



Organization and Governance



A central emphasis on connectionalism

The United Methodist Church, which began as a movement and a loose network of local societies with a mission, grew into one of the most carefully organized and largest [denominations](#) in the world. The United Methodist structure and organization began as a means of accomplishing the mission of spreading [Scriptural Holiness over the land](#).



United Methodists often joke about the many organizational layers of church life, but, as members of other denominations have been heard to say: "If you want something done, get the United Methodists to do it." Followers of the Wesleys are indeed "methodical" about the ways they approach mission and ministry.

One reason United Methodists are able to accomplish great things is the church's emphasis on "connectionalism." It is common to hear United Methodist leaders speak of the denomination as "the connection." This concept has been central to Methodism from its beginning.

No local church is the total body of Christ. Therefore, local United Methodist churches are bound together by a common mission and common governance that accomplish reaching out into the world. United Methodist churches and organizations join in mission with each other and with other denominations.

Connectionalism shows through the clergy appointment system, through the developing of mission and ministry that United Methodists do together, and through giving.

An example of connectionalism: Mission work around the world, whether it be a new university in Africa or bicycles for Cuban pastors, is the work of "the connection," as opposed to the work of a single congregation.





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Decentralization of power



United Methodists are sometimes asked where their church is headquartered, or what officer is "in charge."

Deliberately, The United Methodist Church has no single central office, no archbishop, no pope. This reflects the representative nature of the church's organization – which also provides a system of checks and balances.

The church created a system that in some ways parallels that of the U.S. government when it came to America. The church has a *General Conference*, its legislative branch; a *Council of Bishops*, somewhat like an executive branch; and a nine-member *Judicial Council*, the judicial branch.

It's helpful to recognize the structure of the church, but it is the mission, ministry and love of God through Jesus Christ that is of primary importance. This section will look at a few of the players in this connectional system.





The local church is a strategic base from which Christians move out to the structures of society. (*2004 Book of Discipline*)

"The local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs. It is a community of true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, the church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of the world."

(¶201, *2004 Book of Discipline*)

The *Book of Discipline* outlines rules and organization that local churches must follow but there is also room for a local church to express its ministry according to the community and its congregation.

The local church is comprised of several boards where members serve and oversee or coordinate various functions, programs, and ministries of the church. Some members may choose to also serve at the annual conference level. It is most often at the local church level where members get involved and grow in their spiritual lives.

While no two local churches are exactly the same, there are commonalities. For example, most use the official *United Methodist Hymnal*.



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Member to General Church -- What's the Connection?

This Learning Object is designed to show the relationship/connectionalism between The United Methodist:

-  Individual Church Member
-  Local Church
-  District
-  Annual Conference
-  Jurisdiction
-  General Church





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Individuals attend a local church.

They may or may not all be members.

You, the individual



Organization and Governance

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Individuals attend a local church.

They may or may not all be members.

Many people attend a local church.





