

Draft of a *General Book of Discipline* 2020

New Part VI

General Organization and Administration

Chapter Four

The Conferences

The United Methodist Church is a connectional structure maintained through its chain of conferences.

Section I. The General Conference

¶ 501. *Purpose*—The General Conference serves God’s mission for the Church on its worldwide, connectional level. It gathers the delegates, as representatives of the church, for worship, prayer, fellowship, and legislative action in a spirit of Christian conferencing.

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GBOD ¶501 = new

¶ 502. *Powers*—1. The General Conference has full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional (¶ 16). It has no executive or administrative power.

2. Only General Conference has the authority to speak officially for The United Methodist Church. Any written public policy statement issued by a general Church agency shall clearly identify either at the beginning or at the end that the statement represents the position of that general agency and not necessarily the position of The United Methodist Church.¹

3. 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.

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GBOD ¶502.1 = 501; 502.2+3=509.1+2

¹ See Judicial Council Decision 458.

¶ 503. *Membership*—1. The voting membership of the General Conference shall consist of:

a) An equal number of clergy and lay delegates elected by the annual conferences as provided in the *Discipline*. The missionary conferences and provisional annual conferences shall be considered as annual conferences for the purposes of this paragraph. Annual conferences are urged to seek inclusiveness in the election of delegates.²

b) Delegates from The Methodist Church in Great Britain and other autonomous Methodist churches with which concordat agreements have been established providing for mutual election and seating of delegates in each other’s highest legislative conferences.

2. The number of delegates to which an annual conference is entitled shall be computed on a two-factor basis: the number of clergy members of the annual conference, and the number of members of local churches in the annual conference.³

3. Delegates to the General Conference shall be elected at the session of the annual conference held not more than two annual conference sessions before the calendar year preceding the session of the General Conference.⁴

4. Procedures shall be according to provisions in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 503).⁵

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GBOD ¶ 503.1-3 = 502.1-3; 503.4=new

² See Judicial Council Decisions 435, 592.

³ See Judicial Council Decisions 327, 333, 1051.

⁴ See Judicial Council Decisions 435, 592.

⁵ See Judicial Council Decisions 435, 592.

GC-R ¶ 503. Membership— 1. At least thirty days prior to the beginning of the earliest possible calendar year for election of delegates, the secretary of the General Conference shall notify the bishop and the secretary of each annual conference of the number of delegates to be elected by that annual conference.⁶

2. The secretary of each annual conference, using the certificate of election form supplied, shall report to the secretary of the General Conference the names, addresses, and such other information as may be required for delegates and reserves elected by the annual conference.

3. The secretary of the General Conference shall prepare and send to each annual conference secretary credentials to be signed and distributed to the delegates and reserves elected by the annual conference.

4. The secretary, in cooperation with the General Commission on the General Conference, shall initiate procedures to prepare delegates from central conferences for full participation in the General Conference by providing information concerning both the operation of the General Conference and materials it will consider. As far as possible, the materials should be provided in the languages of the delegates.

5. After consultation with the Council of Bishops, the secretary of the General Conference shall issue invitations to ecumenical representatives.

GBOD GC-R ¶ 503.1-3 = 502.3-5; 503.4-5=504.3

⁶ See Judicial Council Decisions 435, 592.

¶ 504. Conference Session—1. *Rules of Order*- The Plan of Organization and Rules of Order of the General Conference shall be as approved by the preceding General Conference until they have been modified by the action of the General Conference.

2. *Commission on the General Conference*- There shall be a Commission on the General Conference, hereinafter called the commission.

a) It shall select the site and set the dates of the General Conference up to four quadrennia in advance.

b) It shall plan the General Conference program, including the opening day, special events and orders of the day.

c) It shall, in cooperation with the United Methodist Publishing House, make all necessary arrangements for the publication of the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*.

d) It shall organize a Committee on the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order from within its membership. The committee shall study any proposed amendments to the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order to be presented to the commission for approval and submission to the General Conference.

e) The voting members of the commission shall be elected quadrennially by the General Conference from the elected delegates to the General Conference for a term of eight years. They shall consist of twenty-five members as follows: one person from each US jurisdiction, one person from each central conference, one young adult, one youth, the chairperson of the host committee, and ten additional members. The additional members shall be allocated to reflect the proportionate jurisdictional membership based upon combined clergy and lay membership of the Church.

3. *Presiding Officers*— The bishops shall be the presiding officers at the General Conference.

4. *Secretary-Designate*— The General Conference elects a secretary-designate.

5. *Petitions to General Conference*- Any organization, clergy member, or lay member of The United Methodist Church may petition the General Conference according to the prescribed format.

6. The General conference session shall be organized according to provisions in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 504).

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GBOD ¶ 504.1 = 505; 504.2Intro=511Intro; 504.2a=511.4a; 504.2b=511.4b; 504.2c=511.4c; 504.2d=511.3b; 504.2e=511.1a-b; 504.3=503; 504.4=504.2; 504.5=507Intro; 504.6=new

GC-R ¶ 504. *Conference session—* 1. *Commission on the General Conference—*a) *Membership—* (1) Members shall be nominated from the elected delegates to the General Conference by the Council of Bishops prior to General Conference and elected by the General Conference for a term of eight years. Additional persons who meet the qualifications may be nominated from the floor of General Conference. The commission shall reflect a balance of clergymen and clergywomen, laywomen and laymen, and the diverse character of The United Methodist Church. Approximately half of the commission shall be elected by the General Conference each quadrennium.

(2) If vacancies occur, the Council of Bishops shall elect geographically appropriate successors to serve through the next session of the General Conference and then nominate for election by the General Conference persons to serve any remainder term.

(3) The Secretary of the General Conference, the Treasurer of the General Council on Finance and Administration, the Business Manager of the General Conference, and a bishop named by the Council of Bishops shall have the right to the floor without the privilege of voting. The Business Manager of the General Conference shall be the chief administrative officer of the commission.

b) *Officers—* The officers of the commission shall be a chairperson, a vice-chairperson, and a secretary, all of whom shall be elected by the commission at the quadrennial organizational meeting. They shall serve until the adjournment of the next succeeding quadrennial session of the General Conference and until their successors are duly elected and qualified.

c) *Committees—* (1) *Executive Committee—* There shall be an executive committee of the commission, consisting of the officers of the commission, the chairperson of the host committee, the bishop serving on the commission, the Secretary of the General Conference, the Business Manager of the General Conference, and the chairperson and secretary of the Committee on the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order.

(2) *Committee on the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order—* The commission shall organize a Committee on the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order from within its membership. The committee shall be organized at the initial meeting of the commission following General Conference. It shall elect its own chairperson and secretary, who will serve on the commission's executive committee. The committee shall study any proposed amendments to the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order to be presented to the Commission on the General Conference for approval and submission to the General Conference. Any other matters relating to parliamentary order or procedure in the business of the General Conference may be referred to this committee.

d) *Responsibilities—* (1) The commission shall select the site and set the dates of the General Conference up to four quadrennia in advance and shall send an official notice to all elected delegates announcing specifically the opening day and hour of the General Conference and anticipated time of adjournment.

(2) The commission shall advise the delegates in advance of all special events and orders of the day in order that the delegates may have an overview of the General Conference program.

