

Constitutional Amendments

Group 1 – Proposed Constitutional Amendments on the Worldwide Nature of the Church

Subgroup A, Changing “Central” Conferences to “Regional Conferences”: Amendments III, V, VII, XI, XII, XIV, XVI, XVIII, XX, XXI, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, XXXII.

These proposed Constitutional amendments would change the nomenclature for areas outside the United States of America from “central” conferences to “regional” conferences.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ Currently, economic and political power in The United Methodist Church is centered in the United States. This damages our witness as the body of Christ and disempowers central conferences.
- ◆ Creating the possibility of similar structures across our worldwide denomination will enable the witness of the global community of faith within our connectional spirit and structure, increase a sense of parity in decision-making across the UMC, and strengthen on-going discussion about specific structural changes to be proposed.
- ◆ The Council of Bishops’ Task Force on the Global Nature of the Church recommended this structure in its report. The Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table approved the Task Force’s report and sent legislation to General Conference, which approved it with more than a 2/3 vote.
- ◆ The proposed constitutional amendments do not change our jurisdictions within the United States, change the way bishops are elected or assigned, or change the way the Social Principles are decided upon or amended.
- ◆ These constitutional amendments changing the nomenclature from “central” to “regional” conferences” are important in disassociating ourselves from past racist structures in Methodism. From the formation of The Methodist Church in 1939 until the formation of The United Methodist Church in 1968, the church perpetuated and institutionalized patterns of racism through the racially segregated “central conference” structure in the United States. Changing the nomenclature for the current “central conferences” outside the United States to “regional conferences” will further distance us from a racist past and affirm our desire to set aside racial barriers.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ These amendments are a part of a “package” of proposed constitutional changes which are premature and flawed. While these amendments do not create any structural changes, the entire “package” should be set aside until a clearer plan of re-structuring is agreed upon.
- ◆ The United Methodist Constitution requires a super-majority for passage of amendments to ensure that fundamental revisions of our doctrine, polity and missional structure are not made without clear understanding of the new directions being proposed. Passage of these amendments at this time will grant a future General Conference the authority to restructure the church through majority vote, rather than requiring the changes to come back to the annual conferences for review and approval.
- ◆ The Constitution should not be amended until the 2009-2012 Worldwide Nature of the Church Study Committee has studied the issues and made its recommendations. Until the Study Committee comes in with its report, we have absolutely no way of estimating the increased cost of this structure, thereby increasing the denominational expenditures on a continually smaller congregational base in the U.S. When asked at General Conference about the cost of this, the folks who put it together acted as if the question was totally irrelevant.

Subgroup B, Making the United States a Regional Conference or Conferences or Giving what are Currently Central Conference Characteristics to the United States: Amendments IV, X, XIII, XXIII, XXVI.

These proposed constitutional amendments allow the General Conference to create similar structures for all of our world-wide church. Each Annual Conference would belong to a Regional Conference. These amendments involve making the United States into a regional conference (or conferences) or give what are currently Central Conference characteristics to the United States.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ The same schools of thought discussed in support of Amendments III, V, VII, XI, XII, XIV, XVI, XVIII, XX, XXI, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, and XXXII are applicable to these amendments.
- ◆ Specifically, the proposed constitutional amendments will prepare the way for The United Methodist Church in the United States to be structured as a “regional conference or regional conferences.” (per Judicial Council ruling 1100) This structure would provide a venue for The United Methodist Church in the United States to address issues unique to this nation.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ No specific plan for restructuring of The United Methodist Church around “regional conferences” has been presented or agreed upon. The passage of these amendments requiring the creation of regional conference (s) in the United States is premature.
- ◆ The creation of a regional conference centered in the United States may cause an inward focus and create greater distance in the relationship between The United Methodist Church in the United States and our United Methodist church in other parts of the world.
- ◆ Proposed Amendment XIII could permit the United States, as a region or regions, to change and adapt *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (the “*Discipline*”) as its conditions may require, and could permit the region(s) to appoint a judicial court to determine legal questions arising out of these changes and adaptations. Too much uncertainty exists as to what all this means in the structure and *Discipline* of the church.
- ◆ Creating a Regional Conference for the US would probably create another layer of bureaucracy of boards and agencies at the Regional level.
- ◆ The same schools of thought discussed in opposition to Amendments III, V, VII, XI, XII, XIV, XVI, XVIII, XX, XXI, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, XXXI, and XXXII are applicable to these amendments.

Group 2 – The Inclusiveness Amendment: Amendment I Dealing With Paragraph 4

Proposed constitutional amendment I emphasizes the wideness of God’s mercy and the availability of the ministry of the church to all. Amendment I revises language in Division One, ¶ 4, Article IV specifying that The United Methodist Church is in ministry to all. Additionally, more detailed language about “race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition” is replaced with “all persons.”

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ The United Methodist Church is committed to inclusiveness and to being in ministry to and with all persons. This amendment strengthens our commitment by placing clearer and broader language in the constitutional article which most directly deals with the *Inclusiveness of the Church*.
- ◆ The proposed amendment replaces cumbersome lists identifying race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition with succinct and direct language.

