

# CHURCH STRUCTURE

<b>THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>GENERAL CONFERENCE</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCES</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>CENTRAL CONFERENCES</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>ANNUAL CONFERENCES</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1. Powers and Duties. ....	9
2. Board of Trustees. ....	11
3. Districts. ....	11
<b>BISHOPS</b> .....	<b>13</b>
1. Election, Assignment, and Termination.....	13
2. Powers and Duties.....	13
3. The Council of Bishops. ....	14
4. Review and Evaluation of Bishops. ....	15
<b>DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS</b> .....	<b>17</b>
1. Selection, Assignment, and Term. ....	17
2. Powers and Duties.....	17
<b>GENERAL AGENCIES</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL</b> .....	<b>19</b>
1. Investigations, Trials, and Appeals. ....	19

# THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The formal structure of the United Methodist religious denomination is embodied in its Constitution, which outlines a basic federal system of government. Following the Preamble, which defines the theological thrust of the Church, is the body of the Constitution. There are five separate divisions in the Constitution. “Division Two-Organization”<sup>1</sup> is the primary concern of this section.

The organization of the denomination is patterned much like the United States government. It consists of an alliance of several sovereign entities into a union. The entities retain sovereignty with respect to the administration of purely local concerns, while an overriding legislative body deals with affairs of more general concern to the entire denomination. A unique system of checks and balances has been achieved via the establishment of executive and judicial organizations. The General Conference acts as the legislature, the Council of Bishops and the general agencies act as the executive branch, and the Judicial Council acts as the judiciary.

The United Methodist Church is a connectional structure maintained through its chain of conferences. The organization outlined in the Constitution specifically details the “conference” system of government. The conference arrangement (*i.e.*, General Conference, jurisdictional conferences and central conferences, annual conferences, district conferences, charge conferences, and church conferences) has provided the denomination with a representative democratic framework within which the mandates contained in the *Discipline* and the Constitution are administered.

The United Methodist Church, as a denominational whole, does not have legal capacities and attributes.<sup>2</sup> This concept can be misunderstood, misinterpreted, or misused in the secular legal world. The *Discipline* states:

Affirming the spiritual dimensions of the ministry of all Christians, as proclaimed in ¶¶ 120-143 of this *Book of Discipline*, it is recognized that this ministry exists in the secular world and that civil authorities may seek legal definition predicated on the nature of The United Methodist Church in seeking fulfillment of this ministry. Accordingly, it is appropriate that the meaning of “The United Methodist Church,” “the general Church,” “the entire Church,” and “the Church” as used in the *Book of Discipline* should now be stated consistently with the traditional self-understanding of United Methodists as to the meaning of these words.

These terms refer to the overall denomination and connectional relation and identity of its many local churches, the various conferences and their respective councils, boards, and agencies, and other Church units, which collectively

---

<sup>1</sup> ¶¶ 8-44.

<sup>2</sup> ¶ 141.

constitute the religious system known as United Methodism. Under the Constitution and disciplinary procedures set forth in this *Book of Discipline*, “The United Methodist Church” as a denominational whole is not an entity, nor does it possess legal capacities and attributes. It does not and cannot hold title to property, nor does it have any officer, agent, employee, office, or location. Conferences, councils, boards, agencies, local churches, and other units bearing the name “United Methodist” are, for the most part, legal entities capable of suing and being sued and possessed of legal capacities.<sup>3</sup>

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

# GENERAL CONFERENCE

Despite the limitations of the Restrictive Rules and the specific grants of authority to other church bodies in the Constitution, the General Conference<sup>4</sup> is the singularly most powerful and representative body in The United Methodist Church. As the central legislative body of the Church, it is “composed of not less than 600 nor more than 1,000 delegates, one half of whom shall be clergy and one half lay members, to be elected by the annual conferences.”<sup>5</sup> The General Conference is given “full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional.”<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 16 of the *Discipline* enumerates its specific powers.

