Before we proceed we see an individual with a point of information of inquiry: Milton Loyer. If you'll come to the microphone.

Mic. no. 1. Please state your question.

MILTON LOYER (Susquehanna): Question. Bishop, I noticed that you have to look around to find out what microphone people are coming to. But the rules specifically say the presiding bishop shall consider the various sections of the auditorium in rotation. And I wonder how you can consider that various sections of the auditorium in rotation where you can't tell where the people are sitting?

(pause)

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Milton. The seating chart in our pre-work has it for all of us, so we will make sure that the bishops will have that from here on out as we preside. Thank you so much.

To my friends, in accordance with Rule 7.3, the chair informs the delegates that there are the following individuals currently in the pool: two people with speeches in favor, eight people with speeches against, and no one proposing amendments.

Before we proceed to the vote, as a matter of information, the chair would like to clarify what we can see on the speaker recognition pool. We can see your name, conference, and what action you're trying to do.

We will now proceed to vote. The motion requires a two-thirds vote. The question is on the adoption of the amendment to order Rule No 6, to add to line 725, the sentence that ends with "microphone". The sentence, "the digital speaker pool shall be seen by the presiding officer shall be projected and made visible to the body."

Those in favor, press *one (1)*. Those opposed, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Have all voted who wish to do so? Voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote?

(pause)

(indecipherable) I believe there is a device they are trying to fix, so let's wait a few more minutes.

(pause)

Thank you. Voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote? There are 302 in the affirmative, and 421 in the negative. They are less than two thirds in the affirmative. Motion is lost. Rule of Order No. 6 six is not amended. Stephanie, please continue with the report.

[Yes, 302; No, 421]

HENRY: Finally, regarding plenary four motion number three to the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order. The new proposal rule states, "Immediately after the Conference is called to order, an indigenous person shall offer a proper acknowledgement of land ownership. Anyone other than an indigenous person who attempts to offer a land acknowledgement shall only do so after consultation with the appropriate tribal authority of indigenous persons in the area where General Conference is being held." The Rules Committee agreed that land acknowledgements are a good practice. We have one indigenous person on the committee, yet recognize our limited diversity. One concern raised by the Rules Committee on Tuesday night was how this mandate would be carried out if the General Conference was held outside of the United States. Another concern raised was if this is centering the United States and not taking central conferences into consideration. We want this mandate to be given its due consideration. Therefore, the Rules Committee recommends that this amendment be referred to the Commission on the General Conference. We recognize that this would go back to the Rules Committee of the Commission, but it would also have the opportunity to be discussed by the full diversity of representation of the commission. Therefore, Bishop, on behalf of the Rules Committee, I move that this amendment be referred to the Commission on the General Conference.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. You have heard the report of this committee. It has moved to refer the following amendment to the Commission on the General Conference: "Immediately after the Conference is called to order, an indigenous person shall offer a proper acknowledgement of land ownership. Anyone other than an indigenous person who attempts to offer a land acknowledgement shall only do so after consultation with the appropriate tribal authority of indigenous persons in the area where General Conference is being held."

In a moment, we will open the pool so that if you wish to speak, you may register. Again, the question is on the motion to refer the proposed amendment to the Rule of Order to the Commission on the General Conference. You may now register to speak. Is there any discussion?

Call for speech against. Effie McAvoy McClain. Please proceed to the microphone. Mic. no. 1.

EFFIE MCAVOY MCCLAIN (New England): Effie McAvoy McClain, clergy, New England Annual Conference, United States, queer. Colonialization happens around the world, so my question is to the Rules Committee, why can't we know whose land we are on in every nation that we attend General Conference in. Because we know colonialization has happened around the world. It makes no sense we would defer this legislation to be brought back later when we understand that land has been stolen from the indigenous persons in this space from around the world. I am confused to the motion to refer back when we can speak to where we are wherever we are. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, a speech for, Kim Simpson. Please proceed to the microphone.

Thank you. Mic. no. 1.

KIM SIMPSON (Central Texas): Bishop, I am Kim Simpson from the Central Texas Conference, Native American, mature adult. I rise to speak for the recommendation to refer. I am an indigenous person. I understand the will of the body for this, but I do not think we need to make a rule for this. Our *Discipline* is full of things we have made rules that really should be carried on to the Commission that plans all of our General Conference. We hear the concern of the body, and I think if we take this to the Commission on General Conference, they will take to heart the concern. And as we plan worship and get ready for it, we can plan to honor what is asked here. We do not need to make a rule of this. We can take this back to the Commission that has representation from all over the world and use that to know what is the will of the body. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: My friends, before recognizing the next speaker, the time for adjournment has arrived. Is there any objection to extending the time of adjournment until this item is completed?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

BISHOP WILSON: OK. Thank you. The chair recognizes speech against. Anne Marshall, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. Please proceed to the microphone. Mic. no. 1.

ANNE MARSHALL (Oklahoma Indian Missionary): *Mvto*, Bishop. My name is Anne Marshall. I am a member of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. I am a Muskogee, elder Woman. I reside in the Muskogee Reservation, and I also reside on Turtle Island. I speak against this. I think that we as indigenous people, and none of us can speak for all, but I am speaking for those who are here who are indigenous from Turtle Island, that when we come many times we are forgotten, we're invisible, our voices have been silenced for so long. And I know that in *The Book of Discipline*, in *The Book of Resolutions*, we have all these items that we're asked to observe and to pay attention to. But I know that when it comes to people who look like me, who live like me in a traditional and in a Christian way, that we are forgotten. And sometimes we don't like being subjected to legislation. We're probably the only people in the whole world who has to be legally defined as well as having to live in this world—in a White world as well as in our Native world, in our indigenous worlds. And coming to you today, I come

with a heavy heart thinking that we have to have a rule to make sure that we're recognized in this church.

And so when we talk about translation, you don't have a translator for my language or all the other 539 languages that we have. And so, there's a lot of... We talk about trauma, we're traumatized all the time. We were born into traumatized communities. Because we left this area on the Trail of Tears. So, I could go on and on and on. But I think it's important for us to have a rule that says that no matter where you go in this world, as the young person said earlier, that colonization happened everywhere; land has been taken from everywhere. And as we did the welcoming ceremony... you know, the Catawba were in this area at one time; they now reside in Rock Hill, South Carolina. And I'm sure that Chief Harris would have loved to have been here, or Chief Hicks from the Eastern Band of Cherokees in North Carolina, would have been happy to have come and done a land acknowledgement in this area.

So, I come today to just say, please support this rule. *Mvto*.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. Thank you. I have a point of inquiry from Jesi Lipp, the Great Plains Annual Conference. Please, proceed to the microphone.

Mic. no. 4.

JESI LIPP (Great Plains): My name is Jesi Lipp. I am laity from the Great Plains Conference. I am non-binary and use they/them pronouns. I am White, adult, and a person living with disability.

My parliamentary inquiry is this, Bishop. This motion is in the form to refer the rule to the Commission on General Conference. Therefore, if we vote against it, we are not putting the rule in place, we are instead just defeating it all together. Is that correct?

(pause)

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Jesi. No, we will continue to... if it doesn't make it, we will continue to debate; to adopt.

LIPP: Just to clarify—

BISHOP WILSON: Yes.

LIPP: —if this motion is defeated, the amendment will be before us to debate and take a final vote on.

BISHOP WILSON: Yes.

LIPP: Thank you for the clarification.

BISHOP WILSON: Yes. And for the house, Jesi Lipp is my parliamentarian in the Great Plains Annual Conference.

(laughter)

So, I was quite nervous when she went to the microphone.

(laughter)

BISHOP WILSON: We have a speech for, Sarah Tiainen. Forgive me again, Sarah, for mispronouncing the name. Mic. no. 2.

SARAH TIAINEN (Finland-Swedish Provisional): Hi, my name is Sarah Tiainen. I am clergy from the Finland-Swedish Provisional Annual Conference. I wish to speak for the amendment to refer this motion to the Commission on the General Conference.

