



# Organization and Governance

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## Called To Serve



United Methodists believe that all persons, including laity, are called to ministry – that is, the service we do as Christian disciples.

Some individuals are called to make more formal their witness and service through ordination or serving through the annual conference.

Ordained Elders are called by God and ordained by bishops. They preach and teach the Word of God, administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and order the life of the church for mission and ministry.

Others called to ordained ministry may choose to be Deacons.

Ordained Deacons, who are part of the clergy, are often specialists in

ministries of education, music, administration or outreach and justice ministries – referred to as servant ministries.

Laypeople may also be called to serve in ministry through an annual conference. Local pastors are lay people with special conference-approved training who serve as pastors of congregations, assigned there by a district superintendent. They have pastoral duties and may administer the sacraments, but only within, or for the people of, the church or charge to which they are appointed.

And in The United Methodist Church, it is believed that we are *all* called to be in ministry. This is sometimes referred to as the "priesthood of all believers."



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## **Annual clergy appointment**

United Methodist clergy are members of annual conferences, not local churches. As such, clergy are subject to annual appointment to a local charge (one or more local churches) or to other forms of ministry, such as chaplain in the military. Unique to the United Methodist system, all local churches are ensured pastors and all ordained elders in good standing receive appointments.

An average appointment lasts four years. There is not a limit on how long a clergy person can serve the same church.

United Methodists call this an “itinerant” system because the clergy move from place to place. In some other [denominations](#), congregations “call” (select their own) pastors and may ordain them in the local congregation.

While most clergy primarily serve local churches, there is an expectation that they also provide leadership in the annual conference, such as serving on a conference board.



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## General Conference

Who makes decisions for The United Methodist Church if there is no one person in charge? Good question. The only body that can set official policy for the denomination is the General Conference.

The General Conference is an international body of nearly 1,000 delegates that meets for 10 days every four years. The delegates are elected by annual conferences (at Annual Conference sessions) to attend General Conference. They represent all annual conferences around the world. Half of the delegates are laity (non-clergy members), half are clergy.



### Bishop's Role

Bishops attend the General Conference but cannot vote. Different bishops serve as presiding officers during the conference. Other bishops cannot speak unless permission is specifically granted by the nearly 1,000 delegates.

During General Conference, delegates discuss and vote on petitions, resolutions, and legislation proposed by individuals, agencies, annual conferences, and other groups within the **denomination**. These actions result in a revision of the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, the denomination's book of law, and *Book of Resolutions*, policies of the denomination on current social issues.

It is at General Conference where delegates wrestle with today's issues in light of scriptural teachings and the church's understanding of that teaching. Here is where the church's official stands and church policies are made regarding such issues as human sexuality, abortion, war and peace, as well as determination of ministries and funding.

General Conferences are held in years divisible by 4, such as 2008, 2012, etc.





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### Bishops



The United Methodist Church uses an episcopal system of governance, which means bishops provide the top leadership.

All bishops (active and retired) are members of the Council of Bishops, which is required to meet at least once a year. (You may read news stories about their meetings from United Methodist News Service and

Newscope)

Bishops are directed to provide oversight of the entire church but have specific leadership responsibilities in a geographical area, called an *episcopal area*. In the U.S., each episcopal area is comprised of one or two annual conferences. This is generally true in the Central Conferences (conferences outside the U.S.) as well, where there are 19 episcopal areas. However in the Philippines a bishop may preside over as many as eight annual conferences.

Both men and women can be elected bishop. The only requirement to be elected bishop is that the person is an [ordained](#) elder in The United Methodist Church. Bishops in the U.S.

generally serve one Area for eight years (two four-year terms) before they are assigned to another Area.



The United Methodist Church currently has 68 active bishops – 49 in the U.S. and 19 in Central Conferences.







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## Churchwide agencies

To carry out the work of the connection around the world, the church has established churchwide or “general” agencies. These are boards, commissions, and councils. All are currently located in the United States.



Each general agency has its own governing board of lay and clergy members. The agencies are established by General Conference. Their purposes are outlined in the *Book of Discipline*.

