

Why A New Book of Discipline?

The Book of Discipline has served as the covenanting principles of the Methodist Church since its inception at the Christmas Conference in 1784, and of the United Methodist Church following the merger with the United Brethren Church and Methodist Church in 1968. The creation of *The Connection*, a new Discipline is an audacious proposal in the face of this long history and tradition. It begs the question: *Why is a new Discipline necessary and desirable?*

You probably already know how challenging it can be to read, understand and find things in The current Book of Discipline. It wasn't always this complicated. The Book of Discipline has grown by 2000% since 1828 and an additional 500% since 1960. Already the next general conference has 15% more legislation than the 2016 general conference to consider. These additions are now adding more rules and less innovation and fewer people on the Wesleyan Path, more hierarchy and less local decision making and fewer decisions to follow Jesus Christ. What kind of Discipline do you want?

Would you want a book that was simplified, easy to read, and helps you find what you are looking for and wouldn't require a lawyer, parliamentarian or course in polity to understand it?

Imagine a simpler and clearer book that celebrates our rich Wesleyan theology, history and methods for being the church without watering it down by continually adding procedure and process.

Does it feel like the denomination works for the local church, or does it feel like the congregation exists to work for the denomination?

Imagine a book that sees the congregation as the primary unit for mission, and the denomination as a structure to support congregations.

Do you ever feel like the laity are second-class citizens in the church? That laity don't have authority or can't make decisions that determine ministry and outcome? That the Book of Discipline inhibits leadership and ministry?

Imagine a book that not only says the laity are important but grants laity equal authority in making decisions that affect ministry.

Do you ever feel like you do not understand how the ordination process works? In other organizations where you work or serve, is it hard to understand the staffing, how to get hired, the process for improvement and how the organization addresses conflict?

Imagine a book that makes it easier and clearer to understand how to become a clergy person, how to serve as a clergy person, what is expected of clergy and how to address personnel issues without everything seeming like a trial.

Do you ever feel like the church is more interested in rules than souls, more interested in following the Book of Discipline, than serving others?

Imagine a book that trusts the laity and clergy to work together to figure things out in their context rather than long lists of rules that stifles creativity and innovation and creates frustration.

We all want to support ministry and mission everywhere in the world, but is our apportionment system sustainable?

Imagine a book that creates a clear and sustainable apportionment system to support our mission and ministry.

Do you ever feel like our Wesleyan theology, mission, teachings and values take a back seat to our polity and our rules?

Imagine a book that makes the Wesleyan Path primary and builds more decision making based on our values, theology and mission.

Do you feel our denomination is at an impasse and that people are talking about dividing the denomination rather than building on our strengths and seeing that we are stronger together?

Imagine a book that recognizes we are a denomination with a wide theological middle and together we need diversity of thought, offers alternatives for conservative and progressive leaning people to thrive, AND provides paths that bless those who want to go and multiply without fearing they will lose their property or assets.

Our present Book of Discipline's response to the challenges we face has been to create more policies, more rules and more structure. Rather than solving the problem, it has made it more intractable. As John Wesley feared 250 years ago, we have the form of religion without the power of the Wesleyan movement.

Methodism was the fastest growing denomination in the world from 1875-1925, when we focused more on people in the world than on structure; had fewer rules and policies; when more decisions were made at the point of ministry; and our 'discipline' was mostly about how to stay on the path of discipleship - a path laid out for us by John Wesley.

Jesus faced the same challenge. He witnessed a faith that had become a religion centered on rules, regulations and hierarchy. His response was not to add to the complexity, but rather to say that it comes down to two things: love God and love neighbor (Matthew 22). He brought radical, life-transforming change by teaching and demonstrating God's love in the world. With Christ's model in view, we must ask: *Does the 2016 Book of Discipline help us bring radical, life-transforming change? Does it help us to resolve our deepest challenges? Does it force us to look outward to the people of the world? Is it global in its outlook and application?*

Our answer is no. It is not enough to change a paragraph here or there. The challenge before us is too great. It is time to re-imagine what God has for United Methodism in this new century. It is time to renew the structures of the church and to intentionally clear and light the pathway of discipleship.

