

One of New ACT's first decisions was to hire Gil Rendle, the senior consultant with The Institute for Clergy and Congregational Excellence of The Texas Methodist Foundation. Gil was a well-known and respected leader in the field of organizational change and his job was to equip New ACT to imagine how churches and leaders could form a Conference aligned with the needs of the 21st century.

During Gil's work with New ACT, he sought to unleash our imaginations so we might dream of a new way to be a Conference. Of the many provocative ideas he shared with us, there was one that he returned to over and over again: the Conference and its churches exist to the mission field, not its members.

Rev. George Nicholas, a New ACT member, summed up Gil's teaching this way. He said the new Conference needed to equip the churches to get into the

neighborhood and find ways to bring the neighborhood into the church. When the team tasked two of its members, Rev. Darryl Barrow and Kristin Dart, to draft a vision statement for the new Conference, they based their proposal on this idea. Darryl and Kristen returned to the team with this vision statement: "To be God's love with our neighbors in all places." New ACT members loved this phrase and added "To live the Gospel of Jesus Christ" on the front end to complete the vision for what Upper New York Conference would be.

Twelve years ago, the uniting conference adopted "to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be God's love with our neighbors in all places" as Upper New York's vision statement. Since then, leaders and local churches, with God's help, have been working to translate this vision into a lived reality. Visit <https://bit.ly/formingUNY> to see how we have done.



The Bridge is a Conference Communications Ministry tool that delivers to local churches news and stories of ministry from around the Upper New York Conference and the world. For more news and stories visit: [www.unyumc.org](http://www.unyumc.org)



# the Bridge

Connecting local churches to each other & ministries around the world



*"At every level of the connection, church leaders and members come together in conversation, or conferencing, to discuss important issues and discover God's will for the church."*

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*The Upper New York Conference's vision is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be God's love with our neighbors in all places.*

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## The United Methodist Connection

You are a member of a church that is part of a District within the Upper New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, which is in the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, which is one region of Annual Conferences within the United Methodist General Conference. What does this mean exactly?

It is all about “The Connection.”

The United Methodist structure and organization began as a means of accomplishing the mission of spreading scriptural holiness. Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability and developed what he called the “connexion,” a network of classes, societies, and Annual Conferences.

Today, our denomination continues to be organized in a “connectional” system, which

“enables us to carry out our mission in unity and strength” (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 701). Every local church is linked to an interconnected network of organizations that join together in mission and ministry, allowing us to accomplish far more than any one local church or person could alone.

Within the connectional structure of The United Methodist Church, Conferences provide the primary groupings of people and churches for discernment and decision-making. Wesley described Christian conferencing as a spiritual discipline through which God’s grace may be revealed. At every level of the connection, church leaders and members come together in conversation, or conferencing, to discuss important issues and discover God’s will for the church. The word, Conference, thus refers to both the assembly and organization of people as well as the process of discerning God’s call together.

### General Conference

As the primary legislative body, General Conference is the only entity with the authority to speak on behalf of the entire United Methodist Church. The General Conference meets every four years to consider the business and mission of the church. An equal number of lay and clergy delegates are elected from United Methodist conferences around the world to decide matters of policy and procedure for the denomination. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented a 2020 meeting. It was originally postponed to 2022 and now is being further postponed to 2024.

### Jurisdictional Conferences

There are five geographic jurisdictions, or regions, in the United States, which are comprised of eight to 15 Annual Conferences each.

### Central Conferences

In Africa, Europe, and the Philippines, there are seven geographical regions, called Central Conferences, each of which is comprised of Annual Conferences and divided into several episcopal areas.

### Annual Conferences

The Annual Conference is a geographical entity, an organizational body (made up of elected lay and clergy members), and a yearly meeting. It is the fundamental body of the church (*Book of Discipline*, ¶ 11).

### Districts

Each local church is part of a District, which is an administrative grouping of churches in a geographic area.

## Forming the Upper New York Conference

By the Rev. Bill Gottschalk-Fielding, *UNY Director of Connectional Ministries and Assistant to the Bishop*

“[It] has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” Acts 15: 28.

On June 19, 2010, North Central New York, Troy, Western New York, and Wyoming Conferences joined to become the Upper New York Conference. The meeting that day, known as the uniting conference, took several hours, but the work leading up to it had taken several years. Much of that work was led by the New Area/



Gottschalk-Fielding

Conference Team or New ACT. For nearly two years, this 26-member team, drawn from the four upstate Conferences, met monthly to dream and plan. Under the pastoral guidance of Bishops Susan Hassinger and Marcus Matthews, the team did its work by prayerful discernment and consensus-building.

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