

## **UMC Organization: The Church as Connection**

United Methodist leaders often speak of the denomination as “the connection.” This concept has been central to Methodism from its beginning.

The United Methodist structure and organization began as a means of accomplishing the mission of spreading scriptural holiness. Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability and developed what he called the “connexion,” a network of classes, societies, and annual conferences.

Today, our denomination continues to be organized in a “connectional” system, which “enables us to carry out our mission in unity and strength” (Book of Discipline, ¶ 701). Every local church is linked to an interconnected network of organizations that join together in mission and ministry, allowing us to accomplish far more than any one local church or person could alone.

Within the connectional structure of The United Methodist Church, conferences provide the primary groupings of people and churches for discernment and decision-making. Wesley described Christian conferencing as a spiritual discipline through which God’s grace may be revealed. At every level of the connection, church leaders and members come together in conversation, or conferencing, to discuss important issues and discover God’s will for the church. The word, conference, thus refers to both the assembly and organization of people as well as the process of discerning God’s call together.

### **General Conference**

As the primary legislative body, General Conference is the only entity with the authority to speak on behalf of the entire United Methodist Church. The General Conference meets every four years to consider the business and mission of the church. An equal number of lay and clergy delegates are elected from United Methodist conferences around the world to decide matters of policy and procedure for the denomination.

### **Jurisdictional Conferences**

There are five geographic jurisdictions, or regions, in the United States, which are comprised of eight to 15 annual conferences each.

### **Central Conferences**

In Africa, Europe and the Philippines, there are seven geographical regions, called central conferences, each of which is comprised of annual conferences and divided into several episcopal areas.

### **Annual Conferences**

The annual conference is a geographical entity, an organizational body (made up of elected lay and clergy members), and a yearly meeting. It is the fundamental body of the church (Book of Discipline, ¶ 11).

### **Districts**

Each local church is part of a district, which is an administrative grouping of churches in a geographic area.

### **Charge Conferences and Local Churches**

As the visible presence of the body of Christ, the local church is the place where members grow in faith and discipleship, putting their faith into action through ministry in the world.

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