You Want to Be a Delegate to General Conference?

You may have heard that the General Conference will convene, May 2028, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where 708 lay and clergy from around the world will gather to make decisions on behalf of The United Methodist Church. For more information visit: https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2028

You may have gone through a process of discernment and would like to offer yourself for consideration to be elected as a delegate to General or Regional/Jurisdictional Conference. The Church has long desired to have new faces and fresh perspectives be part of the decision-making body, and this guide will provide some insights on what it means to hold the sacred responsibility of being an elected delegate. If you feel called to serve as a delegate, you are stepping into an important role that requires prayer, preparation, and a spirit of service.

1. What is General Conference?

"The General Conference is the only body that can set official policy and speak for the international denomination. General Conference brings together lay and clergy delegates from four continents whose decisions will affect how millions of United Methodists do church for years to come. General Conference is the denomination's highest legislative body. As such, it has the authority to make revisions to the denomination's Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions. The Discipline is the denomination's governing document that contains its doctrine, constitution, church law, rules of organization and procedures. The Book of Resolutions contains the denomination's positions on current social issues. Resolutions expire after eight years unless General Conference readopts them.

General Conference approves the four-year budget allocating apportionments — shares of church giving—for denomination-wide ministries around the globe. General Conference also sets the formula used for apportioning the budget to annual conferences, the denomination's regional bodies, which in turn ask for apportionments from local churches."
(*Source In Part: Hahn, H. (2024, February 1). "A beginner's guide to General Conference". United Methodist News. Retrieved from www.umnews.org*)

- **The Worldwide Gathering of the Church**: General Conference sets church law, revises the *Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions*, establishes church policies, and approves worldwide mission priorities.
- **Representative Leadership**: It includes an equal number of clergy and lay delegates, elected by their annual conferences.
- **Diversity of the Body**: Delegates represent United Methodists in Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the United States, alongside embodying the worldwide nature of the church.

2. Who Can Be a Delegate?

- **Lay Delegates**: Any professing member of a United Methodist congregation for at least two years and active in the church for at least four years may be eligible. Please reference the *2020/2024 Book of Discipline* ¶37.*Article V*

- **Clergy Delegates**: The clergy delegates to the General Conference and to the jurisdictional or regional conferences shall be elected from the clergy members in full connection. Please reference the *2020/2024 Book of Discipline* ¶36.*Article IV*

3. How Are Delegates Elected?

The 2020/2024 Book of Discipline ¶16.*Article III* outlines the ratio of representation, with each annual conference entitled to at least one clergy and one lay delegate to the General Conference. Beyond this mandatory minimum, conferences are allotted their delegate slates using a formula based on their professing lay and clergy membership numbers. The delegation allocations for the coming General Conference in Minneapolis are based on the most recent membership data submitted in 2024 from annual conference journals and statistical information. The denomination currently has 51 annual conferences in the U.S., and 75 annual conferences in Africa, Europe and the Philippines

Annual Conferences: Annual conferences — the geographical entities consisting of lay and clergy voters from multiple churches — each elect their provided allotment of delegates. *The Book of Discipline* requires that laity elect the lay delegates, and clergy elect clergy delegates.

- **Nominations and Voting**: Annual Conferences set their own processes for nomination and election. However, per *The Book of Discipline*, "delegates shall be elected in a fair and open process by the annual conferences."
- **Diversity Matters**: Annual Conferences seek to elect delegations that reflect the richness of the church in terms of age, gender, ability, ethnicity, and experience.
- **Make Inquiry**: Inquire with your annual conference to familiarize yourself with the annual conferences' process for electing delegates. Know when your annual conference will be electing their delegates for General Conference. Please ask others who have served as delegates what to typically expect.

Delegate Categories:
Delegates are ELECTED by the annual conferences and NOT APPOINTED. Delegates are "seated" in the order for which they are elected by the annual conferences. Those elected first, within the allotment of delegates, are considered Primary Delegates.