General Conference has been reserved the exclusive right to speak officially for the entire denomination:<sup>7</sup>

Any individual member called to testify before a legislative body to represent The United Methodist Church shall be allowed to do so only by reading, without elaboration, the resolutions and positions adopted by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church.<sup>8</sup>

Members of the General Conference are elected through the process listed in paragraph 13 of the *Discipline*. The bishops preside over, but are not members of, the General Conference.<sup>9</sup> Each annual conference, missionary conference or provisional annual conference is entitled to at least one clergy and one lay delegate. The ratio of representation<sup>10</sup> is computed by using two factors: (1) the number of clergy members and (2) the number of church members of the annual or missionary conference.<sup>11</sup>

The most significant constitutional limitations placed on the General Conference are the Restrictive Rules. These Rules bar such things as General Conference action that would revoke, alter, or change the Articles of Religion, the Confession of Faith, or the governmental system embodied in the itinerant general superintendency (episcopacy). The Rules also prevent the General Conference from removing the right to trial and appeal.

The General Conference may recommend amendments to the Constitution upon a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.<sup>12</sup> The amendment is not effective unless it is

---

<sup>4</sup> The General Conference is discussed at length in the *Discipline* at ¶¶ 13-16, 501-511.

<sup>5</sup> ¶ 13.1.

<sup>6</sup> ¶ 16.

<sup>7</sup> ¶ 509.1.

<sup>8</sup> ¶ 509.2, ¶ 511.1d

<sup>9</sup> ¶ 503,

<sup>10</sup> ¶ 15.

<sup>11</sup> ¶ 502.2.

<sup>12</sup> ¶ 59.

ratified by two-thirds of the members of the annual conferences present and voting.<sup>13</sup> Amendments to the first and second Restrictive Rules require ratification by a three-fourths majority of the members of the annual conferences present and voting.<sup>14</sup> Proposed amendments may originate in either the General Conference or the annual conferences.<sup>15</sup> Changes to the Constitution may also be proposed by a majority vote of a jurisdictional conference for consideration at the next General Conference.<sup>16</sup>

The legislative acts of the General Conference are subject to interpretation, by the Judicial Council, as to their constitutionality.<sup>17</sup> The general agencies, the Council of Bishops, and other administrative units execute the General Conference legislation on both domestic and international levels.

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> ¶ 60.

<sup>16</sup> ¶ 61.

<sup>17</sup> ¶ 56.1.

# JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCES

Jurisdictional conferences were created in 1939 when The Methodist Church connection was formed by the unification of three branches of Methodism: The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and The Methodist Protestant Church.<sup>18</sup> The Constitution provides for the existence of these conferences in the United States.<sup>19</sup> The five jurisdictional conferences – North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern, and Western – are structured geographically.

Paragraphs 512-39 of the *Discipline* enumerate specific organizational and administrative details concerning jurisdictional conferences and jurisdictional agencies. Jurisdictional conferences: elect bishops, members of general agencies, and members of jurisdictional committees and agencies that the jurisdiction has established as auxiliary to the general agencies of the denomination; determine the boundaries of their annual conferences; make rules and regulations for the work of the Church within the jurisdiction; and appoint a committee on appeals to hear and determine the appeal of a traveling preacher of that jurisdiction from the decision of a trial committee<sup>20</sup>.

The *Discipline* provides very little guidance on the funding of these jurisdictional conferences.

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>18</sup> *Book of Discipline* pg 15.

<sup>19</sup> ¶ 9, see also ¶¶ 23-27.

<sup>20</sup> ¶ 27.6.

# CENTRAL CONFERENCES

Central conferences are located outside the United States and are analogous to jurisdictional conferences. Central conferences (and provisional central conferences) are established by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference and consist of annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, missionary conferences, mission conferences, and missions in territories outside of the United States.<sup>21</sup> Paragraphs 540-48 enumerate the organization and powers of the central conferences. Central conferences, via an enabling act of the General Conference, can be authorized to elect bishops.<sup>22</sup> Central conferences operate in a less structured environment than jurisdictional conferences, owing to the special needs of the Church in countries and cultures outside the United States.<sup>23</sup>

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>21</sup> ¶ 540.1.