Coming from a central conference area in Europe, we do not have indigenous people all over Europe. And if we wish to take the General Conference to anywhere else but the United States, this might be a problem for us. Who would then be our tribal authority among indigenous people? And also, not Europeans have been colonized by someone else. Therefore, I wish to speak for the amendment to be referred. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. A speech to speak against. Monalisa Tuitahi, California Pacific, if you'll come to the microphone?

MONALISA TUITAHI (California-Pacific): Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

TUITAHI: Monalisa Tuitahi, lay member, California Pacific, Pacific Islander. I am a not-so-young, no-longer-young woman.

Will we continue to build a church that is based primarily on process? Because if we do—Sorry, I stand to speak against referral. Because if we do, systems process is the language of the oppressor. And yet what we are asking through this rule is that we use another language. The proposed rule is asking that General Conference sees a people, a land, a place, and begin to recognize the sacredness of the land we stand on. Because in doing, so we recognize who we are and to who we belong to. This is not simply about the Native Americans, the first people of these land, this is about how we honor and respect each other as a people, recognizing the sacredness in each other. There are indigenous people everywhere in our global community. Our connectionalism mandates this kind of mutual respect. It starts by paying homage to God, to each other, to the land we stand on, and to our elders, those among us and those whose spirit is among us. We are a part of something bigger than ourselves, and we need to declare that at the beginning of every General Conference. Whether we are here, in Africa, the Philippines, or in Europe, putting that into our rule affirms that we will honor and respect each other. It becomes a mandate of respect and honor. It may look differently in each setting, and that is OK, but we will mandate it to do it. Pushing it aside to the commission makes discretionary and arbitrary. Thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

Calling for a speech for, Amanda Bonnette-Kim, New England. Please proceed to the microphone.

AMANDA BONNETTE-KIM: Bishop, it was supposed to be a speech against, so I'm going to yield my time to someone to speak for, and I will resubmit myself to the pool.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. There are no more in the pool to speak for this at this time, so.

Yes, mic. 1.

BONNETTE-KIM: Because I'm having technical issue because it's slow, if there's no one for, may I use my time to speak against?

BISHOP WILSON: Please, please do so.

BONNETTE-KIM: Thank you. Amanda Bonnette-Kim, she/her/hers, young adult, biracial, multiethnic, lay delegate from New England Annual Conference. Hello again.

As has been stated, there are indigenous individuals all over the world. And, for example, as was brought up about Norway-Finland.

BISHOP WILSON: (*undecipherable*) I'm sorry, ma'am. Just a moment.

BONNETTE-KIM: Yeah!

(*pause*)

BISHOP WILSON: Ma'am, forgive me. I was mistaken. It would not be in order for you to speak on this motion.

BONNETTE-KIM: OK.

BISHOP WILSON: I think we are now back to Rule 7 (*undecipherable*).

BONNETTE-KIM: OK.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, though.

BONNETTE-KIM: OK, thank you.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you. So, let me get to where we're at here, folks.

(*pause*)

So, in accordance with Rule 7.3, the chair informs the delegates that there are the following individuals in the pool, with speeches in favor—trying to get this number here—zero speeches in favor; two people with speeches against; and zero people proposing amendments.

So we'll now proceed to the vote. This motion requires a majority vote.

The question is on the adoption of the motion to refer the following amendment to the Commission on the General Conference:

"Immediately after the conference is called to order, an indigenous person shall offer a proper acknowledgment of land ownership. Anyone other than an indigenous person who attempts to offer land acknowledgment shall only do so after consultation with the appropriate tribal authority of indigenous persons in the area where General Conference is being held."

Those in favor, press *one* (1).

(*pause*)

I apologize folks, the chair should have the last opportunity to vote [speak], forgive me.

STEPHANIE HENRY: Thank you, Bishop, thank you. Friends, the Rules Committee recognizes that this is important work. It is important to know on whose land we are and where we are visitors. I do want to raise that out of the speeches, we had four from the United States and one from our central conferences. The intention of this referral is to ensure that our central conferences have representation of voice before we mandate something that they would not be capable of carrying out. And that could look like the commission bringing you a rule in 2028 that has this same language, but perhaps it says, "if General Conference is in the United States" or some other language, but it allows the commission to be intentional about how we carry this out.

Personally, the last thing I want to do is tokenize an individual indigenous person in an area to come up, give us a three-minute land acknowledgement. To me, it's about the relationship we form with the people whose land we are going to be on. And so how do we do that intentionally, and not quickly?

And so that is the intent of this referral, is to ensure that we can have these conversations among more than simply five voices, recognizing that as a White person I cannot make any of these decisions.

So, again, the Rules Committee recommends referral.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you.

Again, folks, the question is on the adoption of the motion to refer the following amendment to the Commission on the General Conference:

"Immediately after the conference is called to order, an indigenous person shall offer a proper acknowledgment of land ownership. Anyone other than an indigenous person who attempts to offer land acknowledgment shall only do so after consultation with the appropriate tribal authority of indigenous persons in the area where General Conference is being held."

Those in favor, please press *one* (1). Those opposed, press *two* (2). You may vote now.

(*pause*)

Have all who've voted wish to do so?

(*pause*)

OK. Have all who've voted wish to do so?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: No.

OK. We have time.

(*pause*)

Have all who've voted wish to do so? OK. Voting is now closed.

May we have the results of the vote?

There are 554 in the affirmative and 187 in the negative. There are two-thirds in the affirmative and the motion is adopted.

[*Yes, 554; No, 187*]

I apologize, folks. There is a majority in the affirmative, and the motion is adopted. And the proposed amendment to the Rule of Order is referred to the Commission on the General Conference.

BISHOP WILSON: Thank you, Stephanie and members of the Rules Committee, for your work. My friends, we have completed the vote on this matter. The chair previously asked for an extension of time until we've completed the last action. However, the chair has been advised that there is a very important matter that we must take action on before we adjourn today due to some timing issues of the General Conference.

Judicial Council Ruling

BISHOP WILSON: Therefore, if there's no objection we will continue the session for that item, which is the Judicial Council ruling.

Thank you. My friends, thank you for the opportunity to come and serve you today as the presider. It's been a wonderful experience and look forward to the rest of the week.

(applause)

Bishop Malone will now take the chair.

(pause)

(applause)

BISHOP TRACY S. MALONE: This is the day that the Lord has made. We are rejoicing and we are glad in it. Amen?

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP MALONE: I am Tracy Smith Malone, African American, female, clergy, and I am so very honored to serve as the bishop of the East Ohio Conference.

(applause)

We do have an item of business that we do need to care for, as was already mentioned. As protocol has already been established, we already know who the backup team is. Amen?

So we're going to proceed so we can move things along.

The next item of business is the Judicial Council ruling regarding the term of the Judicial Council. The chair recognizes the secretary of the General Conference, Gary Graves, to read the Judicial Council's ruling.

GARY GRAVES (Secretary of the General Conference): Thank you, Bishop Malone. We actually have two items from the Judicial Council.

The first is Decision No. 1496. Decision No. 1496. The question was put to the Judicial Council by the Council of Bishops in its petition for a declaratory decision asking,

"Does paragraph 710.4 permit a voting member of a general agency elected at the 2016 General Conference to be elected to serve a second quadrennium beginning at the close of the 2020 General Conference being held in 2024?"

The decision from the Judicial Council reads:

“If they are nominated and elected at the postponed 2020 General Conference being held in 2024, the members of general agencies who were first elected to a four-year term at the 2016 General Conference may be elected to serve a second four-year term.”

There is a dissenting opinion, as you will be able to read.

The second item that we have received from the Judicial Council is Memorandum No. 1495, and it is the item that requires this action today. Memorandum No. 1495. On April 10, 2024, the Council of Bishops submitted to the Judicial Council a petition for declaratory decision with the following questions:

Does the sentence, “A member’s term of office shall be eight years” in paragraph 2602.1 mean that a person elected to the Judicial Council at the 2016 General Conference has served one eight-year term and must stand for reelection at the 2020 General Conference to be held in 2024 if the person desires to continue to serve on the Judicial Council?