(3) The commission, in cooperation with the United Methodist Publishing House, shall make all necessary arrangements for the publication of the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate* and quadrennial reports of the Connectional Table and the general agencies of the church in English, French, Portuguese, and Kiswahili, and for all delegates to have timely (90-day period) and convenient access to the most linguistically appropriate translation of these documents. The commission shall also make arrangements for daily schedules, petition lists, nominations information, and other high-importance information published in the English version of the *Daily Christian Advocate* to also be made available in each of these languages in a timely and convenient way.

(4) The commission shall take necessary measures to assure full participation of all General Conference delegates including but not limited to providing accommodation for languages and physical challenges of the delegates, and access to approved licensed childcare during the session at or near the site of the General Conference for children of General Conference delegates.

(5) The commission shall recommend to the General Conference the per diem allowance to be paid to the elected delegates for housing and meals.

(6) The commission shall set the number of legislative committees and the assignment of legislative materials to those committees in consultation with the Secretary of the General Conference and the Business Manager of the General Conference.

e) The secretary of the General Conference shall calculate the number of delegates to be elected by each annual conference, based on the factors specified in ¶ 503.2, using the most recent clergy and professing lay membership figures reported by the local congregation to the annual conference and from the annual conference to the General Council on Finance and Administration through their conference journals, as follows:

(1) One clergy delegate for the first 375 clergy members of the annual conference and one clergy delegate for each additional 375 clergy members or major fraction thereof,⁷ and

(2) One clergy delegate for the first 26,000 members of local churches of the annual conference and one clergy delegate for each additional 26,000 local church members or major fraction thereof, and

(3) A number of lay delegates equal to the total number of clergy delegates authorized as above.

(4) Every annual conference shall be entitled to at least one clergy and one lay delegate.

(5) This formula is designated to comply with the Constitution (¶ 13), which defines the minimum and maximum number of delegates to a General Conference. Should the computations provided in the paragraph result in a figure below the prescribed minimum or above the prescribed maximum for delegates, the Commission on the General Conference shall be authorized to remedy the situation by adjusting up or down the numbers of clergy members and members of local churches of the annual conference necessary to entitle an annual conference to elect delegates, any such adjustment to be proportionally the same for the two factors.⁸

2. *Quorum*—When the General Conference is in session, it shall require the presence of a majority of the whole number of delegates to the General Conference to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business; but a smaller number may take a recess or adjourn from day to day in order to secure a quorum, and at the final session may approve the journal, order the record of the roll call, and adjourn *sine die*.

3. *Secretary-Designate* — a) The Council of Bishops shall present a nomination from the ordained ministry or lay membership of The United Methodist Church for secretary-designate. Other nominations shall be permitted from the floor. The election, if there be two or more nominees, shall be by ballot.

b) *Assumption of Office*— The secretary-designate shall assume the responsibilities of the office of secretary as soon after the adjournment of the General Conference as all work in connection with the session has been completed, including the corrections to the *Daily Christian Advocate*, which serves as the official journal of the General Conference. Upon publication, all translations of the *Daily Christian Advocate* shall be made available as a daily downloadable file, free of charge, on the denominational website. The exact date of the transfer of responsibility to the secretary-designate shall be determined by the Commission on the General Conference, but shall not be later than December 31, following the adjournment of the General Conference.

4. *Petitions to General Conference*—A petition to the General Conference shall be submitted in the following manner:

a) It must be sent in writing according to the format officially approved by the secretary of the General Conference.

b) Each petition must address only one issue if the *Discipline* is not affected; if the *Discipline* is affected, each petition must address only one paragraph of the *Discipline*, except that, if two or more paragraphs in the *Discipline* are so closely related that a change in one affects the others, the petition may call for the amendment of those paragraphs also to make them consistent with one another. Petitions dealing with more than one paragraph in the *Discipline* that do not meet these criteria are invalid. Petitions that meet these criteria (composite petitions) shall not be separated into pieces.

c) Each petition must be signed by the person submitting it, accompanied by appropriate identification and return address, according to the prescribed format.

d) All petitions submitted to the General Conference, except those submitted by individual members of The United Methodist Church and local church groups, which call for the establishment of new programs or the expansion of existing programs will be invalid unless accompanied by supporting data that address the issue of anticipated financial requirements of the program.

e) Petitions must be postmarked by a national postal service no later than 230 days prior to the opening session of the General Conference. If petitions are transmitted by a means other than a national postal service, they must be in the hands of the petitions secretary no later than 230 days prior to the opening session of the General Conference.

f) Exceptions to the time limitations shall be granted for petitions originating from an annual conference session held between 230 and 45 days prior to the opening session of the General Conference, and for other petitions at the discretion of the Committee on Reference.

g) Petitions adopted and properly submitted by annual conferences, central and jurisdictional conferences, the Division on Ministries With Young People, or general agencies or councils of the Church, and petitions properly submitted by individual members (either clergy or lay) of The United Methodist Church and local church groups, provided that they have been received by the petitions secretary or secretary of the General Conference no later than 230 days before the opening of General Conference, shall be printed in the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*.

h) Petitions and/or resolutions not printed in the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate* shall be printed or copied and provided to all delegates. Where the content of petitions is essentially the same, the petition will be printed once, with the first author named and the number of additional copies received printed. Upon publication, all translations of the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate* shall be made available as a downloadable file, free of charge, on the denominational website

i) The secretary of the General Conference shall arrange for electronic access to all petitions, including General Conference action and the resulting impact on the, throughout the General Conference session. This access shall be available until the publication of the new edition of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. Following General Conference 2020, the new *General Book of Discipline* shall be published in all languages used in the publication of the Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate*.

Implementation shall be according to guidelines established by the Committee on Plan of Organization and Rules of Order.

j) All petitions that have been approved by a legislative committee shall receive a vote by the plenary session at that year's General Conference.

k) All petitions that have been submitted to the General Conference shall receive a vote of a legislative committee.

5. *Legislation Effective Date*—All legislation of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church shall become effective January 1 following the session of the General Conference at which it is enacted, unless otherwise specified for central conferences.

GBOD GC-R ¶ 504.1 = 511; GC-R 504.2=506; GC-R 504.3=504.1-2; GC-R 504.4=507; GC-R 504.5=508;

⁷ See Judicial Council Decisions 327, 558.

⁸ See Judicial Council Decisions 687, 1274.

¶ **505. *Records and Archives***— 1. The Secretary of the General Conference shall be responsible for the permanent record of the General Conference, according to provisions in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 505).

2. All original documents of a General Conference shall be filed with the General Commission on Archives and History.

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¶ 505.1 = 510Intro; 505.2=510.4

GC-R ¶ 505. *Records and Archives*—The permanent record of the General Conference shall include:

1. Corrections to the *Daily Christian Advocate*. The editor will file with the Commission on Archives and History two bound copies of the *Daily Christian Advocate* and corrections as the official record of General Conference. Bound copies shall also be made available at cost by The United Methodist Publishing House.

2. A *Book of Resolutions* to be edited by The United Methodist Publishing House. The book shall contain all valid resolutions of the General Conference. The preface of the *Book of Resolutions* shall include the guidelines for writing resolutions.

a) All valid resolutions of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church shall be published in each edition of the *Book of Resolutions*. There shall be a complete subject index and index of Scripture passages to all valid resolutions of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in each edition of the *Book of Resolutions*. Resolutions are official expressions of The United Methodist Church for eight years following their adoption, after which time they shall be deemed to have expired unless readopted. Those that have expired shall not be printed in subsequent editions of the *Book of Resolutions*. The *Book of Resolutions* shall be made available on the official website of The United Methodist Church.

b) The program boards and agencies shall review all valid resolutions and recommend to the General Conference the removal of time-dated material.

c) Resolutions to be an official part of the *Book of Resolutions* will require a 60 percent affirmative vote at General Conference.