<sup>22</sup> ¶ 543.2

<sup>23</sup> *See* ¶ 543.7.

# ANNUAL CONFERENCES

The annual conference is “the fundamental bod[y] of the Church”<sup>24</sup> and is central to its connectional organization. An annual conference bears administrative responsibilities for the work of the denomination in a specific geographic area. The relationship of the annual conferences to the General Conference is roughly analogous to the relationship of individual states to the United States, with each annual conference being a sovereign entity within the larger General Conference. The key powers which annual conferences possess include:

1. The right to vote on all Constitutional amendments.
2. The right to elect clergy and lay delegates to the General and jurisdictional or central conferences.
3. The right (reserved to certain clergy members of the annual conference and lay members of the conference board of ordained ministry) to vote on all matters relating to ordination, character and conference relations of clergy.
4. The power to exercise all of the rights that have not been delegated to the General Conference under the Constitution.<sup>25</sup>

Paragraph 32 of the *Discipline* outlines the membership of the annual conferences.

Voting rights within an annual conference are determined according to the status of the conference member. Clergy members in full connection have the right to vote on all matters in the annual conference, except the election of lay delegates to the General Conference and jurisdictional conference, and are given full responsibility for all matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.<sup>26</sup> Other clergy members have more limited voting rights.<sup>27</sup> Lay members have the right to vote on all matters except those related to ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy or election of clergy delegates to General or jurisdictional conferences, except that lay members of the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Committee on Investigation have the right to vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.<sup>28</sup>

The bishop oversees the management of annual conference business and makes the annual appointments of ministerial members of the conference, in accordance with the *Discipline*.<sup>29</sup> The bishop decides all questions of law, which must be presented in writing during the regular business

---

<sup>24</sup> ¶ 11.

<sup>25</sup> ¶ 33.

<sup>26</sup> ¶602.1a.

<sup>27</sup> See ¶ 602.1b-d.

<sup>28</sup> ¶¶ 33, 35, 602.6.

<sup>29</sup> ¶ 415.2, .4-.7., 416.1

sessions of an annual, jurisdictional, or central conference.<sup>30</sup> The decisions must be recorded in the journal of the conference, reported in writing annually to the Judicial Council, and will not be authoritative until affirmed by the Judicial Council.<sup>31</sup>

### **1. Powers and Duties.**

Paragraph 604 spells out the powers and duties of the annual conference. The annual conference is permitted to adopt internal rules and regulations for operation, provided that these rules are not in conflict with the *Discipline*. Annual conferences control who may be admitted into clergy membership and have the power to inquire into a member's moral and official conduct and to take appropriate disciplinary and administrative action. However, annual conferences cannot financially obligate any other organizational unit of the Church.<sup>32</sup>

Annual conferences also have certain powers and duties relating to local churches, including: to inquire into the financial status of local churches; to require explanations, from the pastor and annual conference lay member, of local church deficits; and to provide counsel to local churches to assist in resolving deficits. Annual conferences monitor the membership status of local churches and give appropriate recognition to any newly organized churches.<sup>33</sup>

In relation to participation in economic boycotts, annual conferences are required to follow the boycott guidelines in *The Book of Resolutions*. They are expressly forbidden to initiate, empower, or join boycotts in the name of The United Methodist Church, as that power is reserved exclusively to the General Conference.<sup>34</sup>

The administrative functions of an annual conference may be carried out through several agencies. The annual conference must structure these agencies and ministries, and any related administrative procedures, in a way that furthers the purpose of annual conferences, as described in ¶ 601.<sup>35</sup> Specifically:

Annual conferences are permitted the flexibility to design conference and district structures in ways that best support the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ in an increasingly diverse global community and that place secondary any prescribed structure, except for the mandated entities in ¶ 610 above. In so doing, an annual conference shall provide for the functions and General Conference connections with all general agencies provided by the *Discipline* as follows: *a)* There shall be clear connections between the General Conference agencies, annual conference program and administrative entities, and the local congregation. These connections shall be identified in the business questions of the annual conference each year. *b)* There shall be clear checks and balances regarding program functions

---

<sup>30</sup> ¶ 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> ¶ 604.2.