The Connection, which will serve as a new Discipline will not resolve everything, of course. It is a manual for being and doing. It must be lived to make a difference. Still, *The Connection* clarifies our mission, our core beliefs and core values. It refocuses the denomination on Wesley's path for faithful discipleship. It refines our structures to allow decision making to occur at the points closest to the actual ministry. It keeps us connected globally as we work hand-in-hand to love God and love neighbor, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Guiding Questions Used in Preparation of *The Connection*

1. Are the foundations that make United Methodists distinctive retained: grace, connection, holy conferencing, itineracy, the indivisibility of piety and social holiness and ecumenism?
2. Can the polity be applied in all contexts in all nations, communities and congregations?
3. Will *The Connection* help United Methodists stay on Wesley's path for faithful discipleship?
4. Will *The Connection* strengthen lay and clergy leadership to be able to make disciples and grow Fruitful Wesleyan congregations for the transformation of the world? Will it help us thrive?
5. Will this move decision-making closer to where the ministry and work of the church is done?
6. Will it free people for risk-taking, courageous ministry?

Key to Reading *The Connection*

One of the important shifts in *The Connection* is the alignment of language and the simplifying of structure without eliminating important structure and organization. Sometimes there are name changes to add clarity and alignment.

The following are the four units of the church that uses the name church rather than their meeting as a the reference. For instance, annual conference will no longer be the name of the unit but the annual meeting.

- **The Local Church** - the congregations around the world that are the primary mission body where disciples are made, lives are changed, and communities are engaged. Congregations meet in charge/church conferences.
- **Connectional Church** (annual conference) – the primary connectional body that connects the people and congregations to the greater church. The connectional church meets in an annual conference.
- **Regional Church** (central and jurisdictional conferences) – the primary contextualization body where episcopal leadership is discerned and elected, polity is localized, and services are regionalized. The regional church meets in a quadrennial conference.
- **Global Church** (general conference) – the primary body to order the life and polity of the church, to gather and share resources and to free United Methodists for mission around the world. The global church meets in a quadrennial global conference.

The United Methodist Church has two types of membership, laity and clergy. The laity join a congregation and become a member of the global United Methodist Church. There are three types of laity membership.

1. Preparatory member – an individual who is under eighteen years of age and has been baptized.
2. Professing member – a baptized individual who has professed the membership vows of The United Methodist Church.
3. Affiliate member – a lay person who is a member of another United Methodist or Christian congregation but is not living near their home congregation for a period of time and while maintaining their membership in their home church, joins a congregation as an affiliate member to participate in the full life of the congregation.

Clergy are associated with a connectional church and, join the council of clergy of the connectional church. Bishops who are also clergy of the church are members of the council of bishops. There are five types of clergy membership.

1. Full member – a full clergy member of the church has the option of choosing to be itinerant or non-itinerant. Non itinerant clergy serve in extension ministries. All present deacons become non-itinerant full members.
2. Provisional member – preparatory step towards full membership.
3. Associate member – completed course of study or equivalent
4. Affiliate member – serving on loan and credentialed in another denomination
5. Local pastor – licensed to serve a congregation or extension ministry

THE **CONNECTION**

THE LIFE AND ORDER OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

United Methodists are connectional. The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church is a world-wide network that connects people, congregations and organizations through shared history, mission, values, polity and teachings. *The Connection, The Life and Order of The United Methodist Church* outlines the vision, historical overview, doctrine, teachings, values, mission and polity of the church. Its intent is to **help United Methodists stay on the path to follow Jesus Christ**. It recognizes we are a body of believers composed of many different nations, races, tribes, cultures and theological understandings who work together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Like Jesus, *The Connection* seeks to honor different journeys and contexts under the great commandment, love God and love your neighbor. *The Connection* seeks to keep the focus, on God and the people in the world and that the church of Jesus Christ exists to love God and serve the people in the world.

Paragraph 100

THE VISION

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

We see a church...

Outward Turning
Disciple Making
Justice Seeking
Life Transforming

We see a church...

Diverse
Inclusive
Multiplying
Wrestling
Becoming

We see a church...

Whose mission and ministry
inspires and captivates the hearts
and minds of new generations of disciples

We are The United Methodist Church -

Continually being shaped by God for
the opportunities and challenges
of these times

Paragraph 200

THE HISTORY

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Same information already in the Book of Discipline

Paragraph 300

THE EPISCOPAL GREETING AND BISHOPS

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Same information to be updated with a new greeting for the next quadrennium

Paragraph 400

THE TEACHINGS

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Doctrine • Ministry with All Christians • Theological Task • Social Principles

Same text already in the Book of Discipline including the social principles except to remove from the social principles the section on human sexuality and refer this section to the council of bishops to review and modify as necessary and recommend to the next Global Conference.

THE WESLEYAN PATH OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Calling • Character • Values • The Means of Grace • Engagement

United Methodists have a distinctive Wesleyan way of being the church. The Wesleyan Path builds on the teachings of the church and includes calling, character, values, the *means of grace* and engaging the world by living our membership vows.