For example, the **General Council on Finance and Administration** oversees funds of the church. The **General Commission on Religion and Race** reviews and monitors the practices of the entire church to ensure racial inclusiveness.

In addition to their program and supervisory work, general agencies have resources available to conferences and local churches.



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### Giving is part of connectionalism

Individuals joining a United Methodist Church are asked to support the church with:

- Prayers
- Presence
- Gifts
- Service
- Witness


Those individual gifts support the work of the local congregation, district, annual conference and The United Methodist Church here and around the world. The system used to do remarkable work in the United Methodist connection is based on assigning sums that local churches pay, which support their conference and the [denomination](#). It's called "apportioned giving." Let's look more closely at how it works.



Apportionments are sometimes referred to as "a portion meant for others."

#### Where the local church expense dollar goes



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Here's how churchwide funding works: The General Conference approves a budget for our connected ministries. This budget is debated in detail. The General Conference sets the share that each annual conference is asked to give in support of the budget. Each annual conference determines its own financial needs and "apportions" both amounts to local churches. The local church remits its apportionments to the annual conference treasurer. The general church apportionments are sent to the General Council on Finance and Administration for distribution to the appropriate agencies and ministries.





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## Special And Specific Funding Opportunities



Conference and general church apportionments are just one way people are connected through their giving.

United Methodist churches observe six churchwide special Sundays with offerings, such as Native American Ministries Sunday and Peace with Justice Sunday.

United Methodist churches and individuals can designate which mission projects their dollars go to through the following opportunities:

- Advance for Christ and His Church
- World Service Special Gifts, and
- Churchwide special appeals for disasters and other emergency causes.



### Education Support

United Methodists support 11 historically black colleges and universities, 13 United Methodist seminaries, Africa University, the work of our bishops around the world, administrative oversight of the church, ecumenical endeavors with the global Christian community and much more.





## World Service Fund, heart of United Methodist presence

Part of every dollar that local church people share in their local churches goes around the world through the World Service Fund and does incredible things.



Specific projects work to:

- Support a network of more than 900 mission personnel and thousands of others who serve in the name of Christ and The United Methodist Church around the world;
- Strengthen evangelism efforts, stimulate church growth, expand Bible studies and nurture spiritual development;



- Expand specific local church work with children, youth, singles, students, persons who are mentally and physically challenged, and adults of all ages;
- Enrich congregational life with worship, retreat and camping resources, leadership preparation and stewardship development;
- Provide leadership and coordination for denominational ministry with youth;



- Continue 200 years of commitment to quality college and graduate education; and
- Provide the means to equip and nurture lay leaders through education and professional support.



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## The Advance Specials support projects worldwide



Individuals, local churches and small groups give major amounts of money to a long list of approved worldwide projects through a program known as *“The Advance for Christ and His Church.”*

Usually referred to simply as “The Advance,” this program began after World War II to help rebuild a physically and spiritually broken world. In the more than 50 years since the Advance began, United Methodists have given \$800 million for thousands of ministries in more than 100 countries.

This is another example of how the connection works and how today’s United Methodists affirm John Wesley’s declaration that “the world is my [parish](#).”

### Did you know?

Nearly one-half of the 371,400 scouts meeting weekly in 6,700 United Methodist churches are from unchurched families.



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## **Summary**

The United Methodist Church is intentionally decentralized and democratic. Its organization and governance has Anglican roots but it has grown into its own form and into a powerful force for Christ throughout the world. Clergy and laity alike help determine the ministry and workings of The United Methodist Church through their actions in their local churches, annual conferences, general agencies and through petitions and resolutions they send to General Conference, and through the voting delegates who go to General Conference, the only body that can set official policy for the church.

It is the organization of The United Methodist Church that creates a structure for connectionalism, but it is individuals, the people called United Methodists, who make possible the connection of hearts, minds, hands and lives as the body of Christ around the world. One way we do that is through apportioned giving.

United Methodists are generous with their prayers, presence, gifts and service, which make possible ministries and outreach through the World Service Fund and specific funding opportunities.

meetings.