<sup>33</sup> ¶ 604.8 - .10.

<sup>34</sup> ¶ 604.12

<sup>35</sup> ¶ 610.

and financial/administration functions within the annual conference. These structural matters will be defined and approved by the annual conference session. Further, conferences are permitted to create contextually appropriate structures that encourage collaboration and partnerships among all program, administrative, and financial entities. Annual conferences may fund their ministries in ways that reflect conference priorities and structures, as approved by the annual conference in the budgeting process. All disciplinary references to “equivalent structures” shall be defined by this paragraph.<sup>36</sup>

Annual conferences may create additional boards, commissions, committees and other organizations collectively referred to as “conference agencies.”<sup>37</sup> Some of these conference agencies are required. Annual conferences are required to have a conference council on finance and administration.<sup>38</sup> This council shall “develop, maintain, and administer a comprehensive and coordinated plan of fiscal and administrative policies, procedures, and management services for the annual conference.”<sup>39</sup> Additional required agencies (or their equivalents) are: boards of church and society,<sup>40</sup> discipleship,<sup>41</sup> laity,<sup>42</sup> higher education and campus ministry,<sup>43</sup> global ministries,<sup>44</sup> Ordained Ministry,<sup>45</sup> pensions,<sup>46</sup> trustees;<sup>47</sup> committees on Ethnic Local Church Concerns,<sup>48</sup> administrative review,<sup>49</sup> episcopacy,<sup>50</sup> episcopal residence,<sup>51</sup> Native American ministry,<sup>52</sup> and disability concerns;<sup>53</sup> commissions on archives and history,<sup>54</sup> religion and race,<sup>55</sup> the status and role of women,<sup>56</sup> the small membership church,<sup>57</sup> and communications;<sup>58</sup> councils on youth<sup>59</sup> and young-adult<sup>60</sup> ministries; organizations named United Methodist Women<sup>61</sup> and United Methodist

---

<sup>36</sup> ¶ 610.1.

<sup>37</sup> See ¶ 610.

<sup>38</sup> ¶ 611.

<sup>39</sup> ¶ 612.1.

<sup>40</sup> ¶ 629.

<sup>41</sup> ¶ 630.

<sup>42</sup> ¶ 631.

<sup>43</sup> ¶ 634.

<sup>44</sup> ¶ 633.

<sup>45</sup> ¶ 635.

<sup>46</sup> ¶ 639.

<sup>47</sup> ¶ 640, *see also* ¶ 2512.

<sup>48</sup> ¶ 632.

<sup>49</sup> ¶ 636.

<sup>50</sup> ¶ 637.

<sup>51</sup> ¶ 638.

<sup>52</sup> ¶ 654.

<sup>53</sup> ¶ 653.

<sup>54</sup> ¶ 641.

<sup>55</sup> ¶ 643.

<sup>56</sup> ¶ 644.

<sup>57</sup> ¶ 645.

<sup>58</sup> ¶ 646.

<sup>59</sup> ¶ 649.

<sup>60</sup> ¶ 650.

<sup>61</sup> ¶ 647.

Men;<sup>62</sup> and appropriate structures related to Christian unity and interreligious relationships.<sup>63</sup> The annual conference shall also manage clergy medical leave, which may be done through a joint committee on clergy medical leave.<sup>64</sup>

The Constitution provides that the General Conference has the authority “to allow the annual conferences to utilize structures unique to their mission, other mandated structures notwithstanding.”<sup>65</sup> Since its ratification, this language has been the subject of numerous Judicial Council decisions.<sup>66</sup> Many annual conferences have seen their restructuring plans declared unconstitutional. Although the amendment resulted in much of the “or other (equivalent) structure” language that is found in ¶¶ 629-54, annual conferences seeking to restructure must be careful to adhere to all of the requirements of the *Discipline*.

