

# What is the Organizational Structure of The United Methodist Church?

The polity of The United Methodist Church is grounded in conferencing, bringing lay and clergy leaders together to discern and make decisions guiding the ministries of the church. This happens in local churches, districts, annual and regional conferences, and the General Conference. Leadership in general agencies is grounded in ongoing conferencing between elected boards and agency staff along with a leadership body called the Connectional Table which brings leaders together to consider the overall trajectory of the work and the needs and opportunities for the Church as a whole. At the General Conference, lay and clergy delegates elected from each annual conference deliberate together over petitions and resolutions contributed by United Methodists worldwide

## The Local Church

The local church regularly gathers disciples of Jesus for worship and connects them to opportunities for growth in discipleship, service and mission in the world. It provides spiritual, physical, and emotional support in its community and is connected to a district and an annual conference, keeping it rooted in the broader UMC family. Pastors are appointed by a bishop, in consultation with a District Superintendent. There are approximately 40,000 United Methodist churches worldwide.

## District

A district is a sub-region of an annual conference that develops common mission strategy across that area and helps connect resourcing for ministry from the annual conference to the churches and people of that area.

## Annual Conference

The annual conference is the basic organizational body of The United Methodist Church. It is where ministry is coordinated, clergy are ordained, and decisions are made about the mission and governance of the church within a specific region. Each annual conference is led by a bishop; in some cases, a single bishop may oversee more than one annual conference. Each annual conference elects an equal number of clergy and lay delegates to represent them at jurisdictional or regional conferences, and at the global General Conference. There are approximately 137 annual conferences worldwide.

## Regional Conferences

Regional Conferences have both legislative and elective roles for geographic areas beyond individual annual conferences. Everywhere, they may adapt some parts of the Book of Discipline to serve the needs of their context better. They also receive and process requests for annual conferences within them to become autonomous Methodist denominations. Outside the US, they set the boundaries of annual conferences, elect bishops and assign them to their episcopal areas and elect officers for their region and as board members for general agencies and other churchwide organizations. In the US, these three functions are performed by the jurisdictions. The US Regional Conference has primarily a legislative role.

The United Methodist Church has nine regional conferences:

- Africa: East Africa, Mid Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa
- Asia: Philippines
- Europe: Central and Southern Europe, Germany, and Nordic-Baltic-Ukraine
- The United States

Each of them contains several annual conferences and often several countries.

See [UMC.org/en/content/regional-conferences](https://www.UMC.org/en/content/regional-conferences) for more information.

## General Conference

The General Conference is the highest legislative body of The United Methodist Church and meets every four years. It is the only body that can speak officially for the entire denomination. Delegates – an equal number of clergy and laypersons – are elected from each annual conference around the world to participate. Together, they set church law, approve budgets, revise The Book of Discipline, and The Book of Resolutions, and guide the global mission and ministry of the church.