

Denominational Q&A
Prepared following the Special Called Church Council Meeting
Springdale First United Methodist Church
5 June 2024

PNJ = People Need Jesus

This was an article circulating through First UMC titled *What Happened at the United Methodist General Conference?* This article was written by Chris Ritter who is an ordained elder in the Global Methodist Church (GMC). During the Special Called Church Council Meeting held on Tuesday, May 28th, 2024, the pastors were tasked to respond to this PNJ article by fact-checking with United Methodist sources. Below you will see the results of our findings.

Marriage is redefined in United Methodism (PNJ title)

UMC response: [UMNews: Church Ends 52-year-old anti-gay stance](#)

By a vote of 523 to 161, General Conference 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.”

Restrictions on LGBTQ Clergy Are Removed (PNJ title)

UMC response: [Resource UMC: Legislative Recap: General Conference 2020](#)

The General Conference voted by overwhelming majorities to remove from the United Methodist Book of Discipline discriminatory language and bans related to ministry by, with and for “self-avowed practicing” gay and lesbian people. Actions included:

- Removal of the language that the “practice of homosexuality ... is incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- Removal of the ban on the ordination and appointment of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy.
- Removal of language that made the ordination of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy and the performance of same-sex weddings chargeable offenses.
- Removal of mandatory minimum penalties for clergy holding same-sex weddings.
- Removal of a prohibition against using United Methodist funds to support groups, activities and causes that promote the acceptance of homosexuality.

- Removal of the requirement that the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination's finance agency, enforce the funding ban. Instead, the provision says the agency should ensure that church funds do not go to anything that rejects LGBTQ persons or limits the response to the HIV epidemic.
- Allowance for all clergy in good standing to be appointed across annual conference lines when their bishop can't locate an appointment in their conference.

As they have traditionally done, conference bishops and their cabinets will consult with clergy and staff-parish relations committees to find the best appointments for both the local church and the pastor.

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.

Language Forbidding Same-sex Weddings in UMC Sanctuaries Are Removed (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMNews: 40-year ban on gay clergy struck down](#)

Without debate, the General Conference removed The United Methodist Church's ban on the ordination of clergy who are "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" — a prohibition that dates to 1984.

On May 1, the General Conference approved the change alongside 22 pieces of legislation on the consent calendar, which allows delegates to pass multiple petitions in bulk if they have overwhelming support in legislative committee and have no budgetary or constitutional impact.

The vote on the consent calendar was 692-51, with approval at 93%.

Also on the consent calendar, delegates voted that superintendents are not to penalize clergy or churches for holding— or refraining from holding — same-sex weddings.

Non-binary Gender Categories Are Embraced (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMNews: Church broadens defense of human rights](#)

The United Methodist Church now proclaims its support "for the equal rights, liberties, and protections of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity."

General Conference delegates approved that statement as part of the first batch of revised Social Principles to come before the body.

The United Methodist Church and its predecessors have long taken public stands on issues of the world going back to the 1908 Social Creed, which called for “equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.”

But this marks the first time that the denomination is calling for human rights no matter a person’s gender identity. By that, the Social Principle means people should be treated with basic human dignity regardless of whether they are male, female, intersexual, transgender or nonbinary.

Specific Language Related to Adultery is Removed from Clergy Chargeable Offenses (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMNews: United Methodists remove same-sex wedding ban](#)

Resource UMC: [Legislative Recap: General Conference 2020](#)

By a vote of 544 to 121, delegates approved a change to the requirements that clergy practice “celibacy” in singleness — an addition made in 1984 that targeted gay candidates for ministry.

Specific bans on adultery and sex before or outside marriage were in ¶2702 of the Book of Discipline. By a vote of 474 to 206, delegates approved striking from church law the chargeable offenses. The statement removed from ¶2702 read as follows, “[Clergy may be tried when charged with] immorality including but not limited to not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage,” “...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.”