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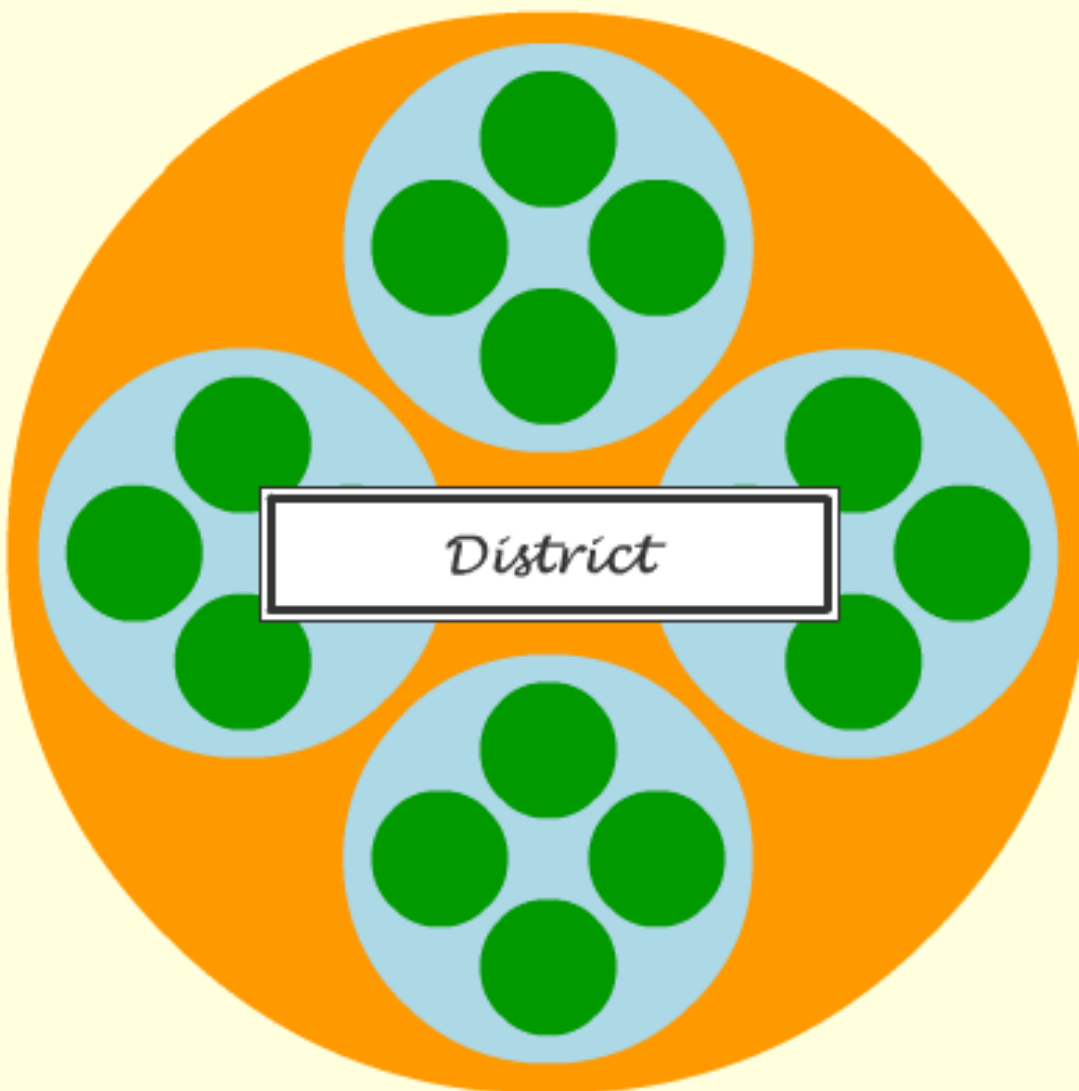
- Individual Church Member
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Individuals attend a local church.

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Many people attend a local church.

Each local church is part of a geographical area called districts.





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An Annual Conference is a regional area.

An annual conference is comprised of many districts.

There are 63 Annual Conferences in the U.S. alone, and several more around the world.





