

Part I
THE CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

The church is a community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redeemed and redeeming fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the church seeks to provide for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of the world.

The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world.

The prayers and intentions of The United Methodist Church and its predecessors, The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, have been and are for obedience to the will of our Lord that his people be one, in humility for the present brokenness of the Church and in gratitude that opportunities for reunion have been given.

Therefore, *The United Methodist Church has adopted and amended the following Constitution.*¹

DIVISION ONE—GENERAL

¶ **1. Article I. Declaration of Union**—The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church have been united into one

1. The Constitution was adopted in Chicago, Illinois, on Nov. 11, 1966, by the General Conferences of The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church and thereafter by the requisite vote in the annual conferences of the two churches. The Plan of Union was made effective by the Uniting Conference in Dallas, Texas, on April 23, 1968. Preamble amended 2000.

Church. The United Methodist Church, as thus constituted, is, and shall be, the successor of the two uniting churches.²

¶ **2. Article II. Name**—The name of the Church shall be The United Methodist Church. The name of the Church may be translated freely into languages other than English as the General Conference may determine.

¶ **3. Article III. Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith**—The Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith of The United Methodist Church are those held by The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, respectively, at the time of their uniting.³

¶ **4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church**—The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status,⁴ or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.⁵ In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.⁶

¶ **5. Article V. Racial Justice**—The United Methodist Church proclaims the value of each person as a unique child of God and commits itself to the healing and wholeness of all persons. The United Methodist Church recognizes that the sin of racism has been destructive to its unity throughout its history. Racism continues to cause painful division and marginalization. The United Methodist Church shall confront and seek to eliminate racism, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large. The United Methodist Church shall work collaboratively with others to address concerns that threaten the cause of racial justice at all times and in all places.⁷

2. Amended 1984, 2000.

3. Amended 2000.

4. Amended 1992.

5. Amended 2000.

6. See Judicial Council Decisions 242, 246, 340, 351, 362, 377, 398, 594, 601, and Decisions 4 and 5, Interim Judicial Council.

7. Amended 2000.

¶ **6. Article VI. Ecumenical Relations**—As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity; and therefore it will seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life: through world relationships with other Methodist churches and united churches related to The Methodist Church or The Evangelical United Brethren Church, through councils of churches, and through plans of union and covenantal relationships⁸ with churches of Methodist or other denominational traditions.

¶ **7. Article VII. Title to Properties**—Titles to properties formerly held by⁹ The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church shall be held and administered in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*.¹⁰ Nothing in the Plan of Union at any time after the union is to be construed so as to require any local church or any other property owner of the former The Evangelical United Brethren Church or the former The Methodist Church to alienate or in any way change the title to property contained in its deed or deeds at the time of union and lapse of time.

DIVISION TWO—ORGANIZATION

Section I. Conferences

¶ **8. Article I.**—There shall be a General Conference for the entire Church with such powers, duties, and privileges as are hereinafter set forth.

¶ **9. Article II.**—There shall be jurisdictional conferences for the Church in the United States of America, with such powers, duties, and privileges as are hereinafter set forth,¹¹ provided that in The United Methodist Church there shall be no jurisdictional or central conference based on any ground other than geographical and regional division.

¶ **10. Article III.**—There shall be central conferences for the church outside the United States of America and, if necessary, provisional central conferences, all with such powers, duties, and privileges as are hereinafter set forth.

8. Amended 1996.

9. Amended 2000.

10. Amended 1984.

11. See Judicial Council Decision 128.

¶ 11. *Article IV.*—There shall be annual conferences as the fundamental bodies of the Church and, if necessary, provisional annual conferences, with such powers, duties, and privileges as are hereinafter set forth.¹²

¶ 12. *Article V.*—There shall be a charge conference for each church or charge with such powers, duties, and privileges as are hereinafter set forth.¹³

Section II. General Conference

¶ 13. *Article I.*—1. The General Conference shall be composed of not less than 600 nor more than 1,000 delegates, one half of whom shall be clergy and one half lay members, to be elected by the annual conferences. The missionary conferences shall be considered as annual conferences for the purpose of this article.¹⁴

2. Delegates shall be elected in a fair and open process by the annual conferences. Delegates may be elected by other autonomous Methodist churches if and when the General Conference shall approve concordats with such other autonomous Methodist churches for the mutual election and seating of delegates in each other's legislative conferences.