And the second question:

Does paragraph 55 of the *Discipline* give the General Conference authority to enact legislation to modify paragraph 2602.1 and determine whether a person elected to the Judicial Council at the 2016 General Conference has served one eight-year term and must stand for reelection at the 2020 General Conference being held in 2024?

The digest from the Judicial Council is this:

The Judicial Council declines jurisdiction. The Constitution provides in paragraph 55, “There shall be a Judicial Council. *The General Conference*”—emphasis added, the General Conference—“shall determine the number and qualifications of its members, their terms of office, and the method of election and of the filling of vacancies.”

The memorandum is dated April 22, 2024.

(pause)

BISHOP MALONE: We have heard the Judicial Council decisions. The chair recognizes Jay Brim to present a motion to the General Conference.

JAY BRIM (Rio Texas): Thank you, Bishop. I’m Jay Brim, an adult male, lay delegate from Rio Texas. I move to refer the issue of Judicial Council elections to the Judicial Administration Legislative Committee.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. We have that motion before the house. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

BISHOP MALONE: It is moved and seconded to refer the Judicial Council’s ruling regarding paragraph 2602.1 to the Judicial Administration Legislative Committee. In a moment, we are going to open the pool, so if you are wishing to speak, you need to be prepared to register.

The question, again, is on the motion to refer the Judicial Council’s ruling regarding paragraph 2602.1 to the Judicial Administration Legislative Committee.

The pool is now open. You may register to speak.

BRIM: Bishop, may I speak to my motion?

BISHOP MALONE: Yes.

BRIM: Thank you. As the Judicial Council has said to this conference, it is our responsibility to determine how to respond to the delay of this meeting due to the pandemic and its effect on the election of the Judicial Council membership. The Judicial Administration Legislative Committee has a referred petition which opens paragraph 2602.1, which is *The Book of Discipline* paragraph that sets the terms of Judicial Council election. Pursuant to our Rules of Order, Rule 36, subdivision 3, which is found in volume 3 of the *Daily Christian Advocate*, p. 1130. “The whole question”—and I am quoting—“The whole question with which the item has to do is referred to that committee for such action as it may deem wise.” As Bishop Bickerton has said, “May it be so.”

BISHOP MALONE: OK. I’m looking at the pool, and there is currently no one in the pool to speak.

I do see here in the pool Kelly Carpenter, other parliamentary. What is your inquiry?

(pause)

Kelly Carpenter?

(pause)

Mic. 1.

KELLY CARPENTER (North Texas): Bishop, my apologies, I hit the button too soon. My parliamentary is to seek a way to make a motion to extend this plenary session.

(pause)

I think I meant to wait until we were done with this item. I apologize.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. Now that you’re standing there and making that request, we’ve already extended twice, and we do know that we had an order of the day for legislative committees to begin their work, and you were scheduled to get a break just prior to your legislative committees meeting, and so what we can do, if it is the will of the body, we can entertain that request. We did extend it for us to complete the item that is before us right now. So the plan is—so that everyone is aware—the plan is for us to finish this process that we’re in now, and then after we completed this process, we were going to dismiss you so that you can take your break and move into your legislative committees.

So with that being said, you still have your inquiry, so I invite you to state what it is again in light of that information, what might you be asking.

CARPENTER: My inquiry was to see if we could extend this plenary session until we complete the business of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

BISHOP MALONE: OK.

(laughter)

So I am going to ask if you can state that in a formal motion.

CARPENTER: Thank you, Bishop. I would like to motion that this body extends this plenary session until we complete the business of the calendar items by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. You may speak to your motion.

Not just yet. Give me one moment.

(laughter)

Yeah, so here's the thing. Because we had a calendar already set by the Agenda on Calendar in committee. In essence, by you making that motion, that is suspending our rules in order for us to do that. OK? So, in order for that to happen, for this motion, the first act is that we would have to suspend the rules. OK?

(pause)

CARPENTER: I move to suspend the rules.

(laughter)

So that we may extend this plenary session until the end of the calendar items brought by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So, here's where we are. Here's where we are. We got this. Here's where we are. So we have a motion to suspend the rules. It has been seconded. It is not debatable. OK? It does require a two-thirds vote. So what I'm going to ask is that you get your devices ready. Get your devices ready. And then the question that will appear on the screen in just a moment, is the motion that is before you, to suspend the rules. And if you want to suspend the rules, you will press *one (1)*, and if you do not want to suspend the rules, you will press *two (2)*. You may cast your vote now.

(pause)

OK. We still have a few more votes coming in. We'll give it another second.

(pause)

The poll is now closed. And if we can please now have the results to appear on the screen?

You have voted to suspend the rules, 510 affirmed suspending the rules, 227 did not affirm suspending the rules.

[Yes, 510; No, 227]

The rules have been suspended.

I will now take us back to where we were as it relates to referring to the motion that was before us to Judicial Administration, the Judicial Council's ruling regarding paragraph 2602.1 to the Judicial Administrative Legislative Committee.

I recognize Frederick Brewington, who has a speech in favor. If you would make your way to a microphone. Mic. no. 3.

FREDERICK BREWINGTON (New York): Bishop, I do not have anything to speak on that issue. I was pressing the button on a previous question that was handled appropriately on the floor. Fred Brewington, New York Annual Conference, African American, straight, and I'm going to take my seat.

BISHOP MALONE: Amen.

(laughter)

OK. So, I am not seeing anyone else in the pool wishing to speak. Therefore it seems, then, that the body is ready. So let's get those voting devices out. Let's get the question, the motion, on the screen so that we can see what it is that we're voting on.

Again, it's on the adoption on the motion to refer the Judicial Council's ruling regarding paragraph 2602.1 to the Judicial Administration Legislative Committee.

If your vote is yes, press *one (1)*. If your vote is no, press *two (2)*. Please vote now.

(pause)

OK. We see no more... Well, there are a few more votes coming in. Give us one second here, please.

The voting is now closed. OK, we have the results, if they can now appear on the screen. And you have affirmed this motion being referred this Judicial Administration Committee.

So, in the affirmative, 660 votes. Those who did not affirm, 45. It has been referred.

[Yes, 660; No, 45]

The first, we had several calendar items, as you would remember, that were to come today from Standing Committee on Central Conference Matter. And because you did vote to suspend the rules that we can complete this work today, we're going to go ahead and proceed to that first calendar item, which is Petition No. 16. The petition to the postponed 2020 General Conference on autonomous status for Eurasia found on p. 1992 of the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. Again, that's Petition No. 16 found on p. 1992 of the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate*.

Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters

At this time, the chair recognizes Bishop Harald Rückert from the Standing Committee to offer the report of the committee.

BISHOP HARALD RÜCKERT: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. May I start with a question to the presiding officer? It's about Agenda Item 16 only? Or is the complete report and all matters of the standing committee before us?

BISHOP MALONE: It is the calendar items that were scheduled for today. It was in reference what was reported today that we would be addressing from Standing Committee.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: So, it's Calendar Item No. 16, and you mentioned already the petition that it's about.

Friends, we did some really great work in the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. And among this work, we also did some very important work in terms for how we relate to each other. We were asked to accompany a process which is taking place in Europe, where the four annual conferences in Eurasia, they are desiring to leave The United Methodist Church. They made their decision a little more than one year ago. Then, the respective central conferences, according to paragraph 572, voted on this request from their annual conferences in the central conference, and it was approved. And according to paragraph 572, the Standing Committee was informed about this. Eurasia wanting to leave, in a peaceful way, The United Methodist Church, according to the paragraph that is already provided in *The Book of Discipline* for a long time.

The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters wanted to help this process go smoothly, and to provide a fair conversation about all the things around it. And set up a small group with members of the Standing Committee to accompany this process. The small group, they met frequently with representatives from Eurasia, and they undertook all the steps that are required under paragraph 572. And all those members that were part of this committee reported that all those strong conversations that needed to take place, took place in a very good spirit of mutual respect and a desire to find a peaceful way into the future.