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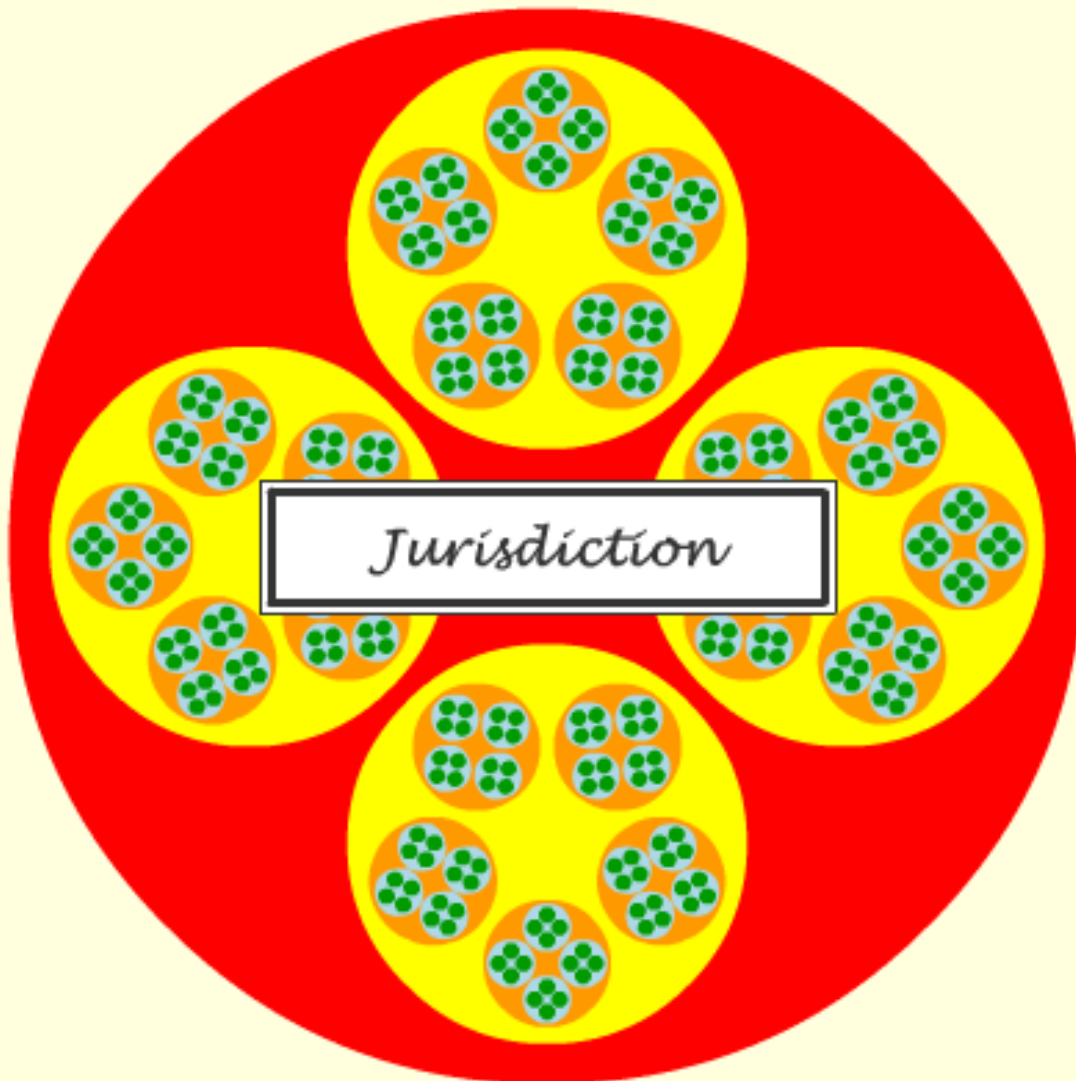
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Each Annual Conference in the United States is part of a geographical region called a jurisdiction.

There are 5 jurisdictions in the U. S.

In other places in the world, Annual Conferences belong to a Central Conference.

There are 7 Central Conferences.





