



# *History of* **DATA COLLECTION** *within the United Methodist Church*

There is a structured approach to data collection within The United Methodist Church (UMC), which is crucial for maintaining accurate records and making informed decisions. The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) is tasked with maintaining the authoritative database of this information, as directed in ¶807.15 of The Book of Discipline. This document highlights the history and current methods of data collection within the UMC, specifically for public and media education.



**FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION**

General Council on Finance and Administration

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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# History of Professing Member Data Collection

## *Pre-2016 Data Collection Methods*

Before the 2016 General Conference, Annual Conferences submitted data through various means both formal and informal, including official Journals, statistics forms, emails, presentations, and screenshots.

## *2016 General Conference Decision*

At the 2016 General Conference, it was decided that statistical numbers must be sourced from an Annual Conference's Journal. If no journal is provided, the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) uses the latest available journal. In some cases, journals have not been submitted since the 2016 ruling, and the numbers reflect the most recent data sent to GCFA, including from informal means.

## *Post-2016 Data Collection Process*

Journals are due 60-90 days after Annual Conferences are held. Every year, Annual Conference secretaries send their Business of the Annual Conference (BAC), Appointment booklet, and their Journal to GCFA.

## Annual Conference Submissions

### *Business of the Annual Conference (BAC)*

The current (March, 2024) BAC includes a list of 75 multi-faceted questions divided into six sections:

1. Organization and General Business
  - Lists appointed or elected leaders
  - Church information (e.g., new church starts, satellite, merged, closed)
  - Changes in district/charge lines
2. Pertaining to Ordained and Licensed Clergy
  - Information on clergy (e.g., certified candidates, discontinued, reinstated, deacons, retired, deceased, leave of absence)
3. Certification in Specialized Ministry
  - Credentials of persons in Part III
4. Assigned Lay Members
  - List of lay members serving
5. Diaconal Ministers
  - Information regarding Diaconal Ministers
6. Appointments and Concluding Business
  - Appointment information regarding clergy

### *Appointment Booklet*

This is a document listing all the churches within an Annual Conference and the associated clergy, along with their clergy status.

### *Journal Components*

The Annual Conference Journal is comprised of the minutes taken during the annual conference's yearly meeting. According to ¶ 606.3:

“The annual conference may form a committee on journal publication. The annual conference journal shall include the following divisions, in the following order:

- a) Officers of the annual conference,
- b) Boards, commissions, committees; rolls of conference members,
- c) Daily proceedings,
- d) Business of the annual conference report (formerly known as the disciplinary questions),
- e) Appointments,
- f) Reports as ordered by the annual conference,
- g) Annual report of the district superintendents (if any),
- h) Memoirs as ordered by the annual conference,
- i) Roll of deceased clergy members,
- j) Historical records,
- k) Miscellaneous,
- l) Pastoral record (including records of accepted local pastors),
- m) Statistics,
- n) Index”

## **Training**

The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) has actively provided training opportunities to conferences on how to report data and statistics. This section outlines the efforts made by GCFA to ensure accurate and timely data reporting by the conferences.

### *Training Opportunities*

Beginning in 2018 GCFA has provided training events to our Central Conferences. Some examples include two extended cabinet meetings in the Philippines (Manila, January 2018) and Africa (Accra, Ghana in February 2018), four connectional giving events in Africa CC, Congo CC, West Africa CC and the Philippines CC, and multiple virtual informational trainings highlighting the data required and why. The resource materials were provided in English, French, and Portuguese.

Jurisdictionally, GCFA holds training sessions throughout the year covering the BAC document and the statistical application. GCFA also hosts a weekly Q&A session for Annual Conferences to attend when they have questions regarding these or just data in general. We continue to reiterate that this data must be in the journal to be counted as official information.

### *Communication Methods*

GCFA communicates deadlines, data requests, and educates Annual and Central Conferences on processes through various methods, including emails, newsletters, webinars, and virtual meetings. GCFA works diligently to obtain journal information.

## **Statistical Reporting**

### *Central Conference Breakdown of Journals Received*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Count of Latest Journal</b>
2014	1
2016	9
2017	23
2018	5
2019	2
2020	8
2021	12
2022	10
2023	5
Minutes only	1
(blank)	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>79</b>

## *Jurisdictional Conference Breakdown of Journals Received*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Count of Latest Journal</b>
2021	4
2022	11
2023	34
2020* 2021 Journal is on their website but is password protected	1
2020* 2022 Does not have Vol 2 which includes Statistics	1
2021* in 2022 Journal they said it will be added with a later addendum	1
2022* for stats lines	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>53</b>

### **Summary**

Collecting accurate data from all Annual Conferences within The United Methodist Church is a challenging task. Conferences are often busy with their numerous responsibilities, and gathering detailed information can sometimes be a lower priority amid other pressing tasks. Despite these challenges, the data collected is of utmost importance for the denomination.

Accurate and timely data reporting ensures that the General Conference can make informed decisions, allocate resources effectively, and maintain transparency within the church. This information helps the denomination understand trends, address areas of need, and support the mission and ministry of the church at all levels.

The data not only reflects the health and growth of individual conferences but also contributes to the overall accountability and strategic planning within The United Methodist Church. It is essential for planning future initiatives, assessing the effectiveness of current programs, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources.

Recognizing the importance of this data, GCFA has implemented various training programs, developed language resources, and established communication methods to support conferences in their reporting efforts. While the process can be demanding, the resulting benefits for the denomination make it a crucial endeavor. It is a collective effort that ultimately strengthens the ability to fulfill The United Methodist Church's mission.