Out of this committee there was a request or the proposal to the Standing Committee to provide an enabling motion to the General Conference, which is required so that the sisters and brothers in Eurasia might leave. And those folks, they reported that it was really a very constructive conversation that was undertaken.

Also, the Ecumenical Office of Church Unity and Interreligious Relationships [Affairs], endorsed this desire from the sisters and brothers to leave Eurasia. And the Standing Committee at its meeting here in Charlotte almost unanimously decided to promote this and bring this motion that is before you, before *you* to allow our sisters and brothers to leave The United Methodist Church.

Again, all these conversations took place in an amicable way in a sense of mutual respect. And so we decided not to speak about disaffiliation in this case. Rather than recognizing that the history in Eurasia and in Europe has developed in different directions, and we can say grace to each other and let us go, even though our hearts are in pain, because we feel that we are still sisters and brothers, but we will take different routes when we go into the future.

So, the Standing Committee moves what you can read on p. 2012, that there will be an enabling act motion for the four annual conferences in Eurasia to leave The United Methodist Church, according to paragraph 572.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So, it is moved to adopt Petition No. 16, the petition to the postponed 2020 General Conference, on autonomous status for Eurasia found on p. 1992 of the English edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*.

In a moment, you will have the opportunity to speak, and the pool will be open and you can register yourself. Again, I want the body to be clear, that the question is on the adoption of Petition No. 16, the petition to the postponed 2020 General Conference on the autonomous status for Eurasia found on p. 1992 of the English edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. And you may now register to speak. The floor is open for discussion.

I see a name in the pool, Joseph Harris, for a point of information or inquiry. If you can please make yourself to a microphone and state what is your point of information or what are you inquiring about.

JOSEPH HARRIS (Oklahoma): Joseph Harris, clergy, Oklahoma, African American male. Bishop, I have a question in terms of our procedures on the extension of time. I know we are talking about the Commission on the Central Conference legislation, but would this also include the report of the Committee of Credentials? The reason why I ask is that we have several people who have not been able to be properly registered because they have been waiting for this vote and this motion from across this great General Conference, so I just wanted to see if this will be included in the extension of time?

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So, I am going to clarify where we are. You would remember that during the report of the Calendar and Agenda Committee from the chair gave a list, and even a particular order of what would be before the body today. One of the things that was mentioned was a report from the Credentials Committee. The motion that was made, that was supported by this body, was to suspend the rules in order to do the work that was calendared, which are four calendared items directly related to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. So, that's what the previous motion was, was to do the work specifically related to Standing Committee. So, what you're asking about is the credentials that was not a part of that motion. Thank you.

OK. So, in the pool, I have a name of Kalaba Chali. A speech for. Please make your way to a microphone. Mic. no. 4.

KALABA CHALI (Great Plains): Bishop, thank you. Kalaba Chali, male, Zambian-Congolese, clergy. I stand to speak in favor. While I grieve to see our sister and brothers leave. The bishop shared how the process was done with humility, with mutual respect. To me that sounds like the most Christian way to do things. I also realize that paragraph 572 has been in our *Discipline* for a long time, and this to me reminds us that, should there be others who desire to do likewise, we will come here graciously, pray together, bless you, and will say, "Go and make more disciples," asking for your prayers to make more disciples. After all, what we are about is to spread the love of Jesus Christ for this broken world to come to know Christ. Thank you.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. We've heard one speech for. Anyone else wishing to speak?

We have in the pool Jacqueline Nembe Songu, speech for. Please make your way to a microphone. Mic. No. 4.

JACQUELINE NEMBE SONGU (East Congo): (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) Thank you. I am confused. If I vote for, they will leave, and if I vote against, they will stay. I do not understand very well.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. I'm trying to follow. I just got my headphones on. Are you waiting? Are hearing interpretation? If everyone will get their headphones on, please. Can you please repeat so we all can hear what you are wishing to say?

SONGU: *(simultaneous interpretation from French)* Exactly. OK. I am confused. If I vote against, the members of these churches will leave, but if I vote against, will they stay within our united church? What is the goal?

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So, there seems to be an issue, and so I'm sorry to do this again. My headphones are pretty garbled. And so if mine are, I would imagine yours are as well. So, let's make sure that we have our channels on the right channel for whatever language that we need to hear, so that we can make sure that Jacqueline is able to be heard. OK. So, we're going to try this one more time.

SONGU: *(simultaneous interpretation from French)* Can I go back to my seat?

(laughter)

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So, I understand that she was asking if she can go back to her seat. Yes, you may return to your seat.

(laughter)

BISHOP MALONE: OK. It takes a village, I tell you. OK.

We have another person in the pool. I'm going to call on Ande Emmanuel who has a speech for. If you'll make your way to a microphone.

ANDE EMMANUEL (Southern Nigeria): Bishop, my name is Rev. Ande Emmanuel. I am a clergy delegate from southern conference of the Nigeria Episcopal Area. I stand to support this request even though it breaks my heart that our brothers are preparing to leave. But knowing that we are all Christian and we are going to still be in this mission together, I want to support this motion. I want every one of us to understand that this paragraph, 572, is a good example for every one of us who want to choose the same path. And allowing this to happen here will give us the opportunity to hold a Christian conferencing, to hold each other's hands, and to pray together while we're living. In as much as we don't want to hold people against their will, we want people to be very gracious to each other. We want to be gracious to everyone that is here. If people don't feel comfortable to be here, they shouldn't be held against their will. So I support this motion. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP MALONE: Okay we've had two speeches for. I do want to be clear with the body, with Jacqueline, as part of what she was saying; she was asking the question, what is the goal? That if I vote no, can they not leave? And of course when we move to the time of vote, that if it's in the affirmative of the aggregate, then it would be a vote yes to leave. If it's a vote in aggregate of no, and it does not prevail, then they will not be permitted to leave. But we'll move to that when it is time to vote, but that was the question that she was asking. So let me now call on Effie McAvoy McClain who has a speech for.

(pause)

EFFIE MCAVOY MCCLAIN (New England): Effie McAvoy, Clergy, New England Annual Conference. I don't have a speech for anything. I'm having technical problems. It's doing weird things over here. Bishop. Sorry for your time.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. We do have several people who are in the pool who are wishing to speak. We have two persons who are wishing to speak against. I am going to call on Manuel Rodrigues, if you will make your way to a microphone, please.

(pause)

Mic. no. 4.

MANUEL RODRIGUES (Western Angola): (*simultaneous interpretation from Portuguese*) Thank you, Bishop. I am Manuel Rodrigues from the West Angola Annual Conference. I am a young adult, and I would like to speak against. Before, I would like to congratulate the bishop by the ways which the bishop presented the issue. Thanks for such generosity. However, we have learned something that when a child is leaving the house of the parents, we need to have the motive, the reason why the child takes such decision to leave the house. But as of now we do not have such information. We don't have correct information. Maybe the bishop has more information that could help us so that we can have an assistance in our decision-making as far as voting is concerned. If we are trying to prove the regionalization issue. I think if we had a particular issue that the region in reference could perhaps deal with in a different manner instead of leaving The United Methodist Church. So that's my contribution, thank you.

BISHOP MALONE: Okay, we've had three speeches for; one speech against. We have someone else in the pool who is wishing to speak against. I am going to call on Jethro Muyombi. If you would make your way to a microphone, please.

(pause)

Mic. no. 2.