3. The Advance Edition of the *Daily Christian Advocate* and the *Daily Christian Advocate*.

GBOD GC-R ¶ 505.1-3 = 510.1-3

¶ **506. *Conference Agencies***— Chapter 5 *Administrative Order* makes provisions for General Conference agencies.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 506 = new

¶ **507. *Property***— Chapter 6 *Property* makes provisions for Church property in The United Methodist Church.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 507 = new

Section II. Jurisdictional Conferences

¶ **508.** Within the boundaries of the United States, there shall be Jurisdictional Conferences and Interjurisdictional Committees according to legislation enacted by General Conference in its *Discipline*, Part VII.

>VII: 508.001-508.007<

GBOD ¶ 508 = new

¶ 509. *Missionary Conferences*— Within the boundaries of the United States, there may be Missionary Conferences, according to legislation enacted by General Conference in its *Discipline*, Part VII.

>VII: 509.001-509.007<

GBOD ¶ 509 = new

Section III. Central Conferences

¶ 511. *Purpose*—1. The purpose of the central conference is to connect regionally Annual Conferences, Provisional Annual Conferences, and Missions, for common mission and ministry, to establish episcopal supervision as an expression of the General Superintendency, and to facilitate worldwide connections.

2. The General Conference, by a two-thirds vote, may organize annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, and missions into central conferences, subject to the provisions of the Constitution. Thus, The United Methodist Church shall have central conferences with territorial boundaries and numbers of bishops as listed in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 511).⁹

3. A provisional central conference may become a central conference upon the fulfillment of the necessary requirements and upon the authorization of the General Conference, including the number of bishops to be elected according to the provisions in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 407.1).

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 511.1 = new; 511.2=540.1; 511.3=540.4

⁹ See Judicial Council Decision 371.

GC-R ¶ 511. *Boundaries of Central Conferences and Numbers of Bishops*—General Conference, by a two-thirds vote, has organized the following central conferences, and has authorized, by majority vote, the election of the following number of bishops:

1. *Africa Central Conference*: Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe; with the authority to elect five bishops.

2. *Central and Southern Europe Central Conference*: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, Tunisia; with the authority to elect one bishop.

3. *Congo Central Conference*: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Zambia; with the authority to elect four bishops.

4. *Germany Central Conference*: Germany; with the authority to elect one bishop.

5. *Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference*: Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan; with the authority to elect two bishops.

6. *Philippines Central Conference*: Philippines; with the authority to elect three bishops.

7. *West Africa Central Conference*: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone; with the authority to elect four bishops.

GBOD GC-R ¶ 511.1-7 = 540.3

¶ 512. *Powers and Duties*— 1. Central conferences are organized with such duties, privileges, and powers as hereinafter conferred by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference.

2. To a central conference shall be committed, for supervision and promotion, the missionary, educational, evangelistic, industrial, publishing, medical, and other connectional interests within its boundaries. It shall provide suitable organizations for such work and elect the necessary officers for the same.

3. a) A central conference shall fix the boundaries of the annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, and missions within its boundaries, proposals for changes first having been submitted to the annual conferences concerned, and provided that only General Conference can establish provisional annual conferences.¹⁰

b) In central conferences no annual conference shall be organized with fewer than thirty-five clergy members except as provided by an enabling act for the quadrennium, which shall not reduce the number below twenty-five. Nor shall an annual conference be continued with fewer than twenty-five clergy members except as provided by an enabling act for the quadrennium.

4. A central conference may elect bishops from among the ordained elders in full connection of The United Methodist Church, according to the number of bishops determined by the General Conference. It shall have power to fix the tenure of bishops elected by the said central conference and shall assign bishops to their respective residences.¹¹

5. a) A central conference shall have authority to engage in dialogue with other Christian bodies within its boundaries, to enter into interim ecumenical agreements with them, and to negotiate unions, provided that all proposed ecumenical agreements are submitted to the Council of Bishops for approval, and all proposals for church union are submitted to the General Conference for approval before consummation.¹²

b) When conferences outside the United States that are parts of The United Methodist Church desire to become an autonomous Methodist, affiliated autonomous Methodist, or affiliated united church, approval shall first be secured from the central conference involved and this decision be ratified by the annual conferences within the central conference by two-thirds majority of the aggregate votes cast by the annual conferences, and shall respect the provisions in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 512).¹³

6. a) Upholding the *General Book of Discipline*, Parts I - VI, a central conference shall have authority to establish and publish legislation and provisions pertaining to the annual, district, and charge conferences within its boundaries, including educational requirements of clergy and specialized lay ministries, and forms of organization according to the laws of the country. In establishing such legislation and provisions, it is authorized to make such changes and adaptations of the *Discipline*, Part VII, as the special conditions and the mission of the church in the area require, provided that no action shall be taken that is contrary to the *General Book of Discipline*, Parts I - VI. Subject to this restriction, a central conference may delegate to an annual conference within its boundaries the power to make one or the other of the changes and adaptations referred to in this paragraph, upon request of such annual conference.¹⁴

b) The central conference is authorized to interpret Article XXIII of the Articles of Religion so as to recognize the governments of the country or countries within its boundaries.

c) In a central conference using a language other than English, changes in the *General Book of Discipline*, Parts I – VI, passed by the General Conference shall take effect at the latest on July 1st of the year following the General Conference year in order to afford the necessary time for translation.

7. a) A central conference is authorized to edit a simplified, revised, and translated Ritual as it may deem necessary, such changes to require the approval of the resident bishop or bishops of the central conference.

b) It is authorized to conform the detailed rules, rites, and ceremonies for the solemnization of marriage to the statute laws of the country or countries within its boundaries.

8. A central conference shall have authority to adopt rules of procedure governing the investigation and trial of its clergy, including bishops, and lay members of the Church and to provide the necessary means and methods of implementing the said rules; provided, however, that clergy shall not be deprived of the right of trial by a clergy committee, and lay members of the Church of the right of trial by a duly constituted committee of lay members; and provided also, that the rights of appeal shall be adequately safeguarded.¹⁵

9. A central conference is authorized to establish a judicial court, which in addition to other duties that the central conference may assign to it shall hear and determine the legality of any action, and of any decision of law by the presiding bishop, pertaining to legislation and provisions as mentioned in §6.

10. The General Council on Finance and Administration shall determine the apportionment amounts for the annual conferences of the central conferences for the succeeding quadrennium based on calculation methodology approved by the General Conference upon recommendation by the Council. This determination shall be informed by consultation with the Council of Bishops.

11. Each central conference within the boundaries of which the General Board of Global Ministries has work shall maintain a cooperative and consultative relationship with the said general board; but the legal distinction between the General Board of Global Ministries and the organized church on the field shall always be kept clear.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 512.1 = 540.1; 512.2=543.1+6; 512.3=543.8; 512.4=543.2+3; 512.5=543.20+21+572 Intro; 512.6=543.7+9+16+10+15+18+17; 512.7=543.13+14; 512.8=543.12; 512.9=547.3; 512.10=543.4; 512.11=542.6

¹⁰ See Judicial Council Decisions 525, 541, 549.

¹¹ See Judicial Council Decisions 311, 430.