3. In the case of The Methodist Church in Great Britain, mother church of Methodism, provision shall be made for The United Methodist Church to send two delegates annually to the British Methodist Conference, and The Methodist Church in Great Britain to send four delegates quadrennially to The United Methodist General Conference, the delegates of both conferences having vote and being evenly divided between clergy and laity.¹⁵

¶ 14. *Article II.*—The General Conference shall meet in the month of April or May once in four years at such time and in such place as shall be determined by the General Conference or by its duly authorized committees.

A special session of the General Conference, possessing the authority and exercising all the powers of the General Conference, may be called by the Council of Bishops, or in such other manner as the General Conference may from time to time prescribe, to meet at such

12. See Judicial Council Decision 354.

13. See Judicial Council Decision 516.

14. Amended 1976.

15. Amended 1996.

time and in such place as may be stated in the call. Such special session of the General Conference shall be composed of the delegates to the preceding General Conference or their lawful successors, except that when a particular annual conference or missionary conference¹⁶ shall prefer to have a new election it may do so.¹⁷ The purpose of such special session shall be stated in the call, and only such business shall be transacted as is in harmony with the purpose stated in such call unless the General Conference by a two-thirds vote shall determine that other business may be transacted.¹⁸

¶ **15. Article III.**—The General Conference shall fix the ratio of representation in the General, jurisdictional, and central conferences from the annual conferences, missionary conferences,¹⁹ and the provisional annual conferences, computed on a two-factor basis: (1) the number of clergy members of the annual conference and the missionary conference,²⁰ and (2) the number of professing²¹ members in the annual conference and the missionary conference,²² provided that each annual conference, missionary conference,²³ or provisional annual conference shall be entitled to at least one clergy and one lay delegate in the General Conference and also in the jurisdictional or central conference.²⁴

¶ **16. Article IV.**—The General Conference shall have full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional, and in the exercise of this power shall have authority as follows:²⁵

1. To define and fix the conditions, privileges, and duties of Church membership, which shall in every case be without reference to race or status.²⁶

2. To define and fix the powers and duties of elders, deacons, supply preachers, local preachers, exhorters, deaconesses, and home missionaries.²⁷

3. To define and fix the powers and duties of annual conferences, provisional annual conferences, missionary conferences and missions,

16. Amended 1976.

17. See Judicial Council Decisions 221, 226, 228, 238, 302.

18. See Judicial Council Decision 227.

19. Amended 1976.

20. Amended 1976.

21. Amended 2000.

22. Amended 1976.

23. Amended 1976.

24. See Judicial Council Decision 403.

25. See Judicial Council Decisions 96, 232, 236, 318, 325, 544.

26. See Judicial Council Decision 558.

27. See Judicial Council Decisions 58, 313.

and of central conferences, district conferences, charge conferences, and congregational meetings.²⁸

4. To provide for the organization, promotion, and administration of the work of the Church outside the United States of America.²⁹

5. To define and fix the powers, duties, and privileges of the episcopacy, to adopt a plan for the support of the bishops, to provide a uniform rule for their retirement, and to provide for the discontinuance of a bishop because of inefficiency or unacceptability.³⁰

6. To provide and revise the hymnal and ritual of the Church and to regulate all matters relating to the form and mode of worship, subject to the limitations of the first and second Restrictive Rules.³¹

7. To provide a judicial system and a method of judicial procedure for the Church, except as herein otherwise prescribed.