Additional language removed is “...fidelity in heterosexual marriage and celibacy in singleness,” as stated in ¶304.2 regarding Qualifications for Ordination. This deletion was approved in committee by 30-19 and in plenary by 544-121. In the same vote, the delegates maintained the chargeable offense of immorality. Delegates did not approve a proposal to add the definition “including, but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness, or not faithful in a marriage.”

Instead, the delegates supported adding after the requirement of 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.”

Consistent with the actions of General Conference, the language of “heterosexual marriage” was removed. The emphases on fidelity in a committed relationship and celibacy in singleness remain.

Abortion Stance Changed (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMC.org What is the UM position on abortion? \(2019\)](https://www.umc.org/what-is-the-um-position-on-abortion/)

The UMC position before General Conference included:

The United Methodist Church affirms the sanctity of life in these two statements in the Social Principles:

- Our belief in the sanctity of unborn human life makes us reluctant to approve abortion.
- But we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child

United Methodists affirm the sanctity of unborn human life. We similarly understand that the pregnant woman is also a life of sacred worth, and that there are circumstances in which there may be “tragic conflicts of life versus life.” This may happen to any pregnant woman, anywhere, at any time during her pregnancy.

Critical to preserving life is ready access to proper medical care. This includes access to medical care that may include abortion when that is the way to preserve the most life possible. That is why the Social Principles affirm that “in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures by certified medical providers.”

The UMC position post General Conference:

- 1) Title change within the Revised Social Principles which changed from ‘Abortion’ to add the language of *Reproductive Health* and Abortion.
- 2) Removed from the Revised Social Principles are the following statements,
 - a) “...we are equally bound to respect the sacredness of the life and well-being of the mother and the unborn child,” and
 - b) “We mourn and are committed to promoting the diminishment of high abortion rates.”
- 3) Added to the UMC Book of Resolutions—Petition #20847: RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE defending elective abortion as a

“right,” without any clear qualification or restriction, and a matter of “health care.” This resolution declares that “United Methodists pledge solidarity with those who seek elective abortions by taking active measures such as accompanying them to abortion appointments, and pledging that United Methodists and their churches will support abortion rights through personal prayer, letter writing campaigns to their legislators and, when necessary, peaceful protest. Approved 52-1.

The section on Reproductive Health and Abortion can be found beginning on page 28 of the Revised Social Principles.

Church Funds Can Be Used to Promote Homosexuality (PNJ title)

UMC Response: UMNews: LGBTQ bans slowly being eliminated

Resource UMC: GCAH announces new center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist heritage

The statement approved per the consent calendar states the funds will be used 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.” Rather than using funds to “promote homosexuality,” the removal of these bans allows the General Conference and its agencies to focus on education and inclusion, making space for all who are seeking to grow. UM News reports from General Conference that “the provision says the agency should ensure that church funds do not go to anything that rejects LGBTQ people or limits the response to the HIV epidemic.”

An example of the new focus on education and inclusion is the announcement made at a press conference held during the Postponed 2020 General Conference. The announcement was made about the formation of a new Center for LGBTQ+ United Methodist Heritage.

90% of our church offerings stay right here, in Springdale, at the church and in our mission field with our mission ministries. The Tithe Initiative is how our apportionments are figured. That means that 10% of our church offerings (not designated funds, mission funds, or special offerings) are sent to the conference office for ministries and administration in Arkansas. In addition to that, the amount that the Arkansas Conference sends to the General UMC (beyond Arkansas) will go from its current base rate of 3.29% to a base rate of 2.6% for 2025 and 2026.

Sexual Orientation Now a Mandated Diversity Category on Church Boards (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMNews: 40-year ban on gay clergy struck down](#)

UM News reports that “Another change approved exhorts the Council of Bishops to be inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, age, people with disabilities, sexual orientation and economic condition in naming representatives to ecumenical organizations.” This exhortation makes space for diverse people whose ministries have historically been minimized or silenced to come to the leadership table.