¹² See Judicial Council Decision 350.

¹³ See Judicial Council Decisions 548, 1062.

¹⁴ See Judicial Council Decision 313.

¹⁵ See Judicial Council Decisions 310, 595.

GC-R ¶ 512. *Becoming an autonomous Methodist, affiliated autonomous Methodist, or affiliated united church from central conferences*— 1. The conference(s) involved shall prepare a historical record with reasons why affiliation and/or autonomy is requested and shall consult with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters (BOD¶ 2201) on proceedings for affiliation and/or autonomy.

2. The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and the conference(s) involved shall mutually agree on the confession of faith and the constitution of the new church. These shall be prepared with care and shall be approved by the conference(s) involved.

3. Preparation of its *Discipline* is the responsibility of the conference(s) desiring affiliation and/or autonomy.

4. Upon recommendation of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, when all disciplinary requirements for affiliated and/or autonomous relationship have been met, the General Conference through an enabling act shall approve of and grant permission for the conference(s) involved to become an autonomous Methodist, affiliated autonomous Methodist or affiliated united church.

5. Then the central conference involved shall meet, declare the present relationship between The United Methodist Church and the conference(s) involved dissolved, and reorganize as an autonomous Methodist, affiliated autonomous Methodist or affiliated united church in accordance with the enabling act granted by the General Conference. The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters shall assist in this process and, when the plans are consummated, report to the Council of Bishops. The proclamation of affiliated and/or autonomous status shall then be signed by the president of the Council of Bishops and the secretary of the General Conference.

6. A plan of cooperation shall be developed in accordance with ¶421.2d.

GBOD ¶ GC-R 512 = 572.1-6

¶ 513. *Membership*— 1. a) The membership of a central conference shall consist of an equal number of clergy and lay delegates elected by the annual and provisional annual conferences.

b) By ballot, the clergy members shall be elected by the clergy members of the annual or provisional annual conferences and the lay members by the lay members thereof.

c) Each annual and provisional annual conference shall be entitled to at least two clergy and two lay delegates, and no other selection of delegates shall be authorized that would provide for more than one clergy delegate for every six clergy members of an annual or provisional annual conference; except that a majority of the number fixed by a central conference as the ratio of representation shall entitle an annual or provisional annual conference to an additional clergy delegate and to an additional lay delegate.¹⁶

d) Delegates to the central conferences shall be elected at the session of the annual conference held not more than two annual conference sessions preceding the session of the General Conference. The secretary of the central conference shall notify the bishop and the secretary of each annual conference of the number of delegates to be elected by that annual conference.

2. Each mission is authorized to elect and send one lay and one clergy to the central conference concerned as its representative, with voice but not vote.

3. No central conference shall be established with less than thirty clergy and thirty lay delegates on the basis of representation as set forth in § 1, except as provided by an enabling act for the quadrennium.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 513.1-1c = 541.1; 513.1d=new; 513.2=541.1; 513.3=540.2

¹⁶ See Judicial Council Decision 371.

¶ 514. *Conference Session* — 1. *Convening Date*-a) Each central conference shall meet within the year succeeding the session of the General Conference at such time and place as the central conference itself or its bishops may determine.

b) *Special Session* - (1) The central conference may order a special session. Such session cannot transact any other business than that indicated in the call.

(2) The College of Bishops, with the concurrence of the executive committee, shall have the authority to call a special session of the central conference to be held at the time and place designated by them.

(3) The delegates to a special session of the central conference shall be the delegates last elected by each annual or provisional annual conference.

2. *Rules of Order*-The central conference shall adopt its own procedure, rules, and plan of organization.

3. *Presiding Officers*-a) A bishop shall be the presiding officer.

b) The bishop acting as presiding officer shall decide questions of law, subject to an appeal to the Judicial Council, or the Judicial Court of the central conference.¹⁷

c) The Council of Bishops may assign one or more of its members to visit a central conference. When so assigned, the bishop shall be an accredited representative of the general Church, and when requested by a majority of the bishops resident in that conference may exercise therein the functions of the episcopacy.

4. The central conference shall provide for the expenses of its sessions.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 514.1 = 542.2; 514.2=new; 514.3=new+542.4+3; 514.4=new

¹⁷ See Judicial Council Decisions 375, 376, 381.

¶ 515. *Records and Archives* —1. The central conference shall keep an exact record of its proceedings. If there are no archives of the central conference, the secretary shall keep the bound copy or copies to be handed on to the succeeding secretary.

2. Each central conference shall send without charge to the General Commission on Archives and History a copy of its journal, of every translation of the *General Book of Discipline*, including its adapted Part VII, in printed or electronic format. Other general agencies may request such material as needed at their expense.

3. The secretary of a central conference in which one or more bishops have been elected shall report to the secretary of the General Conference the names of the bishop(s) and the residences to which they have been assigned by the central conference.

4. A central conference may examine and acknowledge the journals of the annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, and missions located within its boundaries and to make rules for the drawing up of the journals as may seem necessary.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 515.1 = new; 515.2-3=545.3+2; 515.4=543.11

¶ 516. *Conference Agencies*— 1. Central conferences may create agencies, structures or committees with such duties and mandates as the central conference may determine to carry out their mission.

>VII: 516.001<

2. Upon nomination of their respective annual conference delegations, each central conference shall elect a committee on episcopacy consisting of at least one clergy and one lay delegate from each annual or provisional annual conference. The committee shall:

a) review and evaluate at least once each quadrennium the work of the bishops, pass on their character and ministry, and report such evaluations and other findings to the central conference for such action as the conference may deem appropriate within its constitutional warrant of power; such review and evaluation may be organized by episcopal areas, in which case the central conference decides on the enlargement of membership of sub-committees in episcopal areas;

b) it shall, after consultation with the College of Bishops, recommend to the central conference for its approval the boundaries of the episcopal areas and the assignments of the bishops;

c) It shall receive and act upon requests for possible voluntary or involuntary retirement of bishops.

d) The central conference shall provide funding for the expenses of its committee on episcopacy.

3. Each central conference shall establish a board of pensions or make provisions for the creation of boards of pensions on the level of the annual conferences, episcopal areas, or countries within its boundaries. These boards of pensions are responsible for the long-term sustainability of their plans, administration of their pension programs in accordance with plan provisions, investment of pension funds, and proposing plan amendment.

GBOD ¶516.1 = 547+new; 516.2=543.5+new; 516.3=new

¶ 517. *Property*— 1. A central conference, through a duly incorporated property-holding body or bodies, shall have authority to purchase, own, hold, or transfer property for and on behalf of all the unincorporated organizations of The United Methodist Church within its boundaries or on behalf of other organizations of The United Methodist Church that have entrusted their property to that central conference.

2. A central conference shall have authority to make the necessary rules and provisions for the holding and management of such properties; provided, however, that a) all procedure shall be subject to the laws of the country or countries concerned; and b) no action shall be taken transferring or alienating property or proceeds of property without due consideration of its trusteeship for local churches, annual

conferences, the General Board of Global Ministries, and other organizations, local or general, of the Church.