JETHRO MUYOMBI (South Congo): (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) Thank you, Bishop, for allowing me to speak. My name is Jethro Muyombi. I lead the South Congo Conference in Zambia, so the Episcopal Area of Congo and Zambia. I would like to speak against. Maybe it's a done deal already, but I would still like to voice my position. I read in the Old Testament when Lot needs to split from his brother, he does so. But in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians 1:10, I read a teaching that there shouldn't be division within the church. So I would like to give a chance for those who would like to leave to revise their decision. Maybe something bothered them. Maybe a question bothered them. But as a church, as a family, it is possible to repair what was dividing us yesterday so that tomorrow we may go forward together. So I would like to say no, that they would not be able to leave, but as a General Conference, I would like for us to examine their reasons for wanting to leave. So that in the future we would be living together as the body of Christ.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. I'm looking at the pool here, and we have Skylar Bihl who is in the pool for a close of debate. In accordance with—OK. If you could make your way to a microphone. Skylar Bihl. Mic. no. 6.

SKYLAR BIHL (Pacific Northwest): Yes, I am Skylar Marston Bihl. I use she and they pronouns. Lay delegate from the Pacific Northwest. I move to call the question.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So it is moved. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP MALONE: It is moved and seconded that debate be closed. And I want to restate what the motion is that you are closing.

(pause)

You are closing the adoption of Petition No. 16, the petition to the postponed 2020 General Conference on autonomous status for Eurasia found on p. 1992 of the English edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. OK.

And so, it is not debatable. And so, I am going to ask if the question, the motion can be placed on the screen. Again, what you are voting on is to end debate. That's what we're voting on. Press *one (1)* if you vote yes. Vote two—press *two (2)* if you vote no. The vote is now open.

(*pause*)

OK. The votes are coming in quite quickly.

(*pause*)

OK. The vote is now closed, and we are ready to see the results, if those can be placed on the screen. You have them before you. 679 voted to affirm ending debate, 53 did not affirm ending debate. So, there's no further debate. We're going to move directly to the question that is before the house.

[*Yes, 679; No, 53*]

BISHOP HARALD RÜCKERT: May I have a speech for, Bishop?

BISHOP MALONE: Yes, you may. Yes, you may, please.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: I just want to remind the body there has been the decision of four annual conferences in Eurasia, followed by the decision of the respective Central Conference, Northern Europe and Eurasia, followed by decisions in the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters on this request to leave peacefully The United Methodist Church. So, we are dealing with decisions of respective bodies that have already acted on that, and I just wanted to bring this to your attention again when we vote on this.

And lastly, as I describe the way that we undertook to come to this point today, has been a very peaceful way. All doors are open for the future. There are no closed doors in the future for future development between us. Thank you.

Vote on Eurasian Church Exit

BISHOP MALONE: OK. Get your devices ready. Get your devices ready. The motion will now appear on a screen to adopt Calendar Item No. 16. Press *one (1)* to vote yes. Press *two (2)* to vote no.

(*pause*)

OK. The vote is now closed, and we do have the results. They will now appear on the screen. You see the results. 672 voted yes. 67 voted no. The petition is adopted.

[*Yes, 672; No, 67*]

We will now continue to work—

BISHOP RÜCKERT: May I ask, as indicated this morning, to ask for the allowance of Bishop Eduard Kheday to address the General Conference because it's just not a calendar item. It has been something very important we did.

BISHOP MALONE: Sure.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: May I ask him to speak briefly to the conference?

BISHOP MALONE: Yes. Sure. At the chair's discretion, I invite—the chair invites Bishop Khegay to come and offer some words.

BISHOP EDUARD KHEGAY: Good afternoon, sisters and brothers. Dear sisters and brothers, I want to recognize the Eurasia delegation, and I want to ask them to stand in gratitude for your decision.

(applause)

Thank you. And I want to express my gratitude to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters for their hard work to help us through this process. Dear sisters and brothers, people called Methodists, on behalf of our delegation and Methodist people in Eurasia, I want to thank you very much. *Bolshoe spasibo!* This is how we say it in Russia.

According to our *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 572, we shall continue to be UMC until our next Central Conference in 2025 when the final vote will be taken. But this is our last General Conference as delegates from Eurasia. I want to use this moment to express our gratitude. During my twelve years of episcopal ministry, I have experienced many challenges and hardships in Eurasia. The east-west divide, the geopolitical manipulations by superpowers, economic ups and downs, and theological controversies. But today, I want to express our gratitude. We want to say thank you very much. *Bolshoe spasibo!* For love, encouragement, support, and mission work in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyzstan [Kazakhstan] that your churches have shared over the last thirty-plus years and even at the end of nineteenth and beginning of twentieth century.

Let me share personally that I became a Christian because The UMC in Los Angeles had sent young man named Jonathan Park to do mission work in Russia in 1992. Today, Jonathan and his wife, Tara, serve as GBGM missionaries in Vietnam. I was baptized in Moscow Central UMC by GBGM missionary Young Cho Cho in 1992. These people and members of The United Methodist Church in Moscow showed me the way of Christ, the way of love and encouragement, forgiveness and practical holiness.

GBGM has sent long-term missionaries, short-term mission teams, and millions of dollars so that we in Eurasia can be encouraged and inspired to be in mission among our people in the post-Soviet countries. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

During the last thirty-plus years of mission work of The UMC in our area, hundreds of mission teams visited us. They brought Bibles, shared their testimonies, led Bible studies, built church buildings, led vacation Bible school, and taught us how to eat peanut butter sandwiches. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

As I look around this convention center, I am reminded about love and support of my colleague bishops, who pray for me and bless me. All my life, I want to remember and be grateful for Bishop Tom Bickerton, who worked hard on repair of our Moscow seminary building. I want to remember and be grateful for Pastor Adam Hamilton and the Church of the Resurrection team, who made so many trips to Russia and invested their love and energy into our pastors and leaders.

I want to remember and be grateful to our European sisters and brothers who support our programs and make a difference in the lives of the people who are poor and marginalized in our society. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

I want to remember Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, who held my hand in prayer in the far east of Russia as we prayed for peace in the small Russian village from which you can see North Korean land and the Chinese land. The Korean-Russian diaspora will be forever grateful to you and our sisters and brothers from Korean-American churches of The UMC and from Korean Methodist Church. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

I want to remember Bishop Marion Edwards and people of North Carolina, who raised funds for our Moscow seminary, which today trains our pastors and leaders in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

I want to remember many GBGM missionaries and mission teams which visited us in Eurasia and shared their love and gifts with us. The people of UMCOR were there for us as we struggled with floods, refugee crisis, and war. I'm grateful to all general agencies of The UMC for investing millions of dollars, countless hours of prayers, building relationships and lifelong friendships. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

On a personal level, I am grateful to The United Methodist Church for my master of divinity years of study at Candler School of Theology and doctor of ministry years of study at Wesley Theological Seminary. Some of my classmates are here at the General Conference. My classmates Rev. Jae Lee from North Carolina, Rev. Gary Weaver from Pennsylvania, and Bishop Lanette Plambeck from the Dakotas Episcopal Area are here at the General Conference, and I am blessed by their love and encouragement. These people can have fun more than anybody I know.

(laughter)

Bolshoe spasibo! I wish I could thank many more people and groups of our beloved United Methodist Church, and tell you stories of God's work. But I realize how much more work the General Conference must do these days. So, on behalf of our delegation from Eurasia, I want to express gratitude for supporting our autonomous status. *Bolshoe spasibo!*

May God bless you, sisters and brothers. Grace and peace of Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

(applause)

BISHOP MALONE: We give thanks to God for who we have been together and for how the Holy Spirit will continue to keep us connected. Amen.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: *Spasibo*, Eduard.

Worldwide Regionalization Discussion

BISHOP MALONE: OK, so we are going to proceed. The next calendar item is Petition No. 22: worldwide regionalization: amend the constitution to create regional conferences on a worldwide basis. Found on p. no. 1994. 1994 of the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. Again that is Petition No. 22 found on p. no. 1994 of the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. At this time the chair recognizes Bishop Harald Rückert to offer the report of the committee.