Protections Previously Developed for Traditional United Methodists Mostly Omitted (PNJ title)

UMC Response:

In preparation for the special called session of the General Conference in 2019 and an anticipated General Conference in 2020, church leaders promoted a number of plans. One of those plans was known as the One Church Plan. This plan, promoted by the Commission on a Way Forward, provided protections for traditional United Methodists. The One Church Plan was not adopted, thus, these protections are not in place.

The just completed General Conference made it clear that no clergy can be coerced into conducting same-sex weddings. It also made it clear that churches can choose whether or not same gender weddings are permitted to happen on their premises. Other protections in the One Church Plan were omitted. These protections included:

First, language to affirm those who continue to maintain their Scriptural witness does not condone the practice of homosexuality. We believe that their conscience should be protected in the church and throughout society under basic principles of religious liberty.

Second, language stating that marriage has been “traditionally understood as a union of one man and one woman.”

Third, language stating that same sex weddings would only be allowed in churches that specifically voted to host them.

Fourth, language allowing annual conferences to develop their own policies on human sexuality.

Finally, allowances for bishops to decline to ordain practicing gay clergy (the jurisdiction would have provided another bishop to ordain gay candidates in such instances.

Annual Conferences Required to Prepare Local Churches to Accept Gay Clergy (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMNews: 40-year ban on gay clergy struck down](#)

As noted above regarding diversity on church boards, “Another change approved exhorts the Council of Bishops to be inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, age, people with disabilities, sexual orientation and economic condition in naming representatives to ecumenical organizations.”

Here is the new language in the Book of Discipline: ¶ 425 ff. Appointment-Making Responsibility—1. Clergy shall be appointed by the bishop, who is empowered to make and fix all appointments in the episcopal area of which the annual conference is a part. Appointments are to be made with consideration of the gifts and evidence of God’s grace of those appointed, to the needs, characteristics, and opportunities of congregations and institutions, and with faithfulness to the commitment to an open itineracy. Open itineracy means appointments are made without regard to race, ethnicity origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or age, except for the provisions of mandatory retirement. Annual conferences shall, in their training of staff-parish relations committees, emphasize the open nature of itineracy and prepare congregations to receive the gifts and graces of appointed clergy without regard to race, ethnicity origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, economic condition, sexual orientation, or age.

Per this revision of the Discipline, appointments are still “made with consideration of the gifts and evidence of God’s grace of those appointed, to the needs, characteristics, and opportunities of congregations and institutions.” Bishops and appointive cabinets will not send clergy to churches where they will be met with hostility, nor force clergy upon a church regardless of the church’s community, but will thoughtfully consider appointments and continue to prepare churches accordingly for new clergy. UM News reports that these changes also “Allow gay clergy in good standing to be appointed across annual conference lines when their bishop can’t locate an appointment in their conference.”

The UMC Divests from Israel (PNJ title)

UMC Response: [UMNews: Resolution opposes investment in Israeli bonds](#)

- General Conference delegates approved a resolution calling on United Methodist institutions not to invest in government bonds of Israel, Turkey and Morocco as

they are countries that have been cited by the U.N. Security Council or the International Criminal Court for prolonged military occupations.

