

MFSA Plumbline

Regionalization



Understanding the Issue

The United Methodist Church has grown beyond being a US church with mission outposts, but the structure hasn't been updated to reflect the global nature of our church. The Worldwide Regionalization legislation would restructure the church to make all members of The United Methodist Church equal partners in its ministry. It keeps us connected as a church while making space for local cultural expression and autonomy. Specifically, the US will become much more like other regions rather than remaining as the center and norm of the United Methodist Church. This is a first step towards reckoning with the legacy of colonization and moving towards the equity that Jesus calls us to.

Values

- Equity between regions
- De-centering the US
- Decolonizing our mission, relationships, and structure
- Respect for contextual ministry settings
- Agency—Power to make decisions and lead with integrity
- Self-determination within our Connectional system
- Unity that is redefined and strengthened
- Focus on mission and ministry
- Stewardship of all gifts
- Maintaining our Wesleyan theological doctrine and identity

Worldwide Regionalization

Since the founding of The United Methodist Church, Central Conferences have been empowered to adapt specific sections of The Book of Discipline (BOD) to optimize the UMC's mission and ministries within their respective regions. As a result of not being able to revise the BOD, the US has dominated General Conference with US specific legislation. The Connectional Table in collaboration with Wespeth proposed legislation in 2019 that would create the US as a Regional Conference (USRC). This legislation was expanded by the Christmas Covenant to include the whole church. The original USRC legislation is part of the Worldwide Regionalization proposal.

In the season of Christmas in 2019, United Methodists primarily from Africa, Europe and the Philippines wrote the Christmas Covenant as a gift of hope for the church. The Christmas Covenant Team then engaged in grassroots organizing and education over several years. As a result, support for regionalization grew around the connection. In 2023, the Christmas Covenant Team collaborated with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and the Connectional Table to produce the "Worldwide Regionalization" legislation submitted to General Conference by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. Worldwide Regionalization is the updated version of the Christmas Covenant, the grassroots work of the original team enhanced by collaborators.

Worldwide regionalization legislation proposes the formation of eight Regional Conferences. Our current Central Conferences – Africa Central, Congo, West Africa, Southern Europe, Germany, Northern Europe, Philippines – will be renamed Regional Conferences. A new Regional Conference will be created for the United States. Regional church governance provides greater equity across the various regions of the church.

Each Regional Conference will have equal duties and powers. Therefore, Regionalization will move The UMC into a more equitable era.

Analysis

By allowing all regions of The UMC to adapt structures to facilitate our mission and ministries in the most effective ways for their context and culture(s), General Conference can focus more fully on the mission and ministry of our multinational denomination.

Regional Conferences will have authority to adapt specific portions of Part VI of The Book of Discipline, which deals with the organization and administration of the church – how we accomplish our mission and ministries, allowing for the different legal systems across the world.

Because the legislation requires constitutional amendments, it will require a 2/3 majority at General Conference and then ratification by an aggregate 2/3 majority of votes within Annual Conferences.

Resources

- Legislation and further resources: <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/the-connectional-table/regionalization-legislation>
- Talking Points: <https://www.resourceumc.org/-/media/umc-media/2024/01/06/16/09/worldwide-regionalization-flyer-english.pdf>
- Bishops' discuss regionalization: <https://youtu.be/Kb7-Uftd-NY>

Recommended Action

VOTE FOR:

Petition #1—Constitutional Amendments
21039-CO Page 1283 ADCA Supp.

Petition #2—Changes in the Book of Discipline necessitated by constitutional changes
21040-CO Page 1303 ADCA Supp.

Petition #3—Enabling Legislation to update Paragraph 2201 on the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters
21041-ST Page 1578 ADCA Supp.

Petition #4—Enabling Legislation to replace “central conference” with “regional conference” throughout the Discipline after ratification of constitutional amendments
21042-CO Non-Dis Page 1362 ADCA Supp.

Petition #5—Creates a new paragraph 507 to establish an interim US Regional Committee
21043-CO Page 1300 ADCA Supp.

Petition #6—Non-Disciplinary Petition enabling the creation of an interim US Regional Committee
21044-CO Non-Dis Page 1362 ADCA Supp.

Petition #7—Non-Disciplinary Petition to Create a Plan for Organization of a US Regional Conference
21045-CO Non-Dis Page 1363 ADCA Supp.

Petition #8—Non-Disciplinary Petition to Update and Perfect Regional Conference Structure for the next GC after adoption of the constitutional amendments
21046-CO Non-Dis Page 1364 ADCA Supp.

This document was prepared in collaboration with leaders of the Christmas Covenant Team, the Connectional Table, and The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.