3. A central conference or any of its incorporated organizations shall not involve a general agency of the Church in any financial obligation without the official approval of said agency or organization. All invested funds, fiduciary trusts, or property belonging to an annual conference, a provisional annual conference, or a mission, or any of its institutions, acquired by bequest, donation, or otherwise and designated for a specific use, shall be applied to the purpose for which they were designated. They shall not be diverted to any other purpose, except by the consent of the conference or mission involved and with the approval of the central conference concerned and civil court action when necessary. The same rule shall apply to similar funds or properties acquired by a central conference for specific objects. In cases involving the diversion of trust funds and properties within the boundaries of a central conference, the central conference concerned shall determine the disposition of the interests involved, subject to an appeal to the judicial court of the central conference.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 517.1 = 546.1; 517.2=546.2+3; 517.3=546.4

Section IV. Provisional Central Conferences

¶ 521. *Purpose*— Annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, and missions outside the United States that are not included in central conferences and that, because of geographical, language, political, or other considerations, have common interests that can best be served thereby, may be organized into provisional central conferences by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference. Thus, The United Methodist Church may have Provisional Central Conferences with territorial boundaries as listed in the General Conference Regulations (GC-R ¶ 521).¹⁸

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 521 = 560

¹⁸ See Judicial Council Decision 525.

GC-R ¶ 521. *Purpose*— General Conference, by a two-thirds vote, has organized the following Provisional Central Conferences:

The United Methodist Church shall have a provisional central conference with ministries in the following countries:

a) *Southeast Asia and Mongolia Provisional Central Conference*: Laos, Mongolia, Thailand and Vietnam.

GBOD GC-R ¶ 521 = 560

¶ 522. *Powers and Duties*— The General Conference may grant to a provisional central conference any of the powers of a central conference except that of electing bishops.¹⁹

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 522 = 562

¹⁹ Judicial Council Decision 403.

¶ 523. *Membership*—Membership of a provisional central conference shall be according to the enabling act by the General Conference.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 523 = new

¶ 524. *Conference session 1. Episcopal Supervision*— The General Conference shall make provision for the episcopal supervision of work in a provisional central conference.

2. *Organization a)* The organization of a provisional central conference shall conform to the provisions prescribed for central conferences insofar as they are considered applicable by the bishop in charge.

b) The first organizational meeting of a new provisional central conference shall take place within the quadrennium after General Conference action.

c) *Ad Interim Provisions*— In the interval between General Conferences, the General Board of Global Ministries, upon the recommendation of the bishops in charge and after consultation with the annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, and missions concerned, may make changes in the boundaries of a provisional central conference. All changes in boundaries shall be reported to the ensuing session of the General Conference and shall expire at the close of that session unless renewed by the General Conference.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 524.1 = 566; 524.2a=561; 524.2b=new 524.2c=563

Section V. Annual Conferences

¶ 531. *Purpose* —1. The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God.

2. Annual Conferences are the fundamental bodies of the Church (¶ 11).

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 531 = 601

¶ 532. *Powers and Duties* — 1. The annual conference for its own government, may adopt rules and regulations not in conflict with the *Discipline* of The United Methodist Church.²⁰ >VII: 532.001<

2. An annual conference cannot financially obligate any organizational unit of The United Methodist Church except the annual conference itself.²¹

3.a) The clergy session of the annual conference shall have power to make inquiry into the moral and official conduct of its clergy members. Subject only to the provisions on *Judicial Administration*, the clergy session of the annual conference shall have power to hear complaints against its clergy members and may try, reprove, suspend, deprive of clergy office and credentials, expel, or acquit any against whom charges may have been preferred. The clergy session of the annual conference shall have power to locate a clergy member for failure to perform effectively and competently the duties of itinerant ministry. The actions of the clergy session shall be for and on behalf of the annual conference.²²

b) All clergy members of the annual conference and the lay members of the Board of Ordained Ministry may attend and shall have voice in the clergy session. Only the ordained clergy in full connection and the members of the Board of Ordained Ministry may vote. Others may be admitted by express action of the clergy session, but shall not have vote, nor, unless specifically granted by the clergy session, shall have voice.²³

4. The annual conference shall have power to make inquiry into the financial status of the local churches, and shall provide counsel to help a local church overcome a deficit position.

5. The annual conference shall have the power to make inquiry into the membership status of the local churches, particularly if no members have been received on confession of faith during the year.

6. The annual conference shall give recognition to any new churches that have been organized during the year. >VII: 532.002<

7. The annual conference shall make provision for legal counsel applicable to its legal context. >VII: 532.003<

8. If any annual conference initiates, joins, monitors, or terminates a boycott, the guidelines in *The Book of Resolutions* should be followed. The General Conference is the only body that can initiate, empower, or join a boycott in the name of The United Methodist Church. >VII: 532.004<

9. The annual conference may choose to adopt a conference wide plan for compensation of pastors. Such a plan shall provide the method for setting and funding the salaries, and/or other compensation elements as specified in the plan, of the pastors appointed to the charges of the annual conference. GBOD ¶ 532.1-2=604.1-2; 532.3=604.4+605.7; 532.4-6=604.8-10; 532.7=603.8; 532.8=603.8/new; 532.8-9=604.12-13 BOD604.6-7 → see GBOD335.1!

²⁰ See Judicial Council Decisions 43, 74, 141, 318, 367, 373, 432, 435, 476, 536, 584, 590, 592, 699, 876, 1198.

²¹ See Judicial Council Decisions 707, 440.

²² See Judicial Council Decisions 534, 782.

²³ See Judicial Council Decisions 686, 690.

¶ **533. Membership** - 1. The clergy membership of an annual conference shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection, provisional members, associate members, affiliate members, and local pastors under full-time and part-time appointment, each with their respective voting rights. The term *clergy members* shall refer to both active and retired members of the annual conference.²⁴ >VII: 533.001<

2. a) The lay membership of the annual conference shall consist of a professing member elected by each charge, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, home missionaries, the conference president of United Methodist Women, the conference president of United Methodist Men, the conference lay leader, district lay leaders, the president or equivalent officer of the conference young adult organization, the president of the conference youth organization, one youth and one young adult from each district to be selected in such a manner as may be determined by the annual conference according to the age provisions of the central conference or outside central conference boundaries by other legislation enacted by General Conference. If the lay membership should number less than the clergy members of the annual conference, the annual conference shall, by its own formula, provide for the election of additional lay members to equalize lay and clergy membership of the annual conference.²⁵

b) Each charge served by more than one clergy member under appointment (including deacons in full connection for whom this is their primary appointment) shall be entitled to as many lay members as there are clergy members under appointment.

c) The lay members shall have been members of The United Methodist Church for the two years preceding their election and shall have been active participants in The United Methodist Church for at least four years preceding their election. The four-year participation and the two-year membership requirements may be waived for young persons under thirty years of age. Such persons must be members of The United Methodist Church and active participants at the time of election. >VII: 533.002<

3. The lay member or alternate, whoever was last seated in the annual conference, shall be seated in a special session of the annual conference when convened, provided that no local charge shall be deprived of its lay member.²⁶

4. The lay members of the annual conference shall participate in all deliberations and vote upon all measures except on the granting or validation of license, ordination, reception into full conference membership, or any question concerning the character and official conduct of clergy, except those who are lay members of the Board of Ordained Ministry and committee on investigation. Lay members shall serve on all committees except those on ministerial relations.²⁷

5. It is the duty of every member to attend the sessions of the annual conference.

6. Officers who are not members of the annual conference and such additional persons as the annual conference may decide shall have voice but not vote. >VII: 533.003<

GBOD ¶ 533.1 = 602.2+502.2; 533.2=602.4; 533.3-4=602.5-6; 533.5=602.8; 533.6=602.9+10

²⁴ See Judicial Council Decisions 477, 555, 1062.

