

Local Churches

Most individuals have their initial contact with the denomination in the local church. Some local church members don't realize that they are part of a bigger whole or connection: an annual conference, a jurisdiction, the General Church, and churches and annual conferences around the world.

The Book of Discipline outlines rules and organization that local churches must follow providing ample room for a local church to adapt its distinctive ministries and mission to the needs, circumstances, and culture of its congregation and the local community.

Districts and District Superintendents

Each local church is part of a district, which is an administrative grouping of churches in a geographic area. Groups of churches in a geographic area are organized to form a district, somewhat similar to the way cities and towns are organized into counties.

Each district is led by a district superintendent ("DS"), an elder appointed by the bishop, usually for a six-year term. The DS oversees the ministry of the district's clergy and churches, provides spiritual and pastoral leadership, works with the bishop and others in the appointment of ordained ministers to serve the district's churches, presides at meetings of the charge conference, and oversees programs within the district.

Bishops

Each bishop provides oversight of the ministry and mission of annual conferences in his or her area and appoints all clergy to their places of service. Bishops are elected by Jurisdictional Conferences and assigned to a particular area, made up of one or more annual conferences. Bishops are assigned by their jurisdiction to serve a geographical area for a four-year term.

Cabinet

The cabinet is the organization in an annual conference whose membership consists of the resident bishop and the district superintendents. The Cabinet provides oversight and direction for the work of the annual conference, districts, and local churches. The Cabinet works as a unit on developing the appointments for the ministerial members, which are made or fixed by the bishop.

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.

Regional body

The annual (sometimes referred to as 'regional') conference is described by the church's Constitution and (other parts of the) Book of Discipline as the "basic unit" of the church.

In the United States, an annual conference may cover an entire state, only part of the state, or even parts of two or more states. There are also three missionary conferences in the United States, which rely upon the denomination as a whole for funding.

The United States has 54 annual conferences, supervised by bishops in 46 episcopal areas. There are 75 annual conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, which are supervised by 20 bishops.

Organizational body

In the U.S., the annual conference has a central office and professional staff that coordinate and conduct ministry and the business of the conference. It likely has a director of connectional ministries, treasurer, directors of program areas (such as camping), communications director, and other staff as deemed appropriate for the annual conference and as required by the Book of Discipline. Clergy and laypersons may also serve on conference boards, commissions and committees.

Annual Conference sessions

Each year an equal number of clergy members and lay members attend their conference's annual conference session for worship, fellowship, and to conduct the business of the conference, which may last 3-5 days. These sessions include reports of past and ongoing work; adoption of future goals, programs and budgets; ordination of clergy members as deacons and elders; and election of delegates to Jurisdictional and General Conferences (every 4 years). The bishop presides over these meetings.

Jurisdictional Conferences

There are five geographic jurisdictions, or regions, in the United States, which are comprised of eight to 15 annual conferences each. In the United States of America, The United Methodist Church is divided into five areas known as jurisdictions: Northeastern, Southeastern, North Central, South Central and Western. These provide some program and leadership training events to support the annual conferences. Every four years the jurisdictional conferences meet to elect new bishops and select members of general boards and agencies.

The United Methodist Church does not have a central headquarters or a single executive leader. Duties are divided among bodies that include the General Conference, the Council of Bishops and the Judicial Council. Each of these entities is required by our Constitution, a foundational document, to be part of our structure, and plays a significant role in the life of the church.

General Conference

No person or organization except the General Conference, which convenes every four years, has authority to speak officially for the denomination. General Conference, the denomination's top policy-making body, has a maximum of 1,000 delegates half clergy, half lay, from around the world. The conference revises church law and the "Social Principles" (related to a wide range of social and economic concerns) and adopts resolutions on various current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for churchwide programs for the next four years.

Bishops attend the General Conference but cannot vote. Different bishops serve as presiding officers during the conference. Other bishops cannot speak unless permission is specifically granted by the delegates.

Council of Bishops

The Council of Bishops gives general oversight of the ministry and mission of the church and spiritual leadership to the entire church connection. Composed of all active and retired bishops. The Council meets twice a year. According to the Book of Discipline, "The Church expects the Council of Bishops to speak to the Church and from the Church to the world and to give leadership in the quest for Christian unity and interreligious relationships."

Judicial Council

As the denomination's highest judicial body or "court," the Judicial Council's nine members, made up of laity and clergy, are elected by the General Conference and normally meet twice a year to consider whether actions of the various church bodies adhere to the constitution and follow the rules outlined in the Book of Discipline. Their cases are generally referred to them by action of the Council of Bishops, the annual conferences or the General Conference. According to the Constitution, decisions of the Judicial Council are final.

Source: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/organization-church-as-connection>
<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/glossary>