



A Report On:

The 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church

Notable changes to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* which will be included in the forthcoming 2020 edition. The changes to the discipline related to human sexuality were effective on May 4, 2024.

I. Constitutional Amendments

The following will require ratification by 2/3 of the Annual Conferences in order for them to take effect.

Regionilization

An amendment to the constitution of The United Methodist Church was approved. In order to be ratified it must be approved by at least 2/3 of the Annual Conferences. It will be voted on at the South Carolina Annual Conference this June. The proposed amendment divides the historically global movement of United Methodism into the following regional conferences: the United States, Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. If enacted, the amendment will empower the regional conferences to adapt *The Book of Discipline* for their own purposes or context.

The ResourceUMC recap suggests that this amendment represents an attempt to make TUMC less U.S. centric.¹

Racial Justice

An edit to ¶15 which is Article V of The Constitution:

“The United Methodist Church commits to confronting and eliminating all forms of racism, racial inequity, colonialism, white privilege, and white supremacy, in every facet of its life and in society at large.”²

Gender and Ability

Edit ¶14 of The Constitution to include gender and ability

“All persons without regard to race, gender, ability, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.”

¹ <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-legislative-recap>

² <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/effective-dates-for-general-conference-legislation>

II. Human Sexuality:

The following took effect at the close of the General Conference.

From ResourceUMC report³

“These changes bring the Book of Discipline back to a neutral place where one group is not singled out for discrimination. It holds space for differing opinions within The United Methodist Church by avoiding broad mandates.”

From other reports:

- ¶1304.2 was edited to require that clergy maintain “integrity in all personal relationships, ‘social responsibility and faithful sexual intimacy expressed through fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication, mutual consent, and growth in grace and in the knowledge and love of God.’”⁴ The legislation removed this language: “fidelity in marriage” and “celibacy in singleness.”
- “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.”⁵
- The General Council on Finance and Administration “should ensure that church funds do not go to anything that rejects LGBTQ people or limits the response to the HIV epidemic.”⁶
- The following was deleted from a list of chargeable offenses for clergy: “practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies.”⁷
- The following was adopted: “No clergy at any time may be required or compelled to perform, or prohibited from performing, any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple, including same-sex couples. All clergy have the right to exercise and preserve their conscience when requested to perform any marriage, union, or blessing of any couple.”⁸
- The UMC will not “require any local church to hold or prohibit a local church from holding a same-sex marriage service on property owned by a local church.”⁹
- Judicial Council decision on May 4, 2024

Question: With the provisions passed by this General Conference, does the language of Paragraph 2533, “the board of Trustees shall not interfere with the pastor in the use of any said property for religious services or other proper meetings or purposes recognized by the law, usages and customs of the UMC...” prevent local churches from creating policies that would prohibit pastors from conducting worship services that include the marriage of same-sex couples in a local church.

¶2533 of *The Book of Discipline: 2016* reads in part:

the board of trustees shall not violate the rights of any local church organization elsewhere granted in the Discipline; provided further, that the board of trustees shall not prevent or interfere with the pastor in the use of any of the said property for religious services or other proper meetings or purposes recognized by the law, usages, and customs of The United Methodist Church...

³ <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-legislative-recap>

⁴ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/united-methodists-remove-same-sex-wedding-ban>

⁵ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/lgbtq-bans-slowly-being-eliminated>

⁶ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/lgbtq-bans-slowly-being-eliminated>

⁷ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/united-methodists-remove-same-sex-wedding-ban>

⁸ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/united-methodists-remove-same-sex-wedding-ban>

⁹ <https://twkumc.org/gc-faq/>

Answer: Nothing in ¶ 2533 prevents the Board of Trustees of a local church from adopting policies prohibiting the conduct of worship services that include same-sex marriage ceremonies. The answer to the question posed in this Petition for Declaratory Decision: **NO**.

- The following language was eliminated from ¶304.3 on requirements for ordination: “The practice of homosexuality is 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.” This was effective at the end of the General Conference.
- “Allow gay clergy in good standing to be appointed across annual conference lines when their bishop can’t locate an appointment in their conference.”¹⁰
- District Superintendents “are not to penalize clergy or churches for holding— or refraining from holding — same-sex weddings.”¹¹
- “The legislation approved this morning also explicitly protects the right of clergy and churches not to officiate at or host same-sex weddings.”¹²

III. Social Principles:

- “[D]elegates 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.”¹³
- Sections E and F were added on “Child Marriage” and “Polygomy.”