We already had some petitions around regionalization before us, and we approved them already this morning, but this one we have to take action on because it's related to constitutional amendments. Amendments that are necessary to make in order to move forward in what we already have decided this morning. This is kind of a motion. We need to move this forward, and this would be the foundation for what can be done to continue on this path we already have started the first steps this morning. I have with me Christine Schneider. She was on the working team that has been set up by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and the Connectional Table and the leading persons from the so-called Christmas Covenant. So what is before us is not just the work of the Standing Committee. It's a collaborative work that we have accomplished over the last year, very intense work with a lot of good input from all sides and for me personally it somehow models the future of our church. It's about collaboration and being ready to have some compromise in order to find really good solutions, and Christine was part of one of these working groups, and she can share a little bit, and we both are ready to receive your questions if needed.

CHRISTINE SCHNEIDER-OESCH (Switzerland France North Africa): Good morning to y'all. My name is Christine Schneider. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and a reserve delegate, a reserve lay delegate from the Annual Conference of Switzerland, France, and North Africa. I stand before you this morning full of hope and also excited. The work that the Standing Committee is presenting to you is the fruit of years of work. And I want to recognize at this special moment a particular group of people who helped us get started on this. It is the people who offered to the church the Christmas Covenant, as a gift really, and they managed to pass the fire on to many others who agreed, yes, this is a good way forward, and then the Connectional Table got involved and the committee. The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters got involved, and today we stand before you as the ones presenting this to you, but as Bishop Rückert has mentioned, this is the result of excellent collaboration by people from all walks and all parts of our connection, and I stand before ready for questions if there are any.

BISHOP MALONE: OK, so it is moved to adopt Calendar Item No. 22: worldwide regionalization: to amend the Constitution to create regional conferences on a worldwide basis. Again, this is found on p. no. 1994 of the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. In just a moment we will begin looking at the pool, so if you are wishing to speak, you are encouraged to register. Again, the question is on the adoption of Calendar Item No. 2022: worldwide regionalization: amend the Constitution. We have a number of persons in the pool.

(pause)

I'm going to call in the order as it relates to those who are wishing to speak for and against. Jørgen Thaarup, a speech for. If you'll make your way to a microphone. Mic. no. 2.

JØRGEN THAARUP (Denmark): My name is Jørgen Thaarup. I am a clergy delegate from Denmark. I am male and grey, but in my best ages.

(laughter)

I will do my best to speak in favor of this very important petition. The wording of the petition is regionalization worldwide, but in fact the petition is about the power structure of the church, and in The United Methodist Church, we have a double power structure. One power structure I will call the

democratic hierarchic representative structure of power, and the General Conference and *The Book of Discipline* is the major symbol of that power structure. But parallel we also have a federal power structure, and the federal power structure, it can be named by the charge conference, the annual conference, the central conferences, and the major symbol of that power structure is *The Book of Discipline* most of you do not know. But we have in the central conferences our own *Book of Discipline* supplements, and we have had that in more than a hundred years. This petition will shape and strengthen the federal structure, first of all in United States. In *principle* nothing is new because the federal structure we have parallel to the democratic hierarchic structure. But it is a mature step to be a more incarnational church with better opportunity to mission within the culture of our different regions. Help the church to be more vital by supporting this change of the fundamental structure of the church we have in the Constitution. It is a very strong support to this petition that the Standing Committee voted unanimous. So please vote yes to this petition.

BISHOP MALONE: Robert Zilhaber wishing to make an amendment. If you will make your way to a microphone.

(pause)

Mic. 1.

ROBERT ZILHAVER (Western Pennsylvania): Hello, my name is Robert Zilhaber. White male, clergy, Western Pennsylvania. And I would propose the following amendment: Upon the adoption of this petition, the following paragraphs of the United Methodist Constitution shall remain a part of the Constitution and *Discipline* of The United Methodist Church until December 31, 2032. After that date, these paragraphs should no longer be part of the Constitution and the *Discipline* of The United Methodist Church. Paragraph 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 37, 39, and 40.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So we have a motion to amend. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP MALONE: You can speak to your motion.

ZILHAVER: This is a very historic moment that we are moving forward as a church. And in this new expression, we are taking along, in our new structure, seeds of a structure that is rooted in racism, namely the jurisdiction. And like all racial sin, it gets deep in our bones and in our structures and in our power dynamics. We aren't in a place to address all these issues right now. We have a study committee that will be going forward to look at the effects of jurisdictions, whether we're going to export this structure that is rooted and created in the racial sin of our past around the world or is it possible that we can restrain that and turn our back on this bleak part of our history as a church.

We can't do this today, but what this amendment does is remove the constitutional protections of jurisdictions for the study team and future general conferences, so that if the study team decides that the structure is vital and needs to be around the world, everyone would require two-thirds vote, and the United States will not have the additional protection of requiring two-thirds vote to one-third vote that they can keep this structure.

It also means that the paragraphs about the jurisdiction still remain intact and effective as we work through this, and the jurisdictional study team can make amendments about the jurisdiction and in

our *Discipline* and effects and the power dynamics with a simple majority vote. It can also decide to allow the ability of the jurisdictions to terminate, but that would have to require the proactive work of the General Conference. This really is to give this opportunity in our new expression an equal footing between the jurisdiction and the United States and give us an opportunity to dig out the roots of racism that is part of this sinful structure of our church. Thank you.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So just so that the body is aware. We do have a motion before us: the amendment. And we just created a second speaker pool so that we can have a pool specifically for the amendment. So, if you are wishing to speak to the amendment you can register at this time.

OK. The pool has a number of persons wishing to speak. I will call on Audun Westad, who has a speech against. If you will make your way to a microphone, please.

Mic. no. 2.

AUDUN WESTAD (Norway): Hello. My name is Audun Westad. Lay delegate, Norway Annual Conference. I want to make a speech against this. This petition was anonymously voted through in the Standing Committee. And as I said, this motion is not adding any good to this; I think we are making it more difficult. So let's keep it simple and just vote this down, and do the original petition. Thank you.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. I am now going to call on Scott Brewer, who has a speech against.

Mic. no. 4.

SCOTT BREWER (Great Plains): Thank you, Bishop. Scott Brewer, White, adult layman from the Great Plains Annual Conference. I do not have any love for our jurisdictional system. It is, I think, a barrier to doing effective ministry throughout the United States. It is, as has been, I think, well said, a vestige of racism and exclusion. At the same time, and while I am glad to do away with it as soon as possible, I do not believe this is an appropriate amendment to do that. This does add complexity to what is already a difficult topic, I think, for us to be interpreted at our annual conferences when they are being called upon to ratify it. So in the interest of clarity, of clear process, and of helping our people understand what will be before them as a constitutional amendment, I ask that we take the question of jurisdictions and propose that for another time. But this is not the right venue to do it.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. Before I recognize, before the chair recognizes the next speaker, I—the chair requests that the maker of the motion please put that in written form and bring that forward. The maker of the motion to amend, if you would please put that in written form and bring that forward.

OK. So if the page—if you have the motion, could you please bring that forward. Thank you.

The chair now recognizes Becca Girrell. If you would make your way to a microphone. Becca Girrell?

BECCA GIRRELL (New England): Thank you, Bishop. Becca Girrell. She/her/hers, clergy, queer, White, woman, adult from the New England conference. I rise to speak against this proposed amendment. As the maker of the motion acknowledged, there's a study committee for the question of what will be the role of the jurisdictional conferences and what that should look like. I suggest we let that committee do its work and trust them to do their work, while at the same time trusting that the Standing Committee have done their work and put forward as the previous speakers have said a clear proposed

constitutional amendment that can be considered and discerned and ratified, we pray, by all the annual conferences. Thank you.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. We have now had three speeches against. We've had one speech for. I am seeing in the pool here that we have at least three persons wishing to ask for a close of debate. But, before I do that, before the chair does that, I do need to ask, Is there anyone else wishing to speak for?

(pause)

Hearing none, seeing none, we are going to move to vote because there's no one in the pool wishing to speak. OK, so get your devices ready. Get your devices ready. And if we can prepare to show what we're voting on on the screen.

This is only on the adoption of the amendment to Calendar Item No. 22. We're not voting on the calendar item. This is the amendment to the calendar item. Prepare to vote now. If you vote yes, you press *one (1)*. If your vote is no, press *two (2)*. The vote is open.