## **2. Board of Trustees.**

All annual conferences are required by the *Discipline* to establish a conference board of trustees.<sup>67</sup> The board shall be incorporated, unless the conference itself is incorporated in its own name.<sup>68</sup> Paragraph 2512.1 of the *Discipline* specifies the number of trustees required, the schedule upon which they are to serve, and the minimum qualifications that they must meet in order to be eligible for service. The board is required to meet at least annually and to elect the offices of president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.<sup>69</sup>

The board has the authority to: receive, collect, and hold in trust for the benefit of the annual conference all donations, bequests, and devises; receive and hold property for the mission, ministry, and program of the annual conference; invest funds and transfer properties it holds in trust, subject to any restrictions; and execute legal documents or other written instruments.<sup>70</sup>

It is important to recognize that the annual conference board of trustees is subject to direction by annual conference action. Policy decisions regarding the use of undesignated donations, bequests, and devises are within the authority of the annual conference. The board of trustees would then act as directed by the annual conference in these matters.

## **3. Districts.**

Paragraph 658 of the *Discipline* provides for a district conference to be held, if so directed by the annual conference. The annual conference specifies how membership in the district conference will be determined.<sup>71</sup> The annual conference prescribes the function and role of the

---

<sup>62</sup> ¶ 648.

<sup>63</sup> ¶ 642.

<sup>64</sup> ¶ 652.

<sup>65</sup> ¶ 16.15.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. *Decisions* 815, 827, 831, 835, 848, 893, 900, and 904.

<sup>67</sup> ¶¶ 640, 2512.1.

<sup>68</sup> ¶ 2512.1.

<sup>69</sup> ¶ 2512.1-2.

<sup>70</sup> ¶ 2512.3.

<sup>71</sup> ¶ 659.1.

district conference and its various councils and committees. The district conference may be used to review progress on the programs and purposes of the annual conference within the local churches of the district. The organization and functions of the district conferences are outlined in ¶¶ 658-72.

Districts are permitted to form a number of separate committees that are similar in character to those at the annual conference level. Districts are required to have committees on ordained ministry<sup>72</sup> and district superintendency<sup>73</sup> and organizations named United Methodist Men<sup>74</sup> and United Methodist Women.<sup>75</sup>

The district superintendent calls and presides over the district conference and has several roles to play within the district. The district superintendent has authority, after consultation with the conference board, to appoint district directors of various committees and commissions. The district superintendent also serves on the district committee on ordained ministry.<sup>76</sup> Superintendents also are members of the district committee on lay servant ministries, if one exists.<sup>77</sup>

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>72</sup> ¶ 666.

<sup>73</sup> ¶ 669.

<sup>74</sup> ¶ 671.

<sup>75</sup> ¶ 670.

<sup>76</sup> ¶ 666.1.

<sup>77</sup> ¶ 668.2.

# BISHOPS

Division Three of the Constitution (§§ 45-54) establishes the basic framework of episcopal supervision within the denomination. Paragraphs 401-418 and 421-430 discuss in greater detail the array of powers and obligations that are conferred upon bishops of The United Methodist Church connection.

## **1. Election, Assignment, and Termination.**

Bishops are elected by jurisdictional and central conferences.<sup>78</sup> Annual conferences may nominate individuals to be included on the jurisdictional/central conference episcopal ballots.<sup>79</sup> The number of bishops elected in each jurisdictional conference is determined by a specific formula, while central conference elections are based on missional needs, as approved by the General Conference.<sup>80</sup> The procedural requirements for elections are set forth in ¶ 405. Consecration “may take place at the session of the conference at which election occurs or at a place and time designated by the conference.”<sup>81</sup> Bishops are assigned by the process delineated in ¶ 406.