²⁵ See Judicial Council Decision 1212.

²⁶ See Judicial Council Decision 319.

²⁷ See Judicial Council Decisions 109, 505.

¶ **534. Conference Session**— 1. The bishop shall appoint the times for holding the annual conference.²⁸

2. The annual conference or a committee thereof shall select the place for holding the conference session. Each central conference may provide for minimum standards for places and sites in which to hold annual conference sessions. Jurisdictional conferences shall follow the procedures in Part VII of the *Discipline*. >VII: 534.001<

3. The agenda of the session shall be prepared by the bishop, the district superintendents, the conference lay leader, and such others as the conference may name and shall be submitted to the conference for adoption. >VII: 534.002<

4. A special session of the annual conference may be held at such time and in such place as shall have been determined by the annual conference after consultation with the bishop, or by the bishop with the concurrence of three-fourths of the district superintendents. A special session of the annual conference shall have only such powers as are stated in the call.²⁹

5. The bishop assigned shall preside over the annual conference or, in case of inability, shall arrange for another bishop to preside. In the absence of a bishop, the conference shall by ballot, without nomination or debate, elect a president *pro tempore* from among the ordained elders. The president thus elected shall discharge all the duties of a bishop except ordination.

6. At the conclusion of the examination of the standing of the clergy members or at such later times as the bishop may designate, the presiding bishop may call to the bar of the conference the class to be admitted into full connection and receive them into conference membership after asking the questions of the Historic examination. >VII: <534.003

7. The annual conference shall adopt a comprehensive policy for handling sexual and gender harassment of clergy when laypersons are the perpetrators. This policy shall guide the local church in how to handle the report, how to care for the accuser and the accused, the victim and the perpetrator, the findings and settlement. It shall make provision for support of the pastor and for care of church members.

8. Members for committees, boards, and commissions of the annual conference shall be selected in such manner as the *Discipline* may specifically require or as the annual conference may determine. Attention shall be given to inclusiveness.³⁰ >VII: 534.004<

9. The annual conference at the first session following the General Conference or central or jurisdictional conference shall elect a secretary, a conference lay leader, a statistician, and a treasurer/director of administrative services to serve for the succeeding quadrennium. In the case of a vacancy in either office, the bishop, after consultation with the district superintendents, shall appoint a person to act until the next session of the annual conference. Quadrennial elections for conference agencies shall take place the same year as the election of officers.

a) *The conference lay leader*- The conference lay leader shall be a professing member of a local church in the annual conference, shall be the chairperson of the conference board of laity, or its equivalent structure, and participate in annual conference sessions as a partner in ministry with the bishop.

The conference lay leader is the elected leader of conference laity and has responsibility for fostering awareness of the role of the laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world in achieving the mission of the Church and enabling and supporting lay participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the annual conference in cooperation with the bishop and district superintendents. >VII: 534.005<

b) *The treasurer / director of administrative services* is directly amenable to the conference council on finance and administration, and may sit with the council and its committees at all sessions and have

the privilege of voice but not vote. The treasurer / director may serve as treasurer for any or all agencies served by a conference central treasury and report of all receipts, disbursements, and balances of all funds under his or her direction. The treasurer / director shall perform such other staff services as the council on finance and administration may require in the fulfillment of its functions and responsibilities.

>VII: 534.006<

GBOD ¶ 534.1 = 603.2; 534.2=603.3+4; 534.3=605.2; 534.4-5=603.5-6; 534.6-7=605.8+9; 534.8=605.3; 534.9=603.7+619 534.9a=607.1; 534.9b=619Intro+1b+1c(2)+1f

²⁸ See Judicial Council Decision 1206

²⁹ See Judicial Council Decision 397.

³⁰ See Judicial Council Decision 559.

¶ **535. *Records and Archives***—1. The annual conference shall keep an exact record of its proceedings according to the forms provided by the General, central, and jurisdictional conferences. If there are no archives of the annual conference, the secretary shall keep the bound copy or copies or a digital version to be handed on to the succeeding secretary.

2. Each annual conference shall send without charge to the General Commission on Archives and History, a copy of its annual journal, in printed or electronic format. Other general agencies may request such material as needed at their expense.

3. The annual conference journal shall include at least the following divisions:

- a) Officers of 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) Clergy record,
- h) Roll of deceased clergy members,
- i) Memoirs,
- j) Statistics,
- k) Miscellaneous,
- l) Index.

>VII: 535.001<

4. The secretary, or other administrative officer named by the annual conference, shall keep a complete service record of clergy and diaconal ministry personnel in the annual conference. Service records shall include but not be limited to biographical information supplied by the individual, a list of appointments, a record of annual conference actions with regard to conference relationships, and in addition descriptions of circumstances related to changes in conference relationships, credentials surrendered to the bishop or district superintendent, and confidential trial records.

5. The local church report to the annual conference shall be submitted as per the requirements of the annual conference.

6. In central conferences, official records of secretaries, statisticians, and treasurers shall be kept according to basic forms prepared by the General Council on Finance and Administration in cooperation with the central conferences so that elementary statistical data can be collected from all annual conferences. The General Council on Finance and Administration may recommend the use of more developed forms where applicable. Jurisdictional conferences shall follow the procedures in Part VII of the *Discipline*.

7. All records of candidates and clergy and diaconal ministry personnel maintained by the conference secretary, or other administrative officer named by the annual conference, Board of

Ordained Ministry, and board of pensions, are to be kept on behalf of the annual conference, subject to the laws of the country, in conformity with guidelines provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration, in consultation with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, and the following principles:

- a) The annual conference is the owner of its personnel records and files;
- b) Individuals in whose name a record is kept shall have access to the information contained in a record or file, with the exception of surrendered credentials and information for which a right-of-access waiver has been signed;
- c) Access to unpublished records by persons other than the bishop, district superintendent, conference secretary, treasurer, or other administrative officer or the Board of Ordained Ministry, through its chair, board of pensions, through its chair, counsel for the Church, and committee on investigation, through its chair, shall require written consent of the person in whose name a record is kept; access to trial records shall be governed by the provisions of the chapter on *Judicial Administration*.³¹

GBOD ¶ 535.1-3 = 606.1-3; 535.4-7=606.6-9

³¹ See Judicial Council Decisions 751, 765, 1024.

¶ 536. *Conference Agencies* —1. The annual conference is responsible for structuring its ministries and administrative procedures in order to accomplish its purpose. In so doing it shall provide for the connectional relationship from the annual conference to the district and the local church, as well as to the central, jurisdictional and General conference and their respective agencies. >VII: 536.001<

2. a) Annual conferences are given 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, except for the mandated entities. In doing so, an annual conference shall provide for such functions of and connections with the agencies of central, jurisdictional or General conference as help develop its mission.

b) 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.

c) It is recommended that each annual conference have a director of connectional ministries or designated person to focus and guide the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church within the annual conference. The director may be lay or clergy, and shall serve as an officer of the annual conference and shall sit with the cabinet when the cabinet considers matters relating to coordination, implementation, or administration of the vision and program of the annual conference. Whether appointed or elected to this position, the director shall be amenable to the bishop, in consultation with the appropriate annual conference personnel body. >VII: 536.002-536.027<

3. In central conferences, the mandated entities for each annual conference shall be the Council on Finance and Administration (¶538) and the Board of Ordained Ministry (¶539). Jurisdictional conferences shall follow the procedures in Part VII of the *Discipline*.