Calling – The first calling of every United Methodist, laity and clergy, is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. As disciples, United Methodists are called to be life-long learners and followers of Jesus Christ who passionately serve God in the church and in the world. Disciples live their baptismal vows and these vows are the standard for evaluating the calling and engagement of any United Methodist.

Character – Every United Methodist, laity and clergy, is to live by the highest standards of faith including but not limited to ethical decision making, care for creation, faithfulness in relationships, ending evil, injustice and oppression and welcoming and including everyone in its ministries and worship. The ethic of a United Methodist is embodied in faithfulness to the scriptures, doctrine, teachings and Wesleyan Way of The United Methodist Church.

The character of a United Methodist is encompassed in Wesleyan three rules – Do no harm, do all the good you can and stay in love with God. These simple rules are profound and transformative when lived every day.

Core Values

Grace - God's grace is sufficient for salvation and is offered to all through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Extending God's grace - Grace is extended through the sacraments of communion and baptism to adults, youth and children, inviting all people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and by practicing the Wesleyan *means of grace*.

The Bible – The Bible is the primary authority and revelation for salvation and holy living, and is interpreted through tradition, reason and experience.

Personal and social holiness – United Methodists grow spiritually and are accountable for witness, service and doing justice in the world.

Connectionalism - United Methodists are connected through a web of congregations and organizations that share a common mission, doctrine, apportioned financial mission support, itineracy, and holy conferencing.

Diversity and Inclusion – United Methodists welcome, include and involve all people in the life of the church guided by the scriptures, doctrine and Wesleyan Way of the church.

Open itineracy – United Methodist bishops and superintendents teach, support and practice open itineracy in making appointments while at the same time recognizing differences among congregations in theology, language spoken, leadership needs and contexts.

The Means of Grace

United Methodists practice the *means of grace*. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, taught that while God's grace is unearned, we are not to be idle waiting to experience grace, rather, we engage in the *means of grace*. God's mystery works in the hearts and thinking of disciples through the *means of grace*, hastening, strengthening and confirming faith so that God's grace pervades in and through disciples. The means of grace are categorized into *works of piety* and *works of mercy*.

Works of Piety

Individual Practices include reading, meditating on and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, holistic healthy living, and sharing our faith with others.

Communal Practices include regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another in small groups), and Bible study.

Works of Mercy

Individual Practices include doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others.

Communal Practices include advocating for and seeking justice, ending oppression, injustice and discrimination (for instance Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), and addressing the needs of others, particularly the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, the children, the elderly and vulnerable persons.

Living the Membership Vows – Every United Methodist is called to witness and actively participate in the life of the church as they fulfill their membership vows.

1. Renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin;
2. Accept the freedom and power God gives them to resist evil, injustice, and oppression;
3. Confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put their whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as their Lord;
4. Remain faithful members of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world;
5. Be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries;
6. Faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, their service, and their witness;
7. Receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

More specifically, this calls all United Methodists to engage in worship, faith sharing, intentional faith formation through small groups, children and youth ministries, engaging in ministries of witness, mercy and justice in the community and the world, and giving generously to the mission and ministry of the church. These practices were initiated by the disciples of the first century church. (Acts 2:41-47)

Active engagement in the mission and Wesleyan Way of The United Methodist Church keeps United Methodist disciples on the path to loving and serving God. All United Methodists are called to daily live *The Wesleyan Path* creating habits that become part of our nature. United Methodist congregations and organizations are to teach, invite and meaningful and relevant opportunities for people to participate in and practice *The Wesleyan Path*.

THE MISSION

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

New Disciples • Fruitful congregations • Transformed world

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do everything I have commanded you. Look, I will be with you every day until the end of this present age. -Jesus, Matthew 28:19-20, CEB

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. -Amos 5:24, CEB

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The goal of the mission of The United Methodist Church is to invite people to follow Jesus Christ and turn the church outward to serve the people in our communities and the world.

Congregations are the primary mission organization of the church because they are in our communities, they make disciples and have the greatest opportunity to transform lives and the world. Therefore, the primary focus and resourcing of The United Methodist Church is to develop transformational leaders who grow and lead fruitful Wesleyan congregations to make disciples and transform the world.

Additional mission organizations that extend the mission and ministry of the church may be organized by a congregation, connectional church, regional church or the global church to supplement or further extend the mission of The United Methodist Church. In each case, as practical, these mission organizations shall work through the connectional church and their congregations.

Who are disciples of Jesus Christ?

Disciples are life-long learners and followers of Jesus Christ who passionately serve God in the church and in the world.

What is world transformation?

A community where lives are changed, hope abounds, diversity is embraced, the spark of the Gospel is ignited, justice is for all and all have the opportunity, knowledge and skills to live to their full God-given potential. (Micah 6:8, Luke 10:27)

What is a fruitful Wesleyan congregation?