- **Primary Delegates**: Primary Delegates will be seated at General Conference and will have all voting rights, privileges, and responsibilities for the work of General Conference.
- **Alternate Delegates**: Alternate Delegates will serve as a delegate to Regional or Jurisdictional Conferences. Additionally, these delegates could be asked to serve {*move up*}, should a Primary Delegate be unable to fulfill their responsibilities (either permanently or periodically during General Conference).
- **Reserve Delegates**: Reserve Delegates are those who are willing to serve, and will be able to serve should an Alternate Delegate be unable to fulfill their responsibilities (either permanently or periodically during Regional or Jurisdictional Conference)

Note: The General Conference's budget ***only*** covers the expenses of the Primary General Conference Delegates. Any Alternate or Reserve Delegate expenses are the responsibility of the individual (or some annual conferences may provide some support—check with your respective annual conference for their policies and practices).

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4. What Does a Delegate Do?

Once elected as a delegate to General Conference it is a privilege and honor. While you were elected from your annual conference, you are not representing them. It is assumed that there has been actively listening in the delegation and around the annual conference to hear the concerns of the members. However, when at General Conference, the process of voting is derived from being attentive to the work of God's Spirit and voting one's conscience.

As a Primary Delegate (those elected to be seated at General Conference)

- The General Conference will pay for your travel and lodging expenses while at General Conference. The General Conference will provide some meals while at General Conference. However, there may be additional financial resources needed that do not cover expenses, and one will need to give consideration for that personal financial investment.
- Please be prepared to be away from family and ministry responsibilities for at least two full weeks. If a layperson, you will have to take the personal time off to fully invest and participate in General Conference for the full two weeks.
- Before General Conference convenes there will be numerous meetings with delegation members to discuss and prepare for the work of General Conference. These meetings may require in-person, driving, and time for preparation.

- At General Conference, you will be seated in a legislative committee, where you are expected to have reviewed the materials from the Advance Daily Christian Advocate (and Daily Christian Advocate), and be prepared to fully engage in the life of the legislative committee.
- When not in legislative committee there will be Plenary Sessions with worship, reports, and voting on legislative matters.
- There will be opportunities to engage in fellowship and cross-cultural exchanges with United Methodists from around the world.
- The business days typically begin around 8:00a and the time of adjournment is typically 6:30p. However, there may be additional time needed for further review, delegation meetings, and preparation for the next day's work.
- After General Conference, there will be those eager to hear about your experience and anticipate a report back to your annual conference and local churches to help interpret the decisions of the General Conference.

As an Alternate Delegate (those elected to be seated at General Conference)

- The General Conference will pay only for expenses, should you engage in the work of the General Conference as a fully seated Primary Delegate (not temporarily serving).
- As an Alternate Delegate you stay ready and prepared, if you are needed to step in when a Primary Delegate is unable (for a short period or longer periods of time).
- Alternate Delegates are active observers to stay informed of all matters, so they can be an active participant should the opportunity arise.
- Depending on the Primary Delegates, oftentimes Alternate Delegates may not get an opportunity to fully participate in the activities of the General Conference, and one must be at peace and not pressure colleagues to "let you in."

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5. What Qualities Make a Good Delegate?

- **Faithfulness to The United Methodist Church**: A strong spiritual grounding in prayer, scripture, and the Wesleyan tradition.
- **Open-Mindedness**: Willingness to listen across cultures, languages, and perspectives.
- **Commitment to the Mission and Vision**: Keeping the focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- **Integrity and Courage**: Making decisions guided by conscience and love, even when issues are complex.
- **Time and Energy**: Preparing thoroughly and being present for long days of work at General Conference.

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6. Next Steps if You Feel Called

- Pray for discernment about your gifts and calling.
- Speak with your pastor, lay leader, or annual conference representatives about the election process.
- Stay informed about the life of the church locally and globally.
- Be prepared to serve with humility, courage, and love.
- If elected, being able to obtain and keep a passport and a government-issued identification.

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7. Why It Matters

To participate in the General Conference is to join heart and hand with fellow members of The United Methodist Church from our worldwide connection. Elected delegates shape the direction of The United Methodist Church for the next four years and beyond. They carry the prayers, hopes, and concerns of their annual conferences and local congregations into the global conversation. Being elected is an honor, but more importantly, it is a sacred trust to serve The United Methodist Church.

Being a delegate is more than holding a vote—it is about embodying the connection of the worldwide church. If you sense God's call, step forward with prayer, preparation, and the confidence that God's Spirit works through those who are willing to serve.