



**Dakotas Conference**  
The United Methodist Church



**Grow. Reach. Heal.**

*The Dakotas Conference vision is for all congregations to live out Jesus' call to grow in love of God and neighbor, reach new people, and heal a broken world.*

## **POSTPONED 2020 GENERAL CONFERENCE LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY**

A lot happened at the postponed 2020 General Conference. Here is a summary of the key decisions:

Delegates approved a series of petitions related to [regionalization](#), which has become United Methodist shorthand for a package of legislation that would restructure the denomination. Under the legislation, the U.S. and each central conference—church regions in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines—would become regional conferences with the same authority to adapt the Book of Discipline, the denomination's policy book, for more missional effectiveness. Currently, only central conferences have the authority to adapt the Discipline as missional needs and different legal contexts require. To be ratified, the regionalization plan will need at least a two-thirds total vote of annual conference lay and clergy voters, so this item will come to the Dakotas Annual Conference Session for a vote.

Delegates voted to [grant sacramental authority to deacons](#). Deacons can now administer baptism and Holy Communion without having to obtain special permission to do so. Previously, a bishop could authorize a deacon to preside at a specific celebration of the sacraments and/or in a specific ministry context. But today's vote changes the language in The Book of Discipline so that such authorization is no longer required. "For the sake of extending the mission and ministry of the church and offering the means of grace to the world, the deacon is authorized to preside at the celebration of the sacraments," the sentence that was changed now reads.

Delegates [voted to reduce the portion of church giving requested to fund the general-church budget](#). The bottom line is that U.S. annual conferences will be asked to pay lower apportionments to the general church compared to what delegates passed at the 2016 General Conference. Also, denomination-wide ministries that rely on those apportionments—including general agencies and episcopal leadership—will need to be budgeted with those cuts in mind.

Delegates [voted to enter a full-communion partnership with The Episcopal Church](#) after years of dialogue about this possibility. Full communion means each church acknowledges the other as a partner in the Christian faith, recognizes the validity of each other's baptism and Eucharist, and commits to work together in ministry. Such an agreement also means Episcopalians and United Methodists can share clergy. The agreement still needs the approval of the Episcopalians—which might not happen until 2027.

Delegates overwhelmingly [approved a new retirement plan for U.S. clergy](#). Called Compass, the plan was conceived and championed by Wespath, the denomination's pension and benefits agency. The new Compass plan will mean benefit changes starting Jan. 1, 2026. Unlike previous clergy retirement plans that Wespath has offered, Compass does not include a lifetime benefit. Instead, Compass is entirely a defined-contribution plan similar to the 401(k) plans most U.S. corporate employees now have. The benefits of clergy who already have retired will not be affected by the plan. Wespath says the switch to the Compass plan is needed to continue providing reliable and sustainable retirement income.



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The United Methodist Church's [longtime condemnation of homosexuality—which sparked a half-century of conflict—is now no more](#). By a vote of 523 to 161 after about an hour and a half of debate, General Conference delegates eliminated the 52-year-old assertion in the denomination's Social Principles that “the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching.” In the same vote, delegates affirmed “marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith [adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age] into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.”

The United Methodist Church [removed a 40-year ban on the ordination of gay clergy](#). Delegates approved this decision by a 93 percent margin, without debate. As of the conclusion of General Conference, the denomination's Book of Discipline will no longer include a statement saying: “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”

Delegates also voted to remove a ban on annual conferences and denominational agencies from giving United Methodist funds to any “gay caucus group” or using funds to “promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” Instead, the provision now says annual conferences and agencies should honor the denomination's commitment not to reject lesbian or gay members.

Delegates voted to eliminate parts of the Traditional Plan, which was approved at the 2019 General Conference and strengthened the denomination's longtime restrictions on same-sex marriage and “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy. For example, delegates removed of a ban on annual conferences and denominational agencies from giving United Methodist funds to any “gay caucus group” or using funds to “promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” Instead, the provision now says annual conferences and agencies should honor the denomination's commitment not to reject lesbian or gay members. Delegates also voted to lift a ban placed on boards of ordained ministry from considering candidates without evaluating whether they are “self-avowed practicing” gay people, and to strike the requirement that bishops rule gay candidates ineligible. Additionally, delegates lifted the mandatory penalty of at least a one-year suspension without pay for clergy found guilty of officiating at same-sex weddings.

Delegates [approved a resolution condemning racial-ethnic discrimination and gender-based violence against Asian Americans](#). It condemns increasing discrimination against racial-ethnic minorities, especially Asian Americans, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. It also condemns the violations against religious minorities in India. The resolution calls on annual conferences to urge local churches to be informed and to work against discrimination and gender-based violence.

Delegates passed a petition to welcome “with a spirit of grace” churches that have disaffiliated or withdrawn from The United Methodist Church and wish to return. The legislation stipulates that every annual conference shall have a policy of re-affiliation for the churches seeking to return to the connection, so Dakotas Conference leaders will work to create such a policy.



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Delegates passed a resolution that asks everyone conference to identify a Creation Care Coordinator. Additionally, the Revised Social Principles include expanded content on the need for Christians to protect and care for all God's creation. These changes enhance and inform the resolution passed by the Dakotas Conference in 2023, encouraging local congregations to form Green Teams.