- ◆ This amendment clarifies that no member of any constituent body can be barred from membership in The United Methodist Church so long as that person is prepared to take vows declaring the Christian faith and relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ◆ *The Discipline* has been used to exclude persons who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered from membership in the church. In the past, *The Discipline* has also been used to exclude women and people of color from full and equal participation in the life of the church. This amendment clarifies that all are welcome as members.
- ◆ *The Discipline* is silent on the issue of pastors' determining readiness. That was dropped from *The Discipline* when pastors were using it to bar membership in the church on the basis of skin color. Inclusiveness is a part of our Wesleyan heritage and United Methodist ethos. We extend the love and grace of Jesus Christ to all.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ The proposed amendment could be used as a foundation by the Judicial Council to overturn current UM Disciplinary positions related to homosexual practice.
- ◆ The language of "all" is so broad and undefined that it could have unintended consequences while negating the pastor's or congregation's ability to exercise appropriate discernment in matters membership.
- ◆ The proposed amendment leaves the decision about readiness for membership solely with the person seeking membership in the church. This is inconsistent with the practice and tradition in Methodism in which the pastor had a role to play in determining readiness for membership.
- ◆ The passage of the proposed amendment could provide a constitutional foundation for the Judicial Council to reinterpret their decision 1032. The rationale includes "The appointed pastor in charge has the duty and responsibility to exercise responsible pastoral judgment in determining who may be received into the membership of a local church."
- ◆ Judicial Council Decision 1032 supported the decision of a Virginia pastor who refused membership to a man, who is a self-avowed, practicing homosexual. While some believe that this amendment is an appropriate remedy, others believe the broad implications of this for the meaning of membership, pastoral authority and the responsibility of local church leaders make it ill advised.

Group 3 – Miscellaneous Amendments

Voting Rights for Local Pastors: Amendment XIX

This Amendment would expand the ability to vote for General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates to "...associate members, and those provisional members who have completed all of their educational requirements and local pastors who have completed the Course of Study or an M. Div. degree and have served a minimum of two consecutive years under appointment immediately preceding the election."

PRO School of Thought

To offer justice and equality to associate members, local pastors and provisional members who serve faithfully as pastors in our local congregations – many of whom serve smaller membership churches that are located in both urban and town and country settings serving marginalized populations.

- ◆ To enable these persons to have their voices and perspectives heard through the elected delegates at General and Jurisdictional Conferences.
- ◆ Voting rights should be linked with conference membership not ordination which parallels language ¶136 concerning laity.
- ◆ The two years under appointment allows the pastor to gain an appreciation of the annual conference as a clergy member within the United Methodist Church.
- ◆ This proposed amendment would not affect:
 - Voting on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations,
 - Clergy delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conference must be Full Members,
 - Appointment as District Superintendent and election as Bishop are reserved to ordained elders
- ◆ There is continued growth in the number of Local Pastors and Associate Members in the US:

○ 1988	4,983 Local Pastors	1,672 Associate members	Total 6,655
○ 2008	7,258 Local Pastors	2,037 Associate Members	Total 9,295
- ◆ The United Methodist Rural Fellowship estimates that approximately 6,807 additional persons would be granted the right to vote on representation for General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ Full Members of the annual conference have training in UM polity, history, and doctrine as well as several years of experience in leadership within those areas in the annual conference.
- ◆ Local churches are represented by laity, not by clergy. Clergy are elected to represent the annual conference and therefore should be full members of the annual conference.
- ◆ Clergy delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conference have traditionally been elected by and from those who are “Full Members” of the annual conference.
- ◆ Full Members of the annual conference typically have greater knowledge of and appreciation for the annual conference.
- ◆ This constitutional amendment further separates us from the historic ecumenical connection with the Anglican Church and others: a connection which John Wesley valued and sought to maintain as he began to order the life of the Methodist Church in America.
- ◆ As the rules currently stand, only ordained clergy can vote for ordained Elders and Deacons to be clergy delegates to General and Jurisdictional Conferences. This amendment will give the right to vote for ordained Elder and Deacon Delegates to persons who
 - have not been ordained (Local Pastors are examined and approved)
 - have answered some, but not all of the historical questions asked of those who are ordained including:
 - Whether they believe our doctrines are in harmony with Scripture and if they will teach and maintain them.
 - Whether they approve of our Church government and polity and if they will support and maintain them.

