



# General Conference Report

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# General Conference Is...

- ▶ Global
- ▶ Quadrennial (every four years)
- ▶ Representative democracy
  - ▶ Elected lay/clergy delegates from every annual conference
- ▶ Parliamentary procedure/Christian conferencing



Photo courtesy of United Methodist News Service



# General Conference Offers...

- ▶ Worship
  - ▶ Bishops preach
  - ▶ Musical groups from around the world
- ▶ Celebration
  - ▶ 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of United Methodist Women
  - ▶ 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination of women
  - ▶ 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Africa University
  - ▶ 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of order of deacons
  - ▶ Imagine No Malaria at 90% of goal
- ▶ “Family reunion”
- ▶ Legislative work



# General Conference Does...

- ▶ Updates the denomination's **policies** and **positions**
  - ▶ **Policies:** How the church structure operates, church law
  - ▶ **Positions:** Official stance on current moral, social, public policy, and economic issues
- ▶ Approves the plans and budgets for church-wide programs
- ▶ **Only** General Conference can speak officially for the denomination

# General Conference Reflections



Music: "Able," commissioned to celebrate Imagine No Malaria



# Legislative Process

Any UMC organization, clergy person, or lay member may send legislation to GC

- 1,044 distinct petitions were submitted to GC 2016

Petitions are sorted into legislative committees that amend/vote up or down

The whole body of delegates considers committee reports and makes a final vote

Approved legislation becomes official UMC policy/position



# Legislation Outcomes

- ▶ Legislative petitions sent to General Conference: **1,044**
- ▶ Total petitions adopted: **421**
  - ▶ Adopted on consent calendars: 336
  - ▶ Adopted after debate: 85
  - ▶ (Debated an additional 11 that were not adopted)



# Major Results: Global Church

- ▶ Funds to translate the *Book of Discipline* into 8 more languages
- ▶ Plans to draft a global *Books of Discipline* with regionalized sections
- ▶ Increased funds for global theological education
- ▶ Approved provisional conference in Southeast Asia and Mongolia
- ▶ Five more bishops in Africa in 2020
- ▶ New strategy to work with autonomous Latin American Methodist churches



# Major Results: Ministry

- ▶ Three-fourths vote to continue ordination process at each step
- ▶ Group mentoring for local pastors, licensed candidates
- ▶ Updates to educational requirements
- ▶ Debated and voted down:
  - ▶ Term limits for bishops
  - ▶ Ending guaranteed full-time appointments for clergy
  - ▶ Ordination tied to provisional membership, replacing commissioning
- ▶ Approved in committee, ruled unconstitutional:
  - ▶ Imposing mandatory minimum penalties on clergy who admit to committing a chargeable offense



# Major Results: Relationships

- ▶ **Ecumenical:** Full communion with the Moravian Church and the Uniting Church in Sweden
- ▶ **Historical:** Trust and respect between UMC and Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes being rebuilt following the Methodist Church's historical role in the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre
- ▶ **Multicultural:** Missionaries from 11 countries commissioned to serve in 16 countries



# Major Results: Local Church

- ▶ Flexible structural models allowed for new, emergent forms of church
  - ▶ Churches encouraged to monitor and respond to changes in their surrounding community
  - ▶ Hymnal revision committee approved to create a new, cloud-based hymnal
  - ▶ Safety policies for children and youth expanded to include vulnerable adults
  - ▶ Trustees encouraged to include members with disabilities and/or their families when conducting accessibility audits
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# Social Issues: Health

- ▶ Support universal healthcare in the U.S. through a single-payer system
  - ▶ Nuanced ethics of embryonic stem cell research
  - ▶ Did not adopt resolution on responsible parenthood, including reproductive choice
  - ▶ Requested withdrawal from Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
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# Social Issues: Migrants, Workers

- ▶ **Modern-day slavery:** affirm human rights, advocate for economic policies, divest from profiting corporations, build self-esteem and education in children, increase support services for victims
  - ▶ **Global migration:** advocate for policies that reduce the causes of migration, safe passage through countries of transit, and welcome in receiving locales
  - ▶ **Rights of workers:** support a living wage for all workers, reduction of disparity between top and bottom wage earners
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# Social Issues: Violence

- ▶ **Gun violence:** pray regularly, ensure care for those affected, safely store personal firearms, publicly witness, prohibit guns on church property, advocate for increased regulation
- ▶ **Torture:** condemn torture, including the use of prolonged solitary confinement, visit detention centers to ensure fair treatment of prisoners, ensure rights of torture survivors to reparation



# Social Issues: Prejudice

- ▶ **Racism:** acknowledge and challenge institutional, historical systems of racism, speak out against race-based jokes and stereotypes, listen to people's experiences, encourage accountability of law enforcement, support affirmative action
- ▶ **Gender justice:** recognize that God is not male or female, seek to eliminate discrimination against women and girls
- ▶ **Our Muslim neighbors:** study Islam, initiate dialogue, develop awareness of Muslim concerns, build relationships in local community, remedy situations of prejudice and hostility



# Social Issues: Environment

- ▶ **Protection of water:** advocate for clean water as a human right, advocate for polluters to provide funding to clean the supply, implement water-saving practices
- ▶ **Environmental protection:** implement sustainable practices, advocate for regulations and accountability
- ▶ **Climate change:** support communities impacted by climate change, reduce carbon footprint of meetings, advocate for shifting subsidies to cleaner energy sources
- ▶ **Did not adopt:** divestment from fossil fuel-producing corporations



# Not Legislated: Human Sexuality

- More than 130 UMC clergy came out before GC
  - GC did not adopt small-group conversations model
  - Legislative committees had contentious, hurtful debate
  - Staged protests gave moderate disruption
  - Bishops met with both sides
  - Delegates asked bishops for leadership
  - Bishops offered a way forward
  - Next steps
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# Reflections



- ▶ We were amateurs tasked with legislative decision-making
- ▶ General Conference can't legislate making disciples or transforming the world
- ▶ I choose hope for the future, trusting in our "methods"



# Questions?

- ▶ Thank you for your interest in the work of the larger denomination!
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