The mandatory retirement age for bishops is 68, although those bishops remain eligible for various special assignments.<sup>82</sup> Bishops may also resign, seek voluntary retirement, or be involuntarily retired.<sup>83</sup> While bishops generally serve until their retirement, and continue to be members of the Council of Bishops even after retirement,<sup>84</sup> bishops of some central conferences are elected to a finite term. At the expiration of that term, the individual ceases to be a bishop of the Church and must turn in his or her credentials of the office of bishop. The individual will then return to membership as an elder in their previous annual conference.<sup>85</sup> Procedures to be followed by a bishop seeking to take a leave of absence are found in ¶ 410.

## **2. Powers and Duties.**

Bishops are elected to serve the entire Church as general superintendents.<sup>86</sup> The nature of this superintendency is explained in ¶ 401. Bishops also have numerous specific responsibilities. Bishops make all clergy appointments in the episcopal area of which the annual conference is a part.<sup>87</sup> They also appoint deacons in full connection.<sup>88</sup> Bishops must “lead and oversee the spiritual

---

<sup>78</sup> ¶ 405.1.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *See* ¶ 404.

<sup>81</sup> ¶ 405.2c.

<sup>82</sup> ¶ 408.1.

<sup>83</sup> §§ 408.2-4.

<sup>84</sup> *See* ¶ 409.

<sup>85</sup> ¶ 411.

<sup>86</sup> ¶ 403.

<sup>87</sup> ¶ 425.

<sup>88</sup> ¶ 430.

and temporal affairs” of the Church.<sup>89</sup> They have presidential duties in relation to the general, jurisdictional, central and annual conferences.<sup>90</sup> Bishops are also charged to work with, supervise, and guide other personnel within the Church body.<sup>91</sup> This last responsibility includes the duty to maintain supervisory records on district superintendents. The *Discipline* requires GCFA to create guidelines for the maintenance of these supervisory records. These guidelines are contained on GCFA’s website.

Bishops are also constitutionally empowered to decide all questions of law arising out of the regular business of the annual, jurisdictional, and central conferences.<sup>92</sup> Such questions of law must be presented in writing and any decision by the bishop must be recorded in the conference journal.<sup>93</sup> All decisions must be reported annually to the Judicial Council, which either affirms, modifies, or reverses them.<sup>94</sup> The Judicial Council has provided guidelines for bishops to follow when deciding issues of law. These guidelines can be found [here](#).

### **3. The Council of Bishops.**

The Council of Bishops is a constitutionally created body that must meet at least once every year in order to oversee and promote the interests of the Church.<sup>95</sup> It is made up of all of the bishops of the Church.<sup>96</sup> Although ¶ 422 discusses the role of the Council of Bishops, it has various roles and responsibilities scattered throughout the *Discipline*. The Council:

1. May call a special session of the General Conference,<sup>97</sup>
2. Shall set the time for the meeting of the jurisdictional conferences,<sup>98</sup>
3. May assign a bishop to serve in a jurisdiction other than the one which elected the bishop,<sup>99</sup>
4. May request the Judicial Council to determine the constitutionality of any act of the General Conference or of any action of any General, jurisdictional or central conference board or body,<sup>100</sup>
5. Canvasses the votes of the members of the annual conferences as to ratification of constitutional amendments and announces that an amendment has been passed,<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> ¶ 414.

<sup>90</sup> ¶ 415.

<sup>91</sup> ¶ 416.

<sup>92</sup> ¶ 51.

<sup>93</sup> *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*

<sup>95</sup> ¶ 47.

<sup>96</sup> *Id.*

<sup>97</sup> ¶ 14.

<sup>98</sup> ¶ 26.

<sup>99</sup> ¶ 49.

<sup>100</sup> ¶¶ 56.1, .4.

<sup>101</sup> ¶ 59.