4. Provisions for membership of mandated entities shall be made by each central conference, or in territories outside central conference boundaries by other legislation enacted by General conference, provided that:

a) among the members in all mandated entities shall be at least one member of the cabinet as expression of its ministry of general oversight and superintendency;

b) members in the Board of Ordained Ministry shall be nominated by the presiding bishop after consultation with the chairperson of the board.³²

GBOD ¶ 536.1 = 610Intro; 536.2=610.1+608.after§6; 536.3=new+611+635; 536.4b=635.1a

³² See Judicial Council Decisions 446, 558.

¶ 537. *Property*— 1. Annual conferences, or sub-units authorized by them, may become several bodies corporate under the law of the countries, states, and territories within whose bounds they are located.³³

2. The annual conferences, or sub-units authorized by them, may create boards of trustees, and incorporate property-holding bodies, under the law of the countries, states, and territories within whose bounds they are located, to hold and administer real and personal property, receive and administer church extension and mission funds, and exercise such other powers and duties as may be set forth in its charter or articles of incorporation as authorized by the annual conference, subject to the provisions of chapter 6 on *Church Property*.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 537.1 = 603.1; 537.2=640+cf. 659.4

³³ See Judicial Council Decision 108.

¶ 538. *Council on Finance and Administration*—1. In each annual conference there shall be a conference council on finance and administration, hereinafter called the council, or other structure to provide for the functions of this ministry and maintain the connectional relationships. The council shall be amenable and report to the annual conference. >VII: 538.001<

2. *Purpose*— The purpose of the council shall be to develop, maintain, and administer a comprehensive and coordinated plan of fiscal and administrative policies, procedures, and management services for the annual conference.³⁴

3. *Responsibilities*— The council shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions, to which others may be added by the annual conference:

a) To recommend to the annual conference for its action and determination budgets of anticipated income and proposed expenditures for all funds that provide for annual conference clergy support, annual conference administrative expenses, and annual conference benevolence and program causes.³⁴

b) To receive, consider, report, and make recommendations to the annual conference regarding the following, prior to final decision by the annual conference: (1) any proposal to raise capital funds for any purpose; (2) funding considerations related to any proposal that may come before the conference; (3) any requests to conduct a special conference-wide financial appeal.

c) To recommend to the annual conference for its action and decision the methods or formulas by which apportionments to churches, charges, or districts for duly authorized funds shall be determined.³⁶

d) To develop policies and practices in the employment and compensation of personnel, in accordance with the Social Principles.

e) To develop policies governing the construction, renovation and managing of church property, in consultation with boards of trustees where they exist.

f) To develop policies governing the investment of conference funds (except for pension funds managed by the applicable board of pensions), in a manner consistent with the preservation of capital, the Policies Relative to Socially Responsible Investments, and the Social Principles of the Church.

g) To develop policies governing the auditing of the financial records of the conference, its agencies and entities within its boundaries.

h) To develop policies governing the bonding of conference and conference agency officers and staff whose responsibilities include the custody or handling of conference funds or other negotiable assets:

>VII: 538.002-538.006<

GBOD ¶ 538.1 = 611+612.6; 538.2=612.1; 538.3=613.1-3+13+7+5+617Intro+618Intro

³⁴ See Judicial Council Decision 1054.

³⁵ See Judicial Council Decisions 521, 551, 560, 590, 744.

³⁶ See Judicial Council Decision 983.

¶ **539. Board of Ordained Ministry—** 1. *Organization* – In each annual conference there shall be a Board of Ordained Ministry. In central conferences, the annual conference, upon recommendation of its Board of Ordained Ministry, may create an executive committee of the Board, district committees on ordained ministry, or other appropriate structure, as it serves the need to carry out the work of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and assign and delegate to such structures the appropriate tasks and responsibilities it chooses. With regard to mandated sub-units of the Board of Ordained Ministry and their respective tasks and responsibilities, jurisdictional conferences shall follow the procedures in Part VII of the *Discipline*. The Board shall be amenable and report to the annual conference. >VII: 539.001-539.002<

2. *Purpose*— The purpose of the Board of Ordained Ministry shall be to develop, oversee and administer a comprehensive and coordinated approach to all matters related to the ordained ministry. Concerning all matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy it brings recommendations directly to the clergy session of the annual conference.

3. *Responsibilities*— The Board of Ordained Ministry shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions, to which others may be added by the annual conference:

a) To assume the primary responsibility for the enlistment and recruitment of licensed and ordained clergy. It shall, with the assistance of the local church committee on pastor-parish relations, and every clergy of the conference, enlist women and men of all races and ethnic origins for the ordained ministry and guide those persons in the process of education, training, licensing and ordination;

b) To relate to, and develop cooperation with theological institutions and programs approved for the training of United Methodist clergy;

c) To examine and make full inquiry as to the fitness of candidates for: (1) annual election as local pastor; (2) election to associate membership; (3) election to provisional membership; and (4) election to full conference membership.

d) To evaluate and make recommendations concerning character and effectiveness of clergy, and to equip, train, and elect mentors;

e) To evaluate and make recommendations for all elections to, renewal of, and changes concerning certified candidates and conference relationship of clergy;³⁷

f) To keep records of all changes of conference relationship and place a copy in the permanent records of the annual conference, and to ensure confidentiality in relation to the interview and reporting process. There are occasions when the Board of Ordained Ministry would not report privileged information, which in the judgment of the board, if revealed in the clergy session of the annual conference, would be an undue invasion of privacy without adding measurably to the conference's information about the person's qualifications for ordained ministry. However, it is the right of the clergy session of the annual conference to receive all pertinent information, confidential or otherwise, related to the qualifications and/or character of any candidate or clergy member of the conference, subject to the laws of the country.³⁸

g) To report in a timely manner any change in the conference relationship of a clergy member of the conference to the applicable board of pension.

h) To be in consultation with the bishop through the chairperson regarding transfers. This consultation is to be at the bishop's initiative.

i) To provide support services for the clergy, including counseling, continuing education, continuing spiritual growth in Christ, evaluating the effectiveness, and assistance in preparation for retirement.

k) To work with and support the Order of Deacon and the Order of Elder, and the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members. >VII: 539.003-539.004<

4. *Membership*— The membership of the Board of Ordained Ministry shall consist of at least six ordained clergy in full membership and at least one-fifth laypersons. All laypersons shall be professing members of local churches in the annual conference.

>VII: 539.005<

GBOD ¶ 539.1 = 635.1+1b+NEW305.6; 539.2=new; 539.3a=635.2a; 539.3b=new; 539.3c=635.2h; 539.3d=635.new+2f; 539.3e-f=635.2j-m; 539.2g=635.2z; 539h-k-=635.2n-p; 539.4=635.1

³⁷ See Judicial Council Decisions 405, 1263.

³⁸ See Judicial Council Decision 406.

Section VI. Provisional Annual Conferences

¶ 541. *Purpose*— A provisional annual conference shares the same purpose with an annual conference, but because of its limited membership, does not qualify for annual conference status. The creation of a provisional annual conference is part of a missional development which should lead to an annual conference within twelve years.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶541=580

¶ 542. *Powers and Duties*— 1. Any mission established under the provisions of the *Discipline*, and any geographical part of an annual conference may be constituted as a provisional annual conference by the General Conference, upon recommendation by the central conference or provisional central conference, within which it is located, and in consultation with the General Board of Global Ministries and the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, provided that:

a) No provisional annual conference shall be organized with fewer than ten elders in provisional or full connection, or be continued, after completion of the initial quadrennium, with fewer than six elders in full connection.

b) Membership, worship attendance, leadership development, and financial contributions have shown a reasonable progress during the previous quadrennium and give evidence for continued growth towards becoming an annual conference.