(pause)

OK. All right. We're going to close the vote. And we do have the results, if we can please show those on the screen. We see what the vote is. 617 voted no on the amendment. 115 voted yes. The amendment does not pass.

[*Yes, 115; No, 617*]

So we are back at the original calendar item as was presented, and we've already had one speech for. And we're going back to the original pool where we were when we left the original motion. I am going to call on now Odell Horne, who has a speech against. If you will make your way to a microphone, please. Looks like mic. no. 6.

(pause)

ODELL HORNE (North Georgia): Thank you, Bishop. Odell Horne, North Georgia Annual Conference. The principal basic connection is the principal basic to The United Methodist Church that all leaders and congregations are connected in a network of loyalties and commitments that support yet supersede local concerns. I have several objections to the regionalization plan. Although central conferences have been able to adapt *The Book of Discipline* to fit their own ministry context, the Judicial Council has rejected many of those adaptations that the central conferences have proposed, including decisions 313 and 904. Additionally, the legislation before us will create another layer of bureaucracy between the General Conference and the jurisdictional [jurisdictional] conference, which will create in the United States, above the local church, an annual conference, a jurisdictional conference, a regional conference, and a General Conference. While in central conferences above the local church, there will be annual conferences; the central conferences will become regional conferences; and the General Conference. So there will be four layers of administration above the local church in the United States while only three layers of administration above the local church in the central conferences. I call this the separate but equal plan. Adding a regional conference without eliminating the jurisdictional conference system first is akin to the Susan B. Anthony/Frederick Douglass debate over which marginalized group should we advocate for voting rights first. I find it to be inconsistent to make the argument that the Judicial Council—judicial [jurisdictional] conference system is inherently racist before churches began to

disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, but now that the evangelicals are gone we might get rid of the jurisdictional conference system after we pass regionalization. Seems to be the attitude. I might also note that the Black church in the United States has been doing ministry within its own context without regionalization. I would ask the body of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church to vote against worldwide regionalization as it will set up a system of separate but equal in which Americans will never be under the control of the Africans or any other Central Conference delegation.

BISHOP MALONE: OK, we have another person in the pool who is wishing to speak. The speaker—the presider calls on Jonathan Ulanday who has a speech for. Jonathan Ulanday.

JONATHAN ULANDAY (East Mindanao Philippines): Good morning, Bishop. I am Jonathan Ulanday, clergy delegate from East Mindanao Philippines Annual Conference. I use he/him pronouns. I am a Filipino. I am a member of the Christmas Covenant team, and I can say that in behalf of our team that we support the worldwide regionalization legislation by the Standing Committee on the Central Conference Matters.

When Bishop Bickerton asks on the first day of the General Conference if we want to be here, I said yes. Yes, I want to be here because I believe that the bright future of our beloved denomination, and I believe that the values upon which worldwide regionalization is rooted will give renewed strength, life, and vitality to the church. Worldwide regionalization is the *kairos* moment of equity, contextual ministry, and simultaneously dismantling the vestiges of colonialism in the structure of the *oikos* called The United Methodist Church.

In the Philippines, we have been advocating for autonomous structure for seven decades, but the recent developments and missional landscape around the globe place us in a better position with this regionalization. This worldwide regionalization gives us missional and contextual autonomy without losing our connectionality. My country is regularly plagued by typhoons, flash floods, landslides, and various calamities. But even with all these disasters, our church is able to minister with grace and compassion to alleviate the suffering of our people through the United Methodist Committee on Relief, or UMCOR. Further, we are able to touch the lives of the overseas Filipino workers and migrants through the GVGM. We are able to make the people feel the presence of our church due to our connectionalism.

The power and the authority which shall be vested in the regions to make its own rules and regulations for the administration of the work within the boundaries is tantamount to saying, allowing the seeds of the United Methodist spirituality to flourish and grow vigorously in the respective regions or countries. And so I am pleading for this conference to say yes to this petition. Thank you, Bishop.

(applause)

BISHOP MALONE: Friends, I'm going to ask that we not applaud. Let us not applaud. Let us live with grace together. Amen?

OK, so as I'm look at the pool there are a number of persons who are wanting to speak for, and there are a few who want to speak against. We've already heard two speeches for and one against. I am going to call on now Forbes Matonga. The chair calls Forbes Matonga.

If you'll make your way to a microphone.

(pause)

FORBES MATONGA (West Zimbabwe): Thank you, Bishop. My name is Forbes Matonga, West Zimbabwe Annual Conference. I am man, Black, reside in Africa, Zimbabwe.

Bishop, we do agree that the current structure of the United Methodist is colonial. It is not meant to make the church accountable to those living outside the United States. That is a fact. But we have issues with the way the reformation is being proposed. Number one, Africa is going to be further divided. This petition is creating several regions within Africa and yet America will be one region. Politically speaking, that is disintegrating the voice of Africa. So we want—if they wanted the region Africa is to be one region as a block. If you analyze it carefully, you see that Europe is going to be one region, America is going to be one region, Philippines is going to be one region, but Africa is proposed to have four regions. That will make us not speak to each other. We will come here as divided as were we before. That reminds us of a divide and rule. So what we are proposing is that, should we have regionalization, then Africa is a region as a whole. So that when we come to speak on issues that are African, then it's more like delegation like Zimbabwe; we're able to collaborate with others so that our voices will be raised and heard. So this is where we have a deep problem with this one. It is a divide and rule. Right now, we are beginning to speak powerfully because we meet as Africans; we now know each other. Prior to this, Africans never knew each other. We came here; we did not know who comes from Liberia, who comes from—and we are weak. So make us a region, create a region for Africans, create a platform for Africans so that we speak as a continent and not as small colonies that are in Africa. After all these boundaries in Africa—creating Zimbabwe, Zambia—we did not create them. They were created by Europeans. We want to be one, we don't want to be divided. I thank you.

(applause)

BISHOP MALONE: OK, so here is where we are. Again, we have a number of persons who are in the pool. We've had two speeches against and two speeches for, and there are a number of people wishing to speak. I'm going to call on Ande Emmanuel who has a speech for. If you'll make your way to a microphone.

ANDE EMMANUEL (Southern Nigeria): Thank you, Bishop. My name is Rev. Ande Emmanuel, a clergy delegate from southern conference of the Nigeria Episcopal Area. Let me begin by thanking the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, Connectional Table, and Christmas Covenant team for this great work that they have put together to bring us to where we are today. And I want to say this before I continue that we are not here to control the Americans. Neither are our brothers from America here to control us. We're trying to build a platform that is mutual. We're trying to build an understanding that will move our church together. And I want to call our attention, most especially, our brothers and sisters from the central conferences in Africa to understand that we are here to build a mutual relationship for a sustainable United Methodist in Africa. Regionalization, or the worldwide regionalization, created a platform whereby each region is treated equally. This plan has created a platform whereby no region in The United Methodist Church will claim to be powerful and others less. And this is an honest confession from me: I have been to General Conference four times. One as an observer and the other three as a delegate. And to be honest with you, most of the conversations in this General Conference are U.S. centric. Sometimes we sit here and the American talks about things that doesn't relate to us. So if we have to have a global and totally connectional church, most of these that are Americans should be dealt by Americans. I will cite an example. If the issue of jurisdiction and other issues that we're talking about here are issues that concern America, my brothers and sisters, we should allow Americans to decide

what would be best for them. Regionalization has been very productive due to the conversation that I've had, and our connection as United Methodists is important. I think about the education that we have received in Africa as a result of this connection. I think about the healthcare; I think about the agriculture development. All these were possible because we are connected as a church. Brothers and sisters, it is time for us to build this connection to the next level. So I support, and I call you to support same.

BISHOP MALONE: Ok, so let me share with you where we are. We've already had three speeches for; we've had two speeches against. We still have eleven persons in the pool who wanted to speak for; we've already had the three that are allowed. We had four persons in the pool to speak against, and we also have two points of informational inquiry. So the chair is going to call on Sylvestre Muthoma, who has a speech against. This will be the last speech. If you'll make your way to a microphone.

