# Frequently Asked Questions About Decisions Made At General Conference 2020/2024

Saturday, May 4, 2024

***QUESTIONS REGUARDING THE REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIVE LANGUAGE RELATED TO LGBTQ+ PEOPLE***

**Q: What changes were made to the Book of Discipline that relate to human sexuality?**

**A**: The General Conference voted by overwhelming majorities to remove from the United Methodist Book of Discipline discriminatory language and bans related to ministry by, with and for “self-avowed practicing” gay and lesbian people. Actions included:

• Removal of the language that the “practice of homosexuality … is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

• Removal of the ban on the ordination and appointment of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy.

• Removal of language that made the ordination of “self-avowed practicing homosexual” clergy and the performance of same-sex weddings chargeable offenses.

• Removal of mandatory minimum penalties for clergy holding same-sex weddings.

• Removal of a prohibition against using United Methodist funds to support groups, activities and causes that promote the acceptance of homosexuality.

• Removal of the requirement that the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination’s finance agency, enforce the funding ban. Instead, the provision says the agency should ensure that church funds do not go to anything that rejects LGBTQ persons or limits the response to the HIV epidemic.

• Allowance for all clergy in good standing to be appointed across annual conference lines when their bishop can’t locate an appointment in their conference.

These changes bring the Book of Discipline back to a neutral place where one group is not singled out for discrimination. It holds space for differing opinions within The United Methodist Church by avoiding broad mandates.

**Q: What does this mean for my local church?**

**A**: It is important to note that nothing passed by the General Conference would compel churches to receive an LGBTQ+ pastor. The legislation approved also explicitly protects the right of clergy and churches not to officiate at or host same-sex weddings. Pastors have the authority to decide when and for whom they will officiate a marriage.

Congregations have the right to determine whether such ceremonies will be held on church property.

At the same time, this legislation means candidates for ministry who are LGTBQ+ will continue to be welcomed.

Some of our churches, if they feel so led, may have same-gender weddings. There is no prohibition against either.

United Methodist churches will have the freedom to respond to God’s call to ministry in ways that are best for their contextual and missional communities.

**Q: When do these changes take effect?**

**A:** These changes go into effect at the close of General Conference on Friday, May 3, 2024.

***QUESTIONS REGUARDING REGIONALIZATION:***

On Thursday, April 25, a day Bishop Thomas Bickerton called “an historic day,” the General Conference delegates voted 586 to 164 for an amendment to the denomination’s constitution that will now go before annual conference voters for potential ratification.

**Q: What is regionalization?**

**A:** With regionalization, the United States and also each Central Conference outside of the US will become known as Regional Conferences. Each Regional Conference will have the authority and ability to adapt a portion of the Book of Discipline to better align with the missions of their context to continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

This change will decentralize the U.S. church, allowing all conferences to have equal partnership in The UMC, while allowing each geographic area the ability to make changes for their local cultural and missional church expressions.

**Q: When do these changes take effect?**

**A:** The votes to approve Regional Conference legislation will not make immediate changes to the Book of Discipline. Because this legislation includes changes to the Constitution, it must be approved by ⅔ aggregate vote of all Annual Conferences.

Legislation that requires approval at the Annual Conference level must go through an editorial process so that each annual conference around the world can read the legislation and vote accordingly. **Thus, most Annual Conferences will most likely vote on this legislation at the meeting of the Annual Conference in 2025.**

***QUESTIONS REGUARDING THE REVISED SOCIAL PRINCIPLES***

**Q: What changes were made to the Social Principles that relate to human sexuality?**

**A:** General Conference delegates eliminated language stating “the practice of homosexuality …is incompatible with Christian teaching.” ¶161,¶162 The Social Community

In the same vote, delegates affirmed “marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.”

Below is the adopted Revised Social Principles legislation:

• Part V: Social Principles Preamble

• ¶160 The Community of All Creation

• ¶163 The Economic Community

• The Political Community

• Part V: Social Principles Preface

• ¶161,¶162 The Social Community

**Q: What does this mean for my local church?**

**A:** The Social Principles, contained in both the Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions, are statements that reflect official United Methodist teachings on a wide range of topics. They are not church law, and therefore do not have any direct implications for your church, but are intended to inform United Methodist witness on issues of the day with a biblical foundation.

**Q: When do these changes take effect?**

**A:** These changes take effect January 1, 2025.

***QUESTIONS REGUARDING* *SACRAMENTAL RIGHTS FOR DEACONS***

**Q: What does it mean for Deacons to have sacramental rights?**

**A:** This means deacons can now offer Holy Communion and conduct baptisms where they have been appointed to serve, whether that is a church, outreach ministry or mission.

**Q: When does this change take effect?**

This takes effect on January 1, 2025.