6. Provides input regarding the purpose of churchwide offerings and other Special Sundays,<sup>102</sup>
7. May specially assign a bishop to a churchwide responsibility, assuming there is approval from the bishop and the conference committee on episcopacy,<sup>103</sup>
8. Fills vacancies in the office of bishop,<sup>104</sup>
9. Handles matters relating to the resignation of bishops,<sup>105</sup>
10. Approves bishops' leaves of absence and sabbaticals (and selects the temporary replacements for those bishops),<sup>106</sup>
11. May assign a bishop to visit another episcopal area or Methodist-related church,<sup>107</sup>
12. May call a meeting of the Conference of Methodist Bishops,<sup>108</sup>
13. Monitors the process of consultation in appointment-making,<sup>109</sup>
14. Nominates or elects candidates for service to numerous boards, agencies, and commissions,<sup>110</sup>
15. May assign a bishop to visit a central or provisional central conference or mission fields not included in such conferences,<sup>111</sup>
16. Handles relationships with other ecclesial bodies,<sup>112</sup> and
17. Reviews membership applications of churches located outside the bounds of an existing annual, central or provisional conference.<sup>113</sup>

This is merely a sampling of the areas where the Council of Bishops has authority. There are numerous other areas and situations where another body may make the ultimate decision, but only “after consultation with the Council of Bishops.”<sup>114</sup>

#### **4. Review and Evaluation of Bishops.**

Active bishops are to be evaluated, at least once every quadrennium, by the conference committee on episcopacy.<sup>115</sup> The committee may also make recommendations as to the episcopal character and administration of bishops.<sup>116</sup> Bishops may be the subject of complaints submitted to

---

<sup>102</sup> ¶¶ 263, 264.

<sup>103</sup> ¶ 406.3.

<sup>104</sup> ¶ 407.

<sup>105</sup> ¶ 408.4.

<sup>106</sup> ¶ 410.1.

<sup>107</sup> ¶ 422.4.

<sup>108</sup> ¶ 423.

<sup>109</sup> ¶ 426.2.

<sup>110</sup> See e.g., ¶¶ 504, 511, 705.4c-d, 805.1a, 906.1b, 1006.1, 1105.1, 1311.6, 1407.2, 1414.2, 1502.1a, 1602.1, 1704.2, 1807.1, 2003, 2104.1, 2303.1.

<sup>111</sup> ¶¶ 542.3, 567.

<sup>112</sup> See e.g., ¶¶ 571.4, 573, 574.1a.

<sup>113</sup> ¶ 575.2.

<sup>114</sup> See e.g., ¶¶ 263, 408.1d, 504.3, 814.5d

<sup>115</sup> ¶ 412.

<sup>116</sup> ¶ 524.3a.

the College of Bishops.<sup>117</sup> The procedures to be followed in resolving complaints are enumerated in ¶¶ 413 and 2704.1.

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>117</sup> ¶ 413.2.

# DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

As an appointee of the episcopacy, the district superintendent's task is to minister to the needs of the pastors and churches in the district, while supervising and administering the directives and programs of the General Conference and of the annual conference. District superintendents are “elders in full connection appointed by the bishop to the cabinet as an extension of the superintending role of the bishop within the annual conference.”<sup>118</sup>

## **1. Selection, Assignment, and Term.**

District superintendents are appointed by the bishop, after consultation with the cabinet and the committee on district superintendency.<sup>119</sup> The appointment of a district superintendent is for a term, not for life. The normal term for a district superintendent is up to six year, but a bishop may appoint the district superintendent for up to an additional two years at the bishop’s discretion.<sup>120</sup> A district superintendent may not serve for more than eight years over an eleven year span and may not serve for more than fourteen years, total.<sup>121</sup> Paragraph 420 provides district superintendents with the ability to take “renewal and study leave.”

## **2. Powers and Duties.**

The specific responsibilities of district superintendents are primarily set forth by ¶¶ 419-24. The district superintendent travels throughout the district to supervise both the temporal and spiritual affairs of the Church.<sup>122</sup> The district superintendent also is charged with the responsibility of being a “pastor’s pastor” through the giving of spiritual support to all clergy in the district.<sup>123</sup>

District superintendents have responsibilities relating to supervision, personnel, administration, and programs. Part of the district superintendent’s administrative responsibilities is maintaining appropriate records on all ministerial personnel.<sup>124</sup> Guidelines regarding these records are found on GCFA’s website.