Organization and Governance

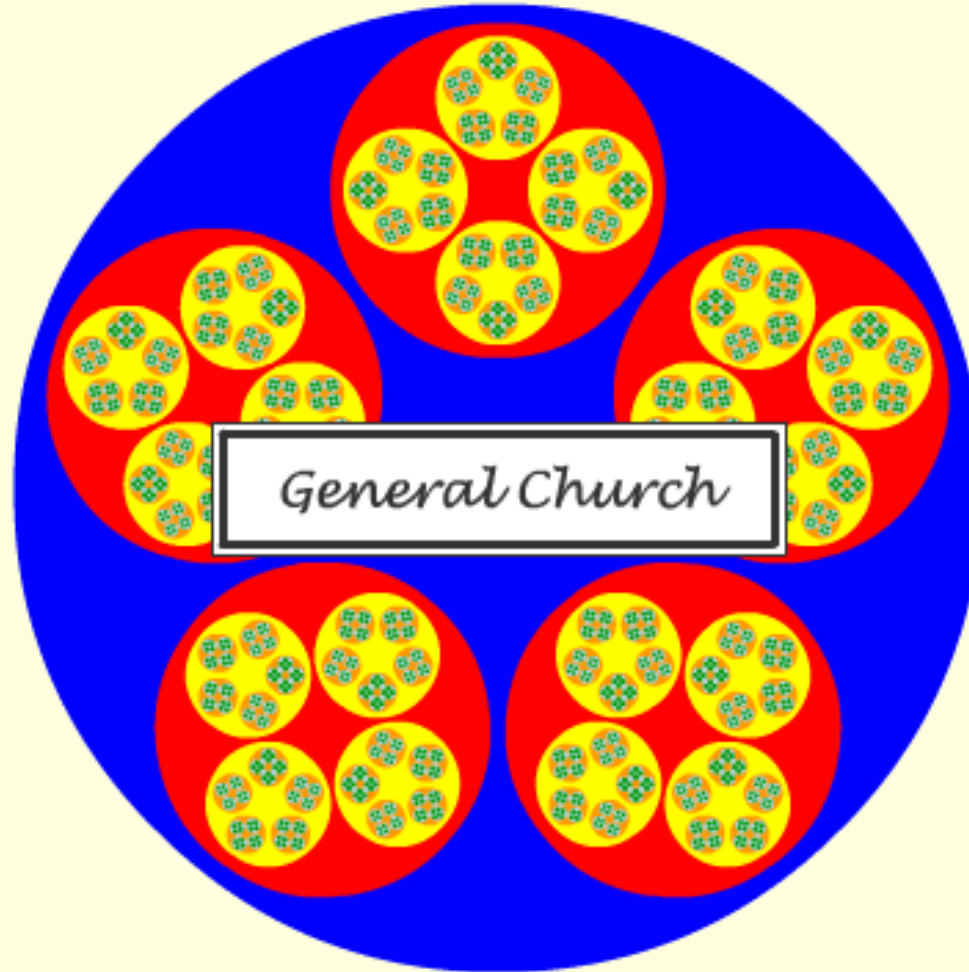
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All of these are part of the General Church.

We all give our time, talents and gifts to support each other and others in the world.

That's why the United Methodist Church is called "**connectional.**"

Because we are connected, we can do more together than we could do alone.





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The Annual Conference

When you hear the term "annual conference," it could be referring to any one of three things. The annual conference is a *regional body*, an *organizational unit* AND a *yearly meeting*.

Regional body

The annual (sometimes referred to as 'regional') conference is described as the "basic unit" of the church.

An annual conference may be an entire state, only part of the state, or even parts of two or more states. There are also three missionary conferences in the United States, which rely upon the [denomination](#) as a whole for funding.

An annual conference is comprised of local churches, which are organized into *districts*. A district is a geographical division with approximately 50 local churches, but this number varies in each annual conference. Each district has a district superintendent who provides leadership within the district and the annual conference.

Organizational body



The annual conference has a central office and professional staff that coordinate and conduct ministry and the business of the conference. It likely has a director of connectional ministries, treasurer, directors of program areas (such as camping), communications director, and other staff as deemed appropriate for the annual conference and as required by the *Book of Discipline*. Clergy and [laypersons](#) may also serve on conference boards, commissions and committees.

Do you know anyone who serves on the conference level?

Annual Conference sessions

Each year, all clergy members and an equal number of lay members selected from the local churches attend their conference's Annual Conference session, which may last 3-5 days. The bishop presides over these meetings.