- At General Conference, some delegates, bishops and observers staged a protest of Israel's ongoing, comprehensive military operations in Gaza, which were triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.
- The resolution regarding the three nations' bonds was approved on a consent calendar on April 30.
 - At the end of 2023, Wespath, the denomination's pension and benefits agency, had invested about 0.12% of its total assets in the sovereign debt of Israel, Morocco, and Turkey.
 - "Wespath is steadfast in aligning with The United Methodist Church's commitment to human rights and socially responsible investing," said Julie Capozzi, the agency's managing director of communications. "In navigating the complex issue of sovereign debt investment, Wespath is listening deeply to the church, reflecting on words from the Council of Bishops, who have '*pledged our prayers and commitment to work for a durable peace* for Israelis, Palestinians and all in the region'."
 - Capozzi added: "While the approved resolution relating to sovereign debt exclusion is non-binding, Wespath takes the call seriously. Wespath will go through a prayerful discernment process with guidance from their incoming board of directors to determine a course of action."
 - Wespath's Social Value Choice Suite of Funds allows investors to avoid "specific companies named in annual conference resolutions concerning Israel and the Palestinian Territories."
 - General Conference delegates renewed and updated a resolution opposing Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. They also approved a resolution addressing Israeli detention of Palestinian children.
- "All United Methodist institutions shall endeavor to seek investments in institutions, companies, corporations, or funds that promote racial and gender justice, protect human rights, prevent the use of sweatshop or forced labor, avoid human suffering, and preserve the natural world, including mitigating the effects of climate change. In addition, United Methodist institutions shall endeavor to avoid investments in companies engaged in core business activities that are not aligned with the Social Principles through their direct or indirect involvement with the production of anti-personnel weapons and armaments (both nuclear and conventional weapons)" (§717).
- From Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church: "To date, UMCOR has awarded nine emergency grants to local partners in Israel and Gaza and the surrounding region. Partners are using funds for relocation support; food and hygiene kits for internally displaced people; support of students and their

continued learning; psychosocial treatment and trauma counseling to women and children; delivery of medical supplies and medicines; and telemedicine services for disabled children in need of follow-up care, but without safe access to a clinic.”

The General Board of Global Ministries Tasked with Furthering Intersectional Ideology (PNJ title)

UMC Response:

[GCORR: General Conference achieves significant milestones in legislation for Racial Justice, Disability Inclusion, and Overall Equity](#)

[UMC.org Faith and inclusion: United Methodist General Conference opens doors](#)

The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) is proud to announce a successful conclusion to the recent session of General Conference, where all proposed legislation by GCORR has been overwhelmingly approved.

Article V Racial Justice constitutional change underscores the UMC’s dedication to actively confronting and eliminating racism, racial inequity, colonialism, white privilege, and white supremacy both within the Church and in society at large. This piece of legislation will be presented at all annual conferences for a ratification vote to change the constitution. GCORR will begin to educate and provide the narrative to help conferences understand the importance for the change.

The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) was given the new responsibility to “Provide training, resources, and consultation for and with all levels of the global church to actively resist intersecting structures of white supremacy, heterosexism, sexism, patriarchy, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, colonialism and classism.”

Constitutional Amendments Allowing Regionalization Were Approved (PNJ title)

UMC Reponse: [UMNews: Disaffiliation ends, regionalization moves forward](#)

General Conference delegates passed Worldwide Regionalization petitions that aim to put the different geographic regions of the denomination on equal footing.

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.

At present, only central conferences have the authority under the denomination's constitution to adapt the Discipline as missional needs and different legal contexts require.

Much of regionalization — including enabling the creation of a U.S. regional conference, which General Conference passed April 30 — is contingent upon the ratification of a constitutional amendment. Ratification requires a total of at least two-thirds of annual conference voters support the amendment.

General Conference already passed that amendment with 78% of the vote on April 25. Now, it will be up to annual conference voters whether the regionalization plan comes to fruition.

Why the Shift in Church Teaching was So Dramatic (PNJ title)

UMC Response:

The language that has been a part of the Book of Discipline, was placed there at a General Conference in 1972. Since that time, every four years, the General Conference has had deep discussions about it. This all came to a crux in 2016, when, at the General Conference, delegates asked the Bishops to lead us concerning this issue. A special session of the General Conference did so in 2019 and the traditional stances were kept. Since then, churches (mostly traditional) have used the disaffiliation option to leave the denomination. The traditional voices that had been at the General Conference were not there and changing positions and policies, while dramatic, was easier to do. So the Church teaching was dramatic, because not all voices were represented any longer. The question is, "Is there a place for traditional minded followers of Jesus in the United Methodist Church?" I believe that there is, if there is a focus on the local church more than on the larger denomination.

No Exit Pathways Were Approved (PNJ title)

UMC Response: UMNews: Disaffiliation ends, regionalization moves forward

The United Methodist Church's focus on disaffiliation has come to an end and a new push for regionalization is just beginning.