8. To initiate and to direct all connectional enterprises of the Church and to provide boards for their promotion and administration.³²

9. To determine and provide for raising and distributing funds necessary to carry on the work of the Church.³³

10. To fix a uniform basis upon which bishops shall be elected by the jurisdictional conferences and to determine the number of bishops that may be elected by central conferences.³⁴

11. To select its presiding officers from the bishops, through a committee, provided that the bishops shall select from their own number the presiding officer of the opening session.³⁵

12. To change the number and the boundaries of jurisdictional conferences upon the consent of a majority of the annual conferences in each jurisdictional conference involved.³⁶

13. To establish such commissions for the general work of the Church as may be deemed advisable.

14. To secure the rights and privileges of membership in all agencies, programs, and institutions in The United Methodist Church regardless of race or status.³⁷

28. See Judicial Council Decision 411.

29. See Judicial Council Decision 182; amended 1976.

30. See Judicial Council Decisions 35, 114, 312, 365, 413.

31. See Judicial Council Decision 694.

32. See Judicial Council Decisions 214, 364, 411.

33. See Judicial Council Decision 30.

34. See Judicial Council Decisions 598, 735.

35. See Judicial Council Decision 126.

36. See Judicial Council Decisions 55, 56, 215.

37. See Decisions 4, 5, Interim Judicial Council; Judicial Council Decisions 427, 433, 442, 451, 540, 558, 567, 588, 594, 601.

15. To allow the annual conferences to utilize structures unique to their mission, other mandated structures notwithstanding.³⁸

16. To enact such other legislation as may be necessary, subject to the limitations and restrictions of the Constitution of the Church.³⁹

Section III. Restrictive Rules

¶ 17. *Article I.*—The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion or establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.⁴⁰

¶ 18. *Article II.*—The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Confession of Faith.

¶ 19. *Article III.*—The General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away with episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.

¶ 20. *Article IV.*—The General Conference shall not do away with the privileges of our clergy of right to trial by a committee and of an appeal; neither shall it do away with the privileges of our members of right to trial before the church, or by a committee, and of an appeal.⁴¹

¶ 21. *Article V.*—The General Conference shall not revoke or change the General Rules of Our United Societies.⁴²

¶ 22. *Article VI.*—The General Conference shall not appropriate the net income of the publishing houses, the book concerns, or the Chartered Fund to any purpose other than for the benefit of retired or disabled preachers, their spouses, widows, or widowers, and children or other beneficiaries of the ministerial pension systems.⁴³

Section IV. Jurisdictional Conferences

¶ 23. *Article I.*—The jurisdictional conferences shall be composed of as many representatives from the annual conferences and missionary

38. See Judicial Council Decision 825; amended 1996.

39. See Judicial Council Decision 215.

40. See Judicial Council Decisions 86, 142, 243, 358, 847, 871.

41. See Judicial Council Decisions 351, 522, 557, 595, 982.

42. See Judicial Council Decisions 358, 468, 847, 871.

43. See Judicial Council Decisions 322, 330.

conferences⁴⁴ as shall be determined by a uniform basis established by the General Conference. The missionary conferences shall be considered as annual conferences for the purpose of this article.⁴⁵

¶ 24. *Article II.*—All jurisdictional conferences shall have the same status and the same privileges of action within the limits fixed by the Constitution. The ratio of representation of the annual conferences and missionary conferences⁴⁶ in the General Conference shall be the same for all jurisdictional conferences.

¶ 25. *Article III.*—The General Conferences shall fix the basis of representation in the jurisdictional conferences, provided that the jurisdictional conferences shall be composed of an equal number of clergy and lay delegates to be elected by the annual conferences, the missionary conferences⁴⁷ and the provisional annual conferences.

¶ 26. *Article IV.*—Each jurisdictional conference shall meet at the time determined by the Council of Bishops or its delegated committee, each jurisdictional conference convening on the same date as the others and at a place selected by the jurisdictional committee on entertainment, appointed by its College of Bishops unless such a committee has been appointed by the preceding jurisdictional conference.