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>118</sup> ¶ 403.2

<sup>119</sup> ¶ 417.

<sup>120</sup> ¶ 418.

<sup>121</sup> *Id.*

<sup>122</sup> *See* ¶ 419.

<sup>123</sup> ¶ 419.6.

<sup>124</sup> ¶ 419.8.

# GENERAL AGENCIES

In order to alleviate confusion over the terms “agency” and “general agency” as they are used within United Methodist polity, the 1984 General Conference acted to define these terms in the *Discipline*.<sup>125</sup> Essentially, “agency” is the broader of the two terms. It includes any and all “councils, boards, commissions, committees, divisions, or other units constituted within the various levels of Church organization” at all the various conference levels, including all “general agencies.”<sup>126</sup> In contrast, “general agency” refers to those entities created at the General Conference level.<sup>127</sup> Thus, while a Conference Council on Finance and Administration and the General Council on Finance and Administration (“GCFA”) are both agencies, only GCFA is a general agency.

General agencies resource and implement denominational work on a continual, day-to-day basis. There are several different types of general agencies, including councils, boards, and commissions.<sup>128</sup> Each is created for a different purpose and with a different set of powers and responsibilities.

In addition to the specific functions assigned to it by the General Conference, a general council is also responsible for the review and oversight of the other general agencies.<sup>129</sup>

Chapter Five of the *Discipline* details the organization, responsibilities, and functions of the various general agencies.<sup>130</sup>

[THIS SPACE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

---

<sup>125</sup> See ¶¶ 701.2-3.

<sup>126</sup> ¶ 701.2.

<sup>127</sup> ¶ 701.3.

<sup>128</sup> See ¶ 703.

<sup>129</sup> ¶ 703.1.

<sup>130</sup> ¶¶ 701 *et seq.*

# THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL

The Judicial Council is the “highest judicial body in The United Methodist Church.”<sup>131</sup> The Judicial Council must sit during sessions of the General Conference and at least one time each year.<sup>132</sup> The Council is composed of nine members who serve in staggered eight year terms.<sup>133</sup> Nominations of members are made by the Council of Bishops and from the floor of the General Conference and elections are made by majority vote of the General Conference.<sup>134</sup>

All decisions that the Judicial Council makes are final.<sup>135</sup> It is established by the Constitution<sup>136</sup> and has the authority to:

1. Determine the constitutionality of any act of the General Conference;
2. Hear and determine any appeal from a bishop’s decision on a question of law;
3. Affirm, modify, or reverse decisions of law made by bishops; and
4. Hear and determine the legality of any action taken by a General, jurisdictional, or central conference board or body.<sup>137</sup>

Paragraph 2610 also gives the Judicial Council the power to render declaratory decisions, at the request of certain Church entities. The Judicial Council’s Rules of Practice and Procedure are available [here](#).

## **1. Investigations, Trials, and Appeals.**

Paragraphs 2701-19 set forth the investigation and trial systems of the Church. Investigation and trial procedures are spelled out in the *Discipline* in such length that it is impracticable to provide summaries of each procedure in this Manual. Instead, GCFA has produced the Administrative and Judicial Procedures Handbook, which addresses in detail the *Discipline* procedures for administrative and judicial complaints. It is available on GCFA’s website ([www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org)).

[END OF DOCUMENT]

---

<sup>131</sup> ¶ 2601.

<sup>132</sup> ¶ 2608.2.

<sup>133</sup> ¶ 2602.1.

<sup>134</sup> ¶ 2602.2.

<sup>135</sup> ¶ 57.

<sup>136</sup> ¶ 55.

<sup>137</sup> ¶ 56. *See also* ¶ 2609.