

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the major changes in this proposal?

- The Global Connectional Conference will replace the General Conference and will only be responsible for those functions and matters of The UMC that are global in nature.
- Non-global or regionally contextual ministry matters would be assigned to four connections: one each in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America (Note: The North America Connection would include Central America. The Methodist denominations in South America are currently autonomous Methodist churches).
- Each connection will have the option to organize into regions equivalent to the current central conferences in Africa, Asia, and Europe and the jurisdictions in the United States.
- The proposal recommends a Global Book of Discipline, as well as connectional books of discipline. Currently, only the central conferences can adapt the Book of Discipline.

How will the proposed “Global Connectional Conference” differ from the current “General Conference”?

The proposed quadrennial Global Connectional Conference will be similar to the current quadrennial General Conference, except that its focus will only be on global matters. Currently, a majority of the time at General Conference is spent on U.S.-centric issues. A focus on global matters will shorten the length of the Global Connectional Conference and allow it to concentrate on matters of importance to all connections, not just one. For example, the agenda could include time for each connection to share ministry successes and challenges. This would give all the connections an opportunity to understand similarities and differences in cultural contexts and to discover ways to assist in overcoming challenges, as we all seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Why do we need another level of church organization?

Because ministry concerns vary between continents where UMC churches are located, this organizational structure encourages each of the four identical connections to focus on matters of importance to that connection. They are designed to provide opportunities to revitalize ministries and discuss new ideas and thoughts that are relevant in the context of a connection’s ministries.

What Book of Discipline paragraphs will be included in the Global Book of Discipline?

This proposal anticipates that the paragraphs in the current Book of Discipline (BoD) that are global in nature will be included in the Global BoD and others will be included in the connectional books of discipline. We have not specified the allocation between the two in this proposal because other UMC bodies (Connectional Table, Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, and Committee on Faith and Order) are already developing a Global BoD for action by the 2016 General Conference. The Task Force decided we should not duplicate their work and plans to review the Global BoD when it is available. General Conference will need to find the balance between what is and is not global.

How will having separate Books of Discipline affect ordination and itinerancy?

Ordination, orders, and licensing will be under the purview of the connections, with an acknowledgement that the roles, expectations, and needs are different around the globe. The possibility exists that the connections may allow their regions to have different requirements, and that would be a decision made by the connection as a whole.

Itinerancy in The UMC refers to clergy moves within annual conferences, and by extension within a region and a connection. Consistency of ordination provisions would enable itinerancy to continue easily within connections. The Task Force's proposal does not include a recommendation regarding whether itinerancy provisions should be included in the Global Book of Discipline or in the connection books of discipline.

Would the new structure change the understanding that we are a global church?

The Task Force expects that this proposal will strengthen the understanding that The UMC is a global church. By assigning global responsibilities to the Global Connection and non-global responsibilities to the connections, this proposal hopefully allows both the global church and the connections to thrive. Currently U.S concerns dominate General Conference, taking time and energy that could be used to focus on global issues during that gathering. This proposal will empower the Global Connection to thrive at being the global church, and empower the connections and regions to thrive at being United Methodist in ways most appropriate to their context.

What does regionalizing mean to those who are marginalized outside the U.S.? Separation may limit the ability to seek justice across the globe.

While people in one connection may disagree with decisions of another connection, this proposal allows each connection to decide about issues of justice within its own context. At the same time, there will be global rules, and the Global Connection will retain the capacity to decide issues of justice on the global scale. Unfortunately, our system currently does not protect all marginalized people in all places. It does trust that United Methodists around the world will seek justice for all marginalized people, wherever they may live.

Does this change what it means to be United Methodist?

For some, it may. We hope for the better. The current system is not one of equity around the world. We hope this revised proposal will change that. For example, renaming the General Conference to the Global Connectional Conference and the central conferences and jurisdictions to regions highlights our connectional heritage. But name changes are not sufficient. The proposed structure is designed to foster stronger connections globally and within the continental connections. We have worked hard to retain the basic identity of The United Methodist Church.

Will the addition of the four connections increase costs of the United Methodist structure?

It may. There will probably be some additional costs related to connectional conferences, committees, etc., but these costs may be offset by a possible reduction in costs related to the meeting of the Global Connection. If the business of the North America connection is removed from the agenda of the Global Connectional Conference, the duration of that meeting will be less than the current General Conference, perhaps by three or four days, resulting in a reduction in costs for that meeting.

The most significant increase in costs will probably involve the meetings of the connectional conferences. This proposal would require each connectional conference to meet quadrennially, prior to the Global Connectional Conference. Depending upon when and where the connectional conferences meet, the incremental cost of these meetings is estimated to be between US\$300,000 and US\$1,000,000. GCFA will be asked to develop more accurate cost projections.

Any incremental cost increases will also need to be examined in the context of the overall budget for the 2016 General Conference budget of over US\$10 million.