¶ 27. *Article V.*—The jurisdictional conferences shall have the following powers and duties and such others as may be conferred by the General Conferences:

1. To promote the evangelistic, educational, missionary, and benevolent interests of the Church and to provide for interests and institutions within their boundaries.⁴⁸

2. To elect bishops and to cooperate in carrying out such plans for their support as may be determined by the General Conference.

3. To establish and constitute jurisdictional conference boards as auxiliary to the general boards of the Church as the need may appear and to choose their representatives on the general boards in such manner as the General Conference may determine.⁴⁹

4. To determine the boundaries of their annual conferences, provided that there shall be no annual conference with a membership of

44. Amended 1976.

45. Amended 1976.

46. Amended 1976.

47. Amended 1976.

48. See Judicial Council Decision 67.

49. See Judicial Council Decision 183.

fewer than fifty clergy in full connection, except by the consent of the General Conference.

5. To make rules and regulations for the administration of the work of the Church within the jurisdiction, subject to such powers as have been or shall be vested in the General Conference.

6. To appoint a committee on appeals to hear and determine the appeal of a traveling preacher of that jurisdiction from the decision of a trial committee.

Section V. Central Conferences

¶ 28. *Article I.*—There shall be central conferences for the work of the Church outside the United States of America⁵⁰ with such duties, powers, and privileges as are hereinafter set forth. The number and boundaries of the central conferences shall be determined by the Uniting Conference. Subsequently the General Conference shall have authority to change the number and boundaries of central conferences. The central conferences shall have the duties, powers, and privileges hereinafter set forth.

¶ 29. *Article II.*—The central conferences shall be composed of as many delegates as shall be determined by a basis established by the General Conference. The delegates shall be clergy and lay in equal numbers.⁵¹

¶ 30. *Article III.*—The central conferences shall meet within the year succeeding the meeting of the General Conference at such times and places as shall have been determined by the preceding respective central conferences or by commissions appointed by them or by the General Conference. The date and place of the first meeting succeeding the Uniting Conference shall be fixed by the bishops of the respective central conferences, or in such manner as shall be determined by the General Conference.

¶ 31. *Article IV.*—The central conferences shall have the following powers and duties and such others as may be conferred by the General Conference:

1. To promote the evangelistic, educational, missionary, social-concern, and benevolent interests and institutions of the Church within their own boundaries.

50. Amended 1976.

51. Amended 1992.

2. To elect the bishops for the respective central conferences in number as may be determined from time to time, upon a basis fixed by the General Conference, and to cooperate in carrying out such plans for the support of their bishops as may be determined by the General Conference.⁵²

3. To establish and constitute such central conference boards as may be required and to elect their administrative officers.⁵³

4. To determine the boundaries of the annual conferences within their respective areas.

5. To make such rules and regulations for the administration of the work within their boundaries including such changes and adaptations of the General Discipline as the conditions in the respective areas may require, subject to the powers that have been or shall be vested in the General Conference.⁵⁴

6. To appoint a judicial court to determine legal questions arising on the rules, regulations, and such revised, adapted, or new sections of the central conference Discipline enacted by the central conference.

7. To appoint a committee on appeals to hear and determine the appeal of a traveling preacher of that central conference from the decision of a committee on trial.⁵⁵

Section VI. Annual Conferences

¶ 32. *Article I.*—The annual conference shall be composed of clergy and lay members. The clergy membership shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection, provisional members, associate members, and local pastors under appointment. The lay membership shall consist of professing⁵⁶ lay members elected by each charge, the diaconal ministers, the active deaconesses, and home missionaries under episcopal appointment within the bounds of the annual conference,⁵⁷ the conference president of United Methodist Women, the conference president of United Methodist Men, the conference lay leader, district lay leaders, the conference director of Lay Speaking Ministries, conference secretary of Global Ministries (if lay), the president or equivalent officer of the conference young adult organization,

52. See Judicial Council Decision 370.

53. See Judicial Council Decision 69.

54. See Judicial Council Decisions 142, 147, 313.

55. See Judicial Council Decision 595.

56. Amended 2000.

57. Amended 1996.