



**UNITED METHODISTS**  
OF UPPER NEW YORK



**NOTE TO APPOINTED CLERGY: Bishop Burgos strongly encourages clergy to share this video in their congregations during worship and in any other media platform available to the congregation(s) they serve.**

The postponed 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church met from April 23 until May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Clergy and lay delegates from our worldwide United Methodist connection gathered for ten days to worship, receive reports, celebrate life-changing ministries, commission new missionaries, consider legislation and resolutions on various mission-critical subjects, and to organize the life of our denomination for the next four years.

This General Conference is a pivotal moment in the history of our beloved denomination, marked by significant decisions that will shape our future together as United Methodists for generations. The movement of the Holy Spirit was evident throughout the past two weeks. A genuine spirit of collaboration, consensus, and hope permeated the legislative committees and plenaries, fostering a new sense of unity amid our rich diversity.

I am grateful for the delegation from the Upper New York Conference. They served us faithfully, modeled grace and collaboration amongst themselves and the other delegates, and embodied the love of God with joy, even during long working days that included many complex and difficult conversations.

In this recap video, I will briefly highlight five significant decisions made during the postponed 2020 General Conference.

### **Regionalization**

The General Conference approved legislation, including changes to our constitution, that enables a regional structure in The United Methodist Church. Regionalization will allow us to continue being a worldwide movement AND permit ministry to happen more contextually, indigenously, and with equity throughout the different regions where we do ministry. The approved legislation on regionalization will now go before all Annual Conferences around our worldwide connection for a vote to ratify this decision before it can be implemented. Upper New York will have the ratifying vote in 2025.

### **Revised Social Principles**

The General Conference also approved a revised version of our social principles. While these principles aren't considered church law, they represent the United Methodist response to our time's most pressing social issues based on our shared Wesleyan heritage and emphasis on social holiness. The review process took eight years and involved over four thousand people worldwide. The revised social



principles are less US-centric, less prescriptive, and more guiding. They aim to address issues that impact the global community, with regional bodies focusing on concerns specific to their respective missional contexts from now on.

### **Removal of the Exclusionary Language against the LGBTQ community.**

In a historic vote, the General Conference decided to remove the exclusionary language that was inserted in our *Book of Discipline* 52 years ago, against LGBTQ persons. This decision was supported by 93% of the delegates.

The body also approved legislation that prevents district superintendents and bishops from penalizing pastors and churches that perform or allow a same-gender wedding on church property. The same petition also includes protections that prevent punishment if a pastor or church chooses not to perform or allow a same-gender wedding on church property.

Unfortunately, already, irresponsible voices from outside the UMC are trying to confuse our people and churches in Upper New York, telling them that because of these decisions, they will be forced to act in ways that are not aligned with their beliefs on this matter. Let me be very clear—that is not true. Currently, clergy determine who they marry or not, and congregations choose how to use their buildings for ministry. That will continue to be the case. The General Conference removed all restrictions in the *Book of Discipline* and trusted clergy and congregations to follow their beliefs about ministry with and by LGBTQ persons.

Some might wonder what removing the restrictive language means for our shared ministry as United Methodists in Upper New York. As we move forward, the cabinet and I will continue:

- seeing and welcoming all people and inviting them to experience the love of Christ in their lives.
- celebrating our rich diversity as a precious gift from God.
- consulting with clergy and pastor-parish relations committees to discern the best missional appointment that honors the congregation and the pastor, and,
- promoting a vision of missional unity that transcends our differences and reflects the all-inclusive grace of Christ.

### **Reduced Missional Budget**

After a robust discussion, the General Conference established a new base rate for the apportionment formula, which will come into effect in 2025. The rate will be reduced from 3.29% to 2.6%. However, if the apportionment collection rate reaches 90% or higher in those years, the base rate will increase to 2.9% for 2027 and 2028.

The reduced budget prioritizes the ministries of local churches and annual conferences and considers our new ministry context after years of reduced membership, COVID-19, and disaffiliations. The bottom line of this decision is that the annual conferences in the US will pay lower apportionments to the general church. This also means that denomination-wide ministries that rely on those apportionments, including our general agencies and episcopal leadership, will be budgeted with this reduction in mind, triggering significant reductions in agency ministry budgets and changes in episcopal assignments.

In June, the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference will make decisions on episcopal assignments considering the missional budget approved by the General Conference.

## **New Clergy Retirement Plan**

The General Conference approved a new retirement plan for United Methodist clergy in the U.S. The plan, called Compass, was conceived and supported by Wespath, the denomination's pension and benefits agency, to secure a sustainable approach to supporting retired clergy.

Compass is expected to be less costly than the CRSP; and it will not generate additional long-term liabilities for annual conferences, many of which have been hard hit by the disaffiliations of local churches. With Compass, clergy will have retirement accounts that they control. They will be encouraged to contribute 4% of their salary to receive the full matching contribution from the church. Compass also will provide matching contributions to help clergy pay off student loans. The shift towards the Compass Plan, will not change benefits for clergy who are already retired. In addition, all benefits accrued in the current plan by active clergy, will be available to them at the time of retirement.

In the coming months, we will provide detailed information to all clergy on the new retirement plan. We will also continue working towards compensation equity for our clergy in ways that are sustainable in the long term.

## **Moving Forward**

In the coming days, weeks, and months, I will collaborate with The Council of Bishops and our conference leadership to provide you with more information about all that happened in Charlotte including the good news on new sacramental privileges for deacons, a revised book of resolutions and many other things; to help us better understand the general conference's outcomes and how we will move forward together.

As we celebrate the monumental progress made by the General Conference, let's do so humbly, mindful that some among us may be frustrated with some of the decisions made by the delegates on behalf of the church and uncertain about the future.

To my LGBTQ siblings, on behalf of the church, again, I ask for your forgiveness for the ways the church have sinned against you with words and exclusionary actions. I look forward to continuing to journey alongside you in this new season. Please know that I remain committed to continue working for a United Methodist Church, where not only our polity, but also all hearts are changed so that all persons are truly welcomed and allow to live to their full God-given potential.

I pray that the spirit of unity and collaboration experienced in Charlotte and the outcomes of this General Conference begin to bring healing to our denomination after years of disagreements and divisions. I urge all United Methodists in Upper New York to stay committed to doing no harm, doing good, and growing together in our understanding, experiences, and outward expressions of God's love.

I have never been more excited to be a United Methodist. We are moving forward with a vision of being a Spirit-led worldwide movement that is:

- Thriving and united in transforming the world by nurturing disciples of Jesus Christ who share God's love, compassion, and justice every day and everywhere.
- Spiritually vibrant and counter-culturally relevant.

- Committed to personal and social holiness, celebrating its rich diversity as a gift from God.
- A multi-generational network of faith communities that embrace all people as beloved children of God and allow them to live to their full God-given potential.
- A mission-driven organization that is agile, creative, and resilient, and while global in nature and impact, it is local and contextual in its ministry to reach as many people as possible with the good news of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed from God:

“Forget what happened long ago! Don't think too much about the past. I am creating something new. There it is! Do you see it? I have put roads in deserts, streams in thirsty lands.”

Guided by the Holy Spirit, together, we are moving forward to God's future with joy and hope. I thank you for who you are and for the countless ways you are making the grace of Christ visible and tangible in your communities. Continue living the gospel and being God's love with your neighbors in all places – that's how the world is transformed.

Now, may the love of God protect our hearts. The grace of Christ strengthen our faith and hope, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit continue to lead us forward.

Amen.



## **Bishop Héctor A. Burgos Núñez**

The United Methodist Church  
Serving United Methodists of Upper New York



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