

Open Hearts

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

2703 Augusta Street
Greenville, SC 29605



Congregational Update

May 10, 2024

OPEN HEARTS

OPEN MINDS

OPEN DOORS

Beloved Church,

I am grateful to return to you after 12 days in Charlotte where I served as a clergy delegate to the postponed 2020 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. General Conference is the only body that speaks on behalf of the United Methodist denomination and our work includes updating our Book of Discipline, the “fundamental book outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organizational work and procedures of The United Methodist Church.”

Several significant pieces of legislation that speak to who we are as a denomination and where we intend to go in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world were passed, and you can read some highlights below. One of the major changes enacted by General Conference was the United Methodist stance on homosexuality and legislation as it relates to the LGBTQ+ community.

In the special called General Conference in 2019, new language was added to the Book of Discipline that was very harmful to LGBTQ+ individuals who wanted to be ordained UMC, married by a UMC clergy, or married in a UMC church. Not only were these prohibitions established, but also severe penalties for disobedience unparalleled to anything else in our Book of Discipline, including clergy being “defrocked,” were imposed. The work of the 2019 General Conference did not reflect a United Methodism that promises to “do no harm,” so this 2024 General Conference removed every bit of harmful language that was previously adopted.

Furthermore, this General Conference voted and approved the following:

- Removed the phrase “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching” from the Book of Discipline.
- LGBTQ+ persons are no longer prohibited from becoming clergy based on their sexuality and can pursue their call into ordained ministry in the UMC.

- LGBTQ+ persons can receive an appointment in the UMC.
- Church court charges against an LGBTQ+ clergy are dropped.
- A process is opened for removed clergy to be reinstated.
- Local churches are given discretion to allow or deny same-sex marriage ceremonies on church property.
- Ministers were assured they have discretion to perform or refrain from performing same-sex marriage ceremonies.

The removal of this language brings the UMC back to neutral, to its pre-1972 state by having no commentary on homosexuality. It is neither condemning it nor affirming it. It says nothing about it now, leaving individuals and churches the freedom to have their own opinions on the matter. This is who we are as United Methodists...the big tent, the wide center. There is room for all. And I am honored to be a part of this historic General Conference that moved the United Methodist Church back onto the path that boldly affirms our Three Simple Rules and our Brand Promise:

*"Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God."
"Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors."*

Part of our United Methodist **doctrinal heritage** is to respect the "diversity of opinions held by conscientious persons of faith" that go beyond the essentials of vital religion. And that is who we are at Open Hearts UMC. Our church name is a promise to the community, that we have open hearts for everyone. We have diverse opinions, experiences, and interpretations of Holy Scripture here and we celebrate that diversity! Wherever you find yourself on the theological spectrum – conservative, right of center, centrist, left of center, or progressive – you are welcome here. We promise to have open doors to welcome all because we have something to learn from each other, we have something to teach each other, and we are better together!

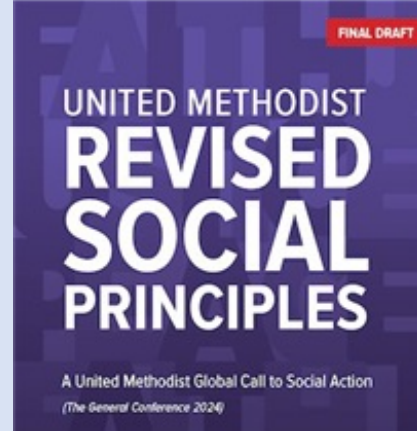
If you would like to have a conversation about the UMC and General Conference, or you need someone to walk with you in your journey in discernment for what these decisions mean for you, your faith, and your participation in our congregation, I'd be happy to meet with you. Please reach out to me at (864)233-8114.

Your ministry partner,
Rev. Karen Jones
Lead Pastor

Revised Social Principles

The United Methodist Social Principles are not church law but are a prayerful and earnest effort of General Conference to speak to a wide range of issues using a biblical and theological foundation that keeps to our United Methodist traditions of social justice. Because they are not church

law, and because it is a living document, it invites disciples to prayerfully consider their own response to the issues presented.



In the past, the Social Principles were written from a distinctively American point of view, and in recognition of our international growth as a denomination, the 2012 General Conference mandated that the Social Principles be revised to have more global relevance. Last week, we passed the newly revised Social Principles that reflects input from our international brothers and sisters in the UMC. Read the revised Social Principles [here](#).

Regionalization

The United Methodist Church started as a holiness movement in the American colonies and then it grew into its own denomination in the United States that later had missional outposts around the world.



We have grown as a denomination and those missional outposts are now leaders in our denomination and outpace the United States in growth. This is wonderful news as we are truly making disciples of Jesus Christ, “from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Central Conferences (which are basically all the conferences except the United State Jurisdictions) are already able to make adaptations to Part VI of The Book of Discipline to make ministry more contextual to their region while keeping the same foundational elements of our beliefs and polity (the constitution, Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task, the Ministry of All Christians, and the Social Principles). This allows Central Conferences the flexibility to adapt their local ministries, governance, and structures according to their regional needs. The United States Jurisdictions in the UMC however, do not have this flexibility, so we make the adaptations we need as a whole General Conference. And while the General Conference had 862 voting delegates from 5 different continents and proceedings are translated in 9 different languages, and the majority of our work deals with issues specific to the United States because we do not have the same permission to make adaptations according to our context.

Although we passed the legislation for Regionalization at General Conference, it still needs to be ratified by an aggregate of Annual Conference votes because it is a change to our Constitution. To read more about Regionalization, click [here](#).

Other Notable Items from General Conference

- US Annual Conferences will be asked to pay **lower apportionments**, shifting the current base rate of 3.29% to 2.6% for 2025 and 2026.
- The first Native American bishop, Bishop David Wilson, presides at General Conference.
- The first African American female bishop, Bishop Tracy S. Malone, is elected to be the next president of our Council of Bishops.
- **Deacons** are granted sacramental responsibility in their contexts.
- We approved **full communion** with the Episcopal Church, to be affirmed by the Episcopal Church by 2027.
- Paragraph 2553, which was a time-bound disaffiliation clause, is deleted.



Resources

Please be wary of certain news outlets and personal blogs that are publishing disinformation about the United Methodist Church and the work done at General Conference. If you see information that you find alarming or is fear-mongering, please pause and research the source. For accurate reporting, please refer to official United Methodist news outlets and resources like:

UM News
General Conference website
Resource UMC

Website : openheartsumcsc.org



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