Conflict of Interest Policies: Amendment II

The proposed amendment requires the adoption of ethics and conflict of interest policies to ensure accountability and fiduciary integrity.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ Ensure integrity and fiduciary accountability

CON School of Thought

- ◆ The mandatory language in the Constitution is too broad. It would require every group in each local United Methodist Church to impose ethics and conflict of interest policies.
 - a. Groups would include, but not be limited to UMW, UMM, UMYF, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, all “groups” in ministry at a local UMC.
 - b. Not every “group” needs an ethics and conflict of interest policy
 - c. Mandatory language this is unnecessary encourages disregard for that portion of the Discipline which also affects the rest of the Discipline
- ◆ Legislation is already being drafted for the 2012 General Conference by Conference Chancellors to place appropriate ethics and conflict of interest policy requirement in the book of discipline

Representation for Newly Created Conferences: Amendment VI

This amendment provides an avenue for General Conference to establish representation for newly created conferences on a non-proportional basis under certain circumstances for a transitional time period.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ The Methodist Church of Cote d’Ivoire applied for and was granted membership in the United Methodist Church at the 2004 General Conference with the provision for less representation at General Conference 2008 than their membership would require. An ensuing Judicial Council decision determined that the limited representation would stand despite no provision for “transitional” status in the Constitution. This amendment rectifies this circumstance.
- ◆ A transitional status allows General Conference to receive new bodies into the UMC while permitting time to determine accurate membership data.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ This amendment deprives new conferences and bodies joining The United Methodist Church of equal representation and creates a two-class system of representation at General Conference.
- ◆ The permissive language of the amendment (“may”) opens the door to unequal and potentially prejudicial treatment of conferences and bodies seeking affiliation with The United Methodist Church.
- ◆ Many believe that the 2004 General Conference action to admit the Cote D’Ivoire Annual Conference was illegal, because *The Discipline* does not provide for a transitional period. If that is so, then The Judicial Council inappropriately affirmed that illegal action. Retroactively amending the constitution to correct previous errors is not good policy.

Membership Without Reference to Gender: Amendment VIII

The amendment recommends adding gender to the categories of persons protected against discriminatory treatment in the denomination's global foundations document.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ Given our long standing work in eliminating gender bias and sexual misconduct in the Church, it is glaring that gender is not included in the duties of the General Conference. This amendment will provide this inclusiveness.
- ◆ For the Church to model the community of Jesus Christ, our ministries must not be based on the norms of our cultures regarding gender, but based on love lived in action, following the mandate of Christ.

CON School of Thought

None

No Jurisdictional Conference Shall Have Fewer than 100 Delegates: Amendment IX

This amendment will ensure a minimum basis of support for the election of bishops at Jurisdictional Conferences.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ All Jurisdictional Conferences shall have the same status and the same privileges of action within the limits fixed by the Constitution. Since Bishops are elected at Jurisdictional Conferences, it is important to ensure some minimum basis of support for election. This will establish a minimum number of delegates to Jurisdictional Conference.

CON School of Thought

None

Annual Conference Membership to be Defined by General Conference: Amendment XV

Proposed Constitutional Amendment XV allows the General Conference to define laity and clergy membership of the annual conference without going through the complicated process of changing the constitution.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ The proposed amendment simplifies the process by allowing the definition of laity and clergy of the annual conference to be defined by the General Conference without going through the process of changing the constitution.
- ◆ This portion of *The Discipline, Section VI, Article 1 of the Constitution*, has been amended 16 times since 1968.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ The constitution is the logical place to define the clergy members of the annual conference. Changing the definition should be a very intentional decision, with deliberation and agreement by the annual conferences through the process of changing the constitution.

Voting Rights of Lay Members on Committee on Investigation: Amendment XVII

Proposed Constitutional Amendment XVII supports reinstatement of legislation adopted by the 2004 General Conference (and subsequently declared unconstitutional by the Judicial Council) to allow lay persons on the Conference Committee on Investigation to vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ The United Methodist Church has been intentional in approving legislation allowing participation of laity on Conference Boards of Ordained Ministry and District Committees on Ordained Ministry with voice and vote. As such, lay members of the Conference Boards of Ministry and District Boards of Ministry are invited to attend the Clergy Session of Annual Conference and may vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy.
- ◆ Lay members of Annual Conference Committees on Investigation have both voice and vote which means they have already “investigated” charges that have been brought about clergy and have participated in the committee vote concerning matters of ordination, character and conference relations and have been a part of careful discernment regarding those decisions and the implications of such.
- ◆ If this constitutional amendment is affirmed, provision would need to be made to invite lay members of the Conference Committee of Investigation to participate in the Clergy Session at Annual Conference with voice and vote.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ It is the belief of many that the traditional relationship between laity and clergy in which laity cannot vote on matters of ordination, character, and conference relations of clergy should remain.
- ◆ There is currently no provision for lay members of the Committee on Investigation to attend the Clergy Session of Annual Conference.

Northeastern Jurisdiction to Include Bermuda: Amendment XXII

Proposed Constitutional Amendment XXII allows “Bermuda” to be added before “Connecticut” in the listing of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference.

PRO School of Thought

- ◆ The proposed amendment formally recognizes that the Baltimore-Washington Conference has been appointing pastors, superintending the congregations, and integrating the congregations of Bermuda into the life of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.
- ◆ The General Board of Global Ministries and the Baltimore-Washington Conference recognize these churches as United Methodist congregations.
- ◆ The proposed amendment would make official what is already being done in practice.

CON School of Thought

- ◆ It seems a bit odd to include Bermuda as a part of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference because of the geography. However, this is already what is being done in practice.