A fruitful Wesleyan congregation is a Holy Spirit-led community of passionate disciples who are connectional and Wesleyan in their beliefs and practices that work together to 1) extend radical hospitality and make new and grow all disciples, 2) create inspiring worship, 3) intentionally grow faith through small groups and children and youth ministries, 4) engage in risk taking community witness, mercy and justice mission, and 5) increase generosity and giving to mission. (Acts 2:42-47)

Who is a transformational leader?

A transformational leader, through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, casts a compelling vision and challenging goals, and whose leadership inspires change and growth.

HOW WE GATHER

AS THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Setting time for prayer, discernment, accountability and decision making

United Methodists gather for holy conferencing to discern how God has, is and will lead the church forward. *Holy* is to be set apart for the purposes of God and *conferencing* means gathering to deliberate, discern, discuss, evaluate, be accountable and set direction for the mission and ministry of the church. The following are guidelines for holy conferencing.

- See every person as a person, as a child of God of sacred worth.
- Listen to learn, particularly before speaking.
- Be curious, ask questions to understand another person's hopes and objectives.
- Inquire if you are accurately reflecting the views of others.
- Disagree without being disagreeable.
- Use words that heal rather than hurt.
- Talk about issues rather than people, do not equate people and issues.
- Act together on common agreements.
- Pray, in silence or aloud, before decisions and let prayer interrupt the busy-ness.

United Methodists gather in four primary groups for holy conferencing.

1. Local Church – Congregations are the primary missional unit of The United Methodist Church and they gather in charge or church conferences. Charge and church conferences align congregations with the mission of The United Methodist Church and set direction for ministry of the congregation in the community.
2. Connectional Church - Formally called annual conferences, and annual conference now refers to the annual meeting of the connectional church. The connectional church is comprised of groups of congregations that gather for an annual conference. The connectional church is the primary connectional organization as it connects congregations with the global United Methodist mission and experience. The connectional church gathers for an annual conference session to evaluate the progress of the congregations in the area, and assess, discern and set direction for the mission and ministry in the area and align congregations with the global witness and mission of The United Methodist Church. The connectional church is focused on resourcing and developing leadership to grow fruitful Wesleyan congregations to carry out the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
3. Regional Church – It is composed of a former central conference or one or more former jurisdictional conferences in the United States or three or more connectional churches that elect bishops and may have a unified pension program and other shared benefits programs, covenant (s) with general church agencies to service their connectional churches. A regional church also has the authority to modify paragraphs 900 and 1000 related to the context of their connectional churches and congregations.
4. Global Church – The entire world-wide United Methodist Church whose delegates gather every four years in a global conference representing the entire United Methodist Church to set the mission, goals, teachings and broad policies for the church.

THE POLITY

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The purpose of the polity of the church is to help United Methodists to stay on the path to follow Jesus. The polity therefore **to support disciples of Jesus Christ to grow in their discipleship, to make disciples and to be in the community witnessing, engaging in mercy ministries and working for justice.** United Methodists are a body of believers of many different nations, races, tribes, cultures, and theological understandings all working together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Like Jesus, the polity seeks to honor different journeys and contexts under the great commandment, love God and love your neighbor. The polity recognizes that too many rules, policies and regulations do not keep people on the Wesleyan Path. The Wesleyan discipleship path is lined with disciples whose hearts and mindsets are committed to be more like Jesus. The polity seeks to keep the focus, like Jesus, on the people in the world. The church of Jesus Christ exists to love God and serve the people of the world. Therefore, the polity and the organization of The United Methodist Church are designed to develop, resource and equip clergy and laity leadership to lead disciples into the community, primarily through congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The polity of the church emerges out of the vision, mission, values, doctrine, and teachings of the church and is designed to achieve heart and mindset change. The Wesleyan Path of The United Methodist Church guides people while allowing for contextual and cultural differences.

The following questions shall guide the writing of polity for the Global United Methodist Church.

1. Will this help United Methodists stay on the path of following Jesus?
2. Will this move United Methodist disciples, particularly through congregations, into the community to bear witness to Jesus Christ, be merciful in their service, and end evil, injustice and oppression?
3. Will this strengthen lay and clergy leadership to lead the church to make disciples and grow fruitful Wesleyan congregations for the transformation of the world?
4. Will this move decision making closer to where the ministry and work of the church is done?
5. Will this set people free for risk taking courageous ministry or does it only address a problem which constrains or burdens others with bureaucracy?
6. Can this be applied in all contexts, in all nations, communities and congregations? If not, should it be referred to the connectional churches or regional churches.