2. A provisional annual conference shall be organized in the same manner and have the same powers and functions as an annual conference, subject to the approval of the bishop in charge.

3. If a provisional annual conference, after three quadrennia, does not show progress towards becoming an annual conference, the following session of the central conference shall review said conference, consult with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, and recommend to the following General Conference on continuation or discontinuation as a provisional annual conference. The provisional annual conference shall only be continued with sufficient missional, geographical, and contextual reasons.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 542.1+a+b = 581Intro+1+3; 542.2=582Intro; 542.3=new

¶ 543. *Membership*— A provisional annual conference shall be organized with the same provisions for membership as an annual conference.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 543 = new

¶ 544. *Conference Session*— 1. A provisional annual conference shall be organized with the same provisions for a conference session as an annual conference insofar as they are considered applicable by the bishop in charge.

2. The bishop in charge may appoint a superintendent to whom may be committed specific responsibility as liaison to the General Board of Global Ministries.

3. In a provisional annual conference receiving major funding from the General Board of Global Ministries, the assigned staff of the board shall provide consultation and guidance in setting up the annual budget and Advance projects within the conference, aiming to increase self-support.

4. A provisional annual conference shall elect one clergy and one layperson as delegates to the General Conference. Delegates to central conferences shall be elected in accordance with ¶ 513.1.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 544.1 = new; 544.2=582.1; 544.3=582.3; 544.4=582.4

Section VII. District Conferences

¶ 551. *District Conferences*— Each central conference shall establish provisions for organizing within annual conferences District Conferences, district administrative structures, and district agencies, or delegate such power to the annual conferences within its boundaries. Jurisdictional conferences shall follow the procedures in Part VII of the *Discipline*.

>VII: 551.001-551.007<

GBOD ¶ 551 = new, cf. 658+659.1

Section VIII. Missions

¶ 561. *Purpose* -1. The purpose of a mission is to provide and develop ministry with a particular group or region whose potential and need cannot be met within the existing structures and resources of annual or district conference(s). A mission may also be the initial stage in moving toward the formation of a provisional annual conference.

2. In accordance with the Wesleyan ecumenical spirit, in all phases of mission development, the initiating United Methodist entities will consult with, and where possible create cooperative relationships with Wesleyan communions. They will promote relationships with other denominations serving in the area, and with interdenominational and ecumenical organizations. Where appropriate, they will engage in dialogue with interfaith agencies and organizations.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 561 = 590

¶ 562. *Powers and Duties*— 1. A mission is an organizational body for a field of work inside, outside, or across the structures of annual conferences, or provisional annual conferences.

2. A mission may be established by the General Board of Global Ministries, or by a central or annual conference in cooperation with the General Board of Global Ministries.

3. The boundaries for a mission established by a central or annual conference(s) in cooperation with the General Board of Global Ministries are to be determined by the central or annual conference(s) and the General Board of Global Ministries. If a mission is established by the General Board of Global Ministries outside territories of a central or provisional central conference, the General Board of Global Ministries will establish the boundaries.

4. a) When the mission lies within the bounds of one episcopal area, the resident bishop shall preside over the mission.

b) When the mission crosses the boundaries of one or more episcopal areas, central or jurisdictional conferences, the College(s) of Bishops, in consultation with the general secretary of the General Board

of Global Ministries, shall assign a bishop to the mission.

c) When the mission lies outside the bounds of an established episcopal area in central or jurisdictional conferences, the Council of Bishops, in consultation with the general secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries, will assign a bishop to be its presiding officer.

5. The entity or entities establishing a mission, in collaboration with the assigned bishop will seek a cooperative agreement with an annual conference which will serve as the correspondent annual conference to the mission for the purposes of ordination and conference membership as well as for local pastor licensing.

6. The annual meeting of the mission shall have the power to certify candidates for the ordained ministry, to receive and to examine mission pastors and local elders in mission, and to recommend to an annual conference proper persons for provisional or full membership and ordination.

7. The entity or entities initiating a mission shall be responsible for its administration and development and for making sure that the mission sets up, organizes and implements the necessary mechanisms and processes to fulfill the functions of the mission.

8. Neither the mission nor its officers shall assume financial obligations or make financial commitments on behalf of the General Board of Global Ministries without the board's written authorization.

9. Recommendations for a change of status of a mission shall be made by the entity or entities which established the mission.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 562 = 591

¶ 563. *Membership* - 1. A mission shall be made up of all regularly appointed missionaries, both lay and clergy, local elders in mission, mission pastors, and other lay members. The mission shall determine the number of lay members and the method of their selection. In so doing, it shall ensure that all aspects of the mission's work are represented.³⁹

2. In territories outside the boundaries of central or annual conferences, the bishop assigned to the mission and the General Board of Global Ministries recommend the educational requirements for local elders in mission and mission pastors. Such recommendations and requirements shall be approved by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

a) Local elders in mission are ordained members of the mission and are not members of an annual conference. Local elders in mission are limited in their itineration and sacramental authority to the bounds of the mission and as such are not eligible to transfer their credentials to another annual conference.

b) Mission pastors are members of the mission without being members of an annual conference. The mission shall determine the requirements for a mission pastor in order to most effectively utilize the indigenous leadership. Mission pastors are limited in their itineration to the bounds of the mission.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 563=592;

³⁹ See Judicial Council Decision 341.

¶ 564. *Annual Meeting*— 1. A mission shall meet annually at the time and place designated by the bishop in charge, who shall preside. In the absence of the bishop, a superintendent of the mission shall preside. The presiding officer shall bring forward the regular business of the meeting and arrange the work.

2. The assigned bishop, in consultation with the entity or entities establishing the mission, may appoint one or more superintendents of the mission.

3. At the annual meeting, the bishop shall assign the missionaries, local elders in mission, and mission pastors to the several charges for the ensuing year; provided that transfer of missionaries related to the General Board of Global Ministries shall be completed only after consultation with the board.

4. A mission related to a central conference is authorized to elect and send one lay and one clergy to the central conference as its representative, with voice but not vote.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 564 = 593

Section IX. Joining The United Methodist Church

¶ 571. *Joining The United Methodist Church* -1. A church outside the United States may join The United Methodist Church when all of the following requirements are fulfilled:

a) Said church shall accept and approve the Constitution, Articles of Faith, *Discipline*, and polity of The United Methodist Church.

b) Said church, if it is within the boundaries of a central or provisional central conference, shall apply for membership in that conference. Such application shall be reviewed and recommended by the central or provisional central conference. In the event that said church is not within the boundaries of an existing central or provisional central conference, then its membership application shall be reviewed and recommended by the Council of Bishops.

c) Said church shall declare that, upon consummation of becoming an integral part of The United Methodist Church, its former constitution and church order becomes null and void.

2. The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters shall advise and assist said church in the process of joining The United Methodist Church and prepare the necessary enabling act for approval by the General Conference, including necessary adjustments in the organization of the central or provisional central conferences.

>VII: —<

GBOD ¶ 571.1 = 575Intro+.1-3; 571.2=575.4-5