By a vote of 516 to 203, General Conference delegates supported the end of a disaffiliation policy added by the special 2019 General Conference and used by about a quarter of U.S. churches to leave The United Methodist Church. Under the disaffiliation policy, more than 7,600 U.S. churches left before it expired at the end of 2023.

“The season of disaffiliation ends today,” said Lonnie Chafin, a delegate from the Northern Illinois Conference and chair of the Conferences legislative committee. The committee supported and brought to the floor the petition that deletes Paragraph 2553 from the Book of Discipline. The paragraph only ever appeared in a digital addendum to the Discipline.

“Passing this petition will mean Paragraph 2553 will never appear in a printed edition of the Book of Discipline,” he told his fellow delegates, “and will send a message to our congregations that it’s time to speak of how we come together and share the love of God.”

During the same afternoon session, delegates approved by a vote of 629 to 96 a reaffiliation policy to welcome churches that wish to rejoin The United Methodist Church.

The following are questions posed by church members of FUMC:

What does our church have to do now to accommodate the decisions made at the General Conference?

The recent decisions of the General Conference do not require action from anyone. However, the decisions do leave space for change to occur if that is the desire of your congregation.

What stance is our church taking?

Our stance involves whether or not our clergy are willing to perform same-gender weddings. The General Conference allows for it, but it also allows pastors not to perform such ceremonies. It is the individual choice of the pastors appointed to our church.

Does our church now have to host same-sex weddings?

The General Conference legislation explicitly protects the right of clergy and churches not to officiate at or host same-sex weddings. 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.”

We know that different people have different opinions on these matters and our churches are in different contexts within the bounds of the Arkansas Conference.

In terms of whether ceremonies will be allowed on our campus, the church, through its wedding policy can decide whether or not that will be allowed. Our wedding policy already states that in order to marry in our sanctuary or chapel, you have to be a member of the church. If we decide to not allow same-gender weddings in our facilities, the policy will be considered by the Trustees. A recommendation will be made and passed along to the Church Council. This policy would be binding unless the Trustees revisited the policy at a time in the future. The same process would follow, a recommendation, passed on to the Church Council.

Are we mandated to have diversified representation on our boards and committees?

No. We are not mandated to have diversified representation on our boards and committees. The Nominations Committee (the only committee chaired by the pastor) takes our work seriously in putting the best leaders in the best places. We do try to have a mixture of leaders in terms of gender (women and men) and age ranges (younger adults, where allowed, middle aged adults, and older adults. Nothing is mandated.

Why didn't our church vote in the Fall to see where our members were on these issues and before the sundown cause was closed?

In order for Disaffiliation to be considered, the process would have had to begin with a recommendation from the Church Council to pursue it. The process would have included three congregational meetings, a period of 90 days minimum time, and a church-wide vote. In order for disaffiliation to be considered, there would have had to be a super majority in favor of it, 66.7%. It was not believed by the previous pastor nor the current pastor that there would be enough votes for disaffiliation to happen. Disaffiliation votes are difficult in churches, splitting them and causing dissension. Because of this and the fact that it was not believed that there would be enough votes for it to pass, the process was never seriously considered.

Is there any pathway to keep our church membership intact, keep our building and split from UMC if that is what the majority wants?

The General Conference did not extend a disaffiliation process. There is no longer an avenue available for churches to leave the denomination. ¶2553 (previous legislation for disaffiliations, is no longer an option).

- Delegates removed ¶2553 from the Book of Discipline, ending the disaffiliation policy that the special 2019 General Conference added.

- A proposal to renew the disaffiliation process for churches that existed from 2019-2023 under ¶2553 was made. This proposal was defeated 62-12 in committee and 519-212 in plenary.
- Disaffiliation Policy Ended, Reaffiliation Measure Approved
 - General Conference also required annual conferences affected by disaffiliation to develop grace-filled policies for the reaffiliation of churches that want to rejoin the denomination.