(pause)

SYLVESTRE MUTHOMA (East Congo): (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) Thank you, Bishop, for allowing me to speak. I would like to start with a parentheses, Bishop. When people come here, I say I am White, I want to say I'm Black, and somebody else will say I'm Red or Yellow. I would say that it's better to introduce ourselves as brothers and sisters, instead of introducing ourselves by skin tone. I am speaking to say no, because today regionalization is a big question, a big issue, a critical question for the life of The United Methodist Church. The churches at the crossroads, even though we won't say it. And our Eurasian friends might have understood it a little bit earlier, and they left. But as far as I'm concerned, I come from the East Congo in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We did not have enough time to debate this issue. So debating about how to vote is not a good process because we need to have all the necessary information, all the ramification of this regionalization. We need to understand what will be the benefit for the church, and we need to have all the detailed information before we proceed to the vote because as of today, in the East Congo, we do not know all the ramifications. What are the advantages? What are the disadvantages? So we need an in-depth study, an in-depth analysis before we can vote. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So according to our rules of the General Conference, Rule 7.3, after three speeches for and three speeches against are given and since there are no secondary motions before the assembly, the question will be put to vote immediately. There are eleven speakers for and two speakers against that are in the pool and no secondary motions that are pending. So in accordance with that rule, the chair now turn to the presenter of the committee to grant you an opportunity to have the last speech.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: Two—three brief remarks. In terms of the central conferences, this petition before you does mainly change the name from central conferences, regional conferences, and gives a little bit more clarity about adaptation rights, and all the rest remains as it is. No changes for central conferences.

SCHNEIDER-OESCH: The big change this petition brings is really for our brothers and sisters here in the United States where you would be finally be given the right to decide things which only concern you, among yourselves. The same right that we have enjoyed for a long time. One brief remark about the jurisdictions. Yes, this is a burning issue. Yes, members of the Standing Committee agree that this structure is problematic, but after long debate and a long consideration, the Standing Committee has

come to the conclusion that it is better to solve this in two steps, and that's why it has not included the question of the jurisdictions in this petition. Many of us in the Standing Committee are convinced it is time this question—to address this question. And we are sorry you still have two—four layers of decision-making in this country even after we pass regionalization but let's solve that in the next step. We are convinced this is the better way to do it.

(pause)

Yes, and one reminder: We have already adopted through the consent calendar the Petition 8. Petition 8 creates a study group for the way into the future. Regionalization means quite a change and as hard as we have all worked on the details of this, we are aware as we move into this new future we will discover things that need adjusting. We will want to learn from our new experiences, and that is exactly the role of this study group that was already put in place when you adopted Petition 8. So adopting worldwide regionalization today is not the end of something, it is the beginning of something. And so from the Standing Committee we encourage you to take that step.

BISHOP MALONE: OK. So we are now going to proceed to vote. So if you would get your devices ready. Remember that this motion requires a two-thirds vote and the question is on the adoption of Calendar Item No. 22: worldwide regionalization: amend the Constitution to create regional conferences on a worldwide basis. And again this is found on p. 1994 of the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Vote on Worldwide Regionalization

OK we see a few flags, and we see pages providing assistance. We see you, and assistance is coming. We want to make sure everyone gets an opportunity to vote.

(pause)

OK. All right. There's another flag. OK we have a few flags. We know we have been sitting for a long time. You've been very faithful.

(pause)

OK. It looks like everyone is being attended to. OK we have another flag over here, directly in front. OK we're good. OK. All right. The vote is—

(pause)

OK the vote is now closed. The ballot is closed. OK. And the results should now appear on the screen. OK.

(applause)

So Calendar Item No. 22 has been approved. 586 in the affirmative, yes. 164 voted not to affirm.

[Yes, 586; No, 164]

(pause)

So let me share with you where we are, and this is where the chair needs your cooperation. Before we go to no. 21, Calendar Item 21, I do think it's important that the chair informs you that even though we suspended the rules so that this body can complete today's calendar items and just so that you are aware in order to complete those calendar items there are two more items that have to be cared for, and we see how long this has taken. OK. And we want you to be able to do your best work. The next order of the day, which is lunch, which is 12:30, and as you were looking at the calendar there was a legislative committee meeting. Your work was supposed to start before lunch and then you will have more time following lunch. We are right at the time of 12:30 for lunch, and so if there is no objection—we know as an assembly you suspended rules—if there is no objection that will conclude today's work so that the legislative committees can get to work and then the remainder of these calendar items can be sent back to the Agenda and Calendar Committee to get them calendared for tomorrow, if there is no objection.

The body is ready. You have done good work. You've done—OK I'm going to turn to Gary Graves, who is the secretary of the General Conference to provide any announcements. Let us give thanks to the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

(applause)

OK. We're going to have to go to vote. I did not hear that there was some objection. There were a few who did object, and we do need to honor that. So we have to put it to a vote. We have to put it to a vote. Again, we do this work together. We honor each other. I'm gonna ask for us to get on the screen a motion to recess. So get your voting devices ready.

And you're gonna press *one (1)* for yes. You're gonna press *two (2)* for no.

(pause)

The vote is open. You may vote now.

(pause)

OK.

(pause)

OK. We are in the middle of a vote. We are in the middle of a vote. OK.

(pause)

If there's—I see someone with a checkered flag. I'm going to ask for a page to go and check on that delegate.

We do have the results. They will now appear on the screen. The vote is closed. Here are the results.

You have voted 642 to affirm to recess and 74 have voted not to affirm to recess.

[Yes, 642; No, 74]

So the motion to recess, your action is to adjourn, but before we move, before we move, before we move, please, I'm going to turn to Gary Graves, secretary of the General Conference, to make a few

announcements, but before he does so, I want to say thank you to the team that assisted this morning in the presiding. Amen. Bishop Saenz and Bishop Wilson.

(applause)

And I also want to remind the body that we took very serious what your ask was that we have a map of the floor so that others who are presiding will have that map to be able to have a sense of where the body is so that we can be more attentive. We're all trying to do our best here to the glory of God. I turn now to Gary Graves.

GARY GRAVES: Thank you, Bishop. A reminder of what is ahead for us. We will be at lunch from 12:30 to 1:30.

Legislative committees begin at 1:30. During the legislative committee meetings, if you are needing to do temporary seating of reserve delegates, that process will move from the table that is here between Halls B and C, and it will move upstairs to room W211. W211. Please note that the procedure will remain the same, and only the location will change while you are in legislative committees.

Please be sure to take your voting card with you but leave the device on the table.

Please be sure to take your interpretation device with you, and just a reminder, the interpretation devices are line-of-sight infrared. If you are looking at one of these antennas that are around the room, your device that is receiving it needs to be visible to that. If you have it buried under fourteen books, you won't hear anything. If it's inside your pocket, you will not hear anything, so please be sure to keep these out so that the line-of-sight will assist you. If there's anything technically incorrect, they will tell me, and I will repair that.

We do have one other piece of information that we feel is important to share with you as we are together and the subject matter of this day from our worship time and throughout with our special emphasis. During the break today, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling and Bishop Lanette Plambeck will be available on the floor to your left, to our right, here on the side of the stage, to meet with anyone for whom today's focus on personal violence triggers a trauma response and who find themselves in need of prayerful support or care.

Let us remember one another as we go throughout the day, and I do want to thank you for honoring our commitment with those who are serving us, those who are preparing our meals and presenting them, that we don't delay them too far off schedule, so thank you very much for that.

BISHOP SMITH MALONE: OK. So we have completed our business for today's plenary session. And our third plenary session is adjourned. May the Lord continue to bless the good and holy and sacred work that you are doing on behalf of the whole United Methodist Church. God bless you as you go into your legislative committee meetings and as you sit at table and break bread together. It's been an honor to serve you.

We are adjourned.

(applause)