The following are excerpts from the approved revised Social Principles which are not church law.

C. Human Sexuality

We affirm human sexuality as a sacred gift and acknowledge that sexual intimacy contributes to fostering the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of individuals and to nurturing healthy sexual relationships that are grounded in love, care and respect. Human sexuality is a healthy and natural part of life that is expressed in wonderfully diverse ways from birth to death. It is shaped by a combination of nature and nurture: heredity and genetic factors on the one hand and childhood development and environment on the other. We further honor the diversity of choices and vocations in relation to sexuality such as celibacy, marriage and singleness. We support the rights of all people to exercise personal consent in sexual relationships, to make decisions about their own bodies and be supported in those decisions, to receive comprehensive sexual education, to be free from sexual exploitation and violence, and to have access to adequate sexual health care.

¹⁰ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/lgbtq-bans-slowly-being-eliminated>

¹¹ <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/40-year-ban-on-gay-clergy-struck-down>

¹² The legislation approved this morning also explicitly protects the right of clergy and churches not to officiate at or host same-sex weddings.

¹³ <https://twkumc.org/gc-faq/>

D. Marriage

Within the church, we affirm marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith into union with one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community. While The United Methodist Church does not recognize marriage as a sacrament, we celebrate and cherish this union as an expression of the couple's faith, grounded in their relationship with God and one another. Marriage thus reflects a continued willingness to grow together in Christ and a commitment to cultivate a covenantal bond that encompasses intimacy, grace and love. As members of the larger society, we also affirm the importance of civil marriage, the legal recognition of domestic unions by the state. Such legal recognition is vital for guaranteeing family stability and the orderly regulation of inheritances, and for providing assurance that spouses and children are afforded all the rights, benefits, and protections to which they are entitled.

K. Reproductive Health and Abortion (excerpt only: abortion)

Our commitment to the sanctity of human life makes us reluctant to condone abortion. We unconditionally reject it as an acceptable means of birth control or a mechanism for gender selection and other forms of eugenics. We support measures requiring parental, guardian or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood, except in cases of alleged incest.

We oppose late-term or partial-birth abortion, a process also known as dilation and extraction. We call for the end to this practice, except when the life of the mother is in danger, no other medical treatments are feasible, or when severe abnormalities threaten the viability of the fetus. We recognize that these and other tragic conflicts of life with life may justify decisions to terminate the life of a fetus. In these limited circumstances, we support the legal option of abortion and insist that such procedures be performed by trained medical providers in clean and safe settings.

We urge all those considering abortions to seek appropriate medical advice and pastoral counseling and to engage in searching, prayerful inquiries into other alternatives, such as making babies available for adoption. We pray for those facing unintended pregnancies and offer our prayers and support as they attempt to discern God's will and seek God's wisdom and guidance. Regardless of the circumstances in which someone might get an abortion, we do not condone bullying or shaming people for their decisions or actions.

We acknowledge that young women of childbearing age frequently report that they lack the ability to make meaningful life choices or exercise effective control over their own lives. We challenge pastors, congregations, campus ministries, and others to be at the forefront of efforts to empower these young women. Additionally, we support resource centers that offer compassionate care and help women explore alternatives to abortion.

IV. Other Notable Actions

- Four Eurasian conferences were allowed to leave The United Methodist Church.
- Full Communion with The Episcopal Church was approved. It awaits approval by The Episcopal Church.
- Deacons were given sacramental authority within their context.
- 43% reduction in the budget compared to the 2016 General Conference. The apportionment rate was also reduced from their current base rate of 3.29% to a base rate of 2.6% for 2025 and 2026.
- ¶12553 which was passed by the special 2019 General Conference was removed from *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. It was erroneously reported that this was done to end disaffiliation. That paragraph had actually expired December 31, 2023. It was removed so that it would never appear in a printed edition of *The Book of Discipline*.