



# LANCASTER FIRST

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

May 6, 2024

Friends in Christ,

Many of you have been following what has been happening across the connection of the United Methodist Church (UMC) as the General Conference met from April 23-May 3 in Charlotte, North Carolina. The General Conference (GC) is the world-wide body made up of nearly 900 clergy and laity that makes decisions for the UMC and meets every four years. The General Conference concluded its postponed 2020 business on Friday, May 3, having passed some legislation that you have probably seen in the headlines or on various social media outlets.

We are writing to offer a very basic summary of some of the legislation that was passed, so that you will have that information from your pastors and church leadership.

The big items of legislation that passed are as follows:

1. **Regionalization:** Regionalization is an amendment to the UMC constitution that still requires all 133 conferences in the world to vote before it is ratified. The amendment will be ratified by two thirds aggregate vote of all 133 annual conferences. If the amendment passes, regionalization will allow for different regions of the world to modify section VI of our Book of Discipline (BOD). The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church is the guidebook for our denomination. Section VI of our Book of Discipline outlines the organization and administration of the church. Sections I-V of the BOD include our Constitution, General Book, Doctrinal Standards, Ministry of All Christians, and Social Principles. Regionalization would apply to all regions equally.
2. **Disaffiliation through Paragraph 2553 Removed:** Churches will no longer be able to disaffiliate from the UMC through the process outlined in paragraph 2553.
3. **Revised Social Principles:** Our Social Principles are in section V of our BOD. The Social Principles define our denominational stances on things like alcohol, creation care, divorce, gambling, gender equality, marriage, war, and many other topics. A new set of Social Principles was adopted at this General Conference. A notable change was to the definition of marriage: *"marriage is a sacred lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and 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."*
4. **Sacramental Privilege for Deacons:** There are three types of pastors: Elders, Deacons, and Licensed Local Pastors. Elders are ordained to the offices of proclaiming God's word, ordering the work of the church, serving congregations and communities, and administering the sacraments. Deacons are ordained to the offices of proclaiming God's word, service, compassion, and justice. Deacons have, with this GC, been granted the additional privilege of administering the sacraments.
5. **Same Sex Marriage and Ordination of LGBTQ+ Clergy:** Since a prohibitive clause was added to our BOD in 1984, the UMC has not permitted pastors to perform same-sex weddings. Nor have annual

conferences been permitted to ordain self-professing LGBTQ+ persons. The decision of this GC has removed those prohibitive clauses, effective Friday, May 3, 2024. Therefore, the decision of whom a pastor will or will not marry is in the hands of the pastor. The clergy also retain the primary responsibility of determining building use for religious services in their local churches, with the expectation that they will work appropriately with local church trustees. Additionally, it will be up to the District Committees on Ministry (DCOMs) and Boards of Ordained Ministry (BOMs) of annual conferences to discern the fitness of all persons for ministry. Again, the prohibitive language for persons who are LGBTQ+ has been omitted.

6. **Reduced General Conference Apportionments:** The amount that will go to the overall denomination was reduced to reflect our current financial reality.
7. **Full Communion with Episcopal Church:** To be in full communion with another Christian denomination means that we recognize the authenticity of one another's baptisms, we offer sacramental hospitality to each other, and we recognize the ordination of one another's priests, elders, and deacons. This item must still be ratified by the governing body of the Episcopal Church.

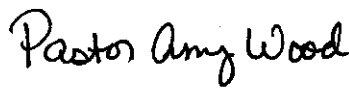
Our mission continues to be *to love God and love all people and to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. And as a local body that is part of a world-wide denomination, we are completely committed to that mission.

In the interest of addressing any questions or concerns you may have, we are planning a Q & A meeting (date and time to be shared soon). If you have other concerns or questions, please speak with Pastor Nikki or Pastor Amy to avoid the spread of misinformation or misunderstanding in our church or community. We look forward to joining you in conversation about our church and how we can continue to share Christ's love with everyone!

In Christ,



Pastor Nikki



Pastor Amy



Mike Lieber, Church Council Chair

163 East Wheeling Street, Lancaster, Ohio 43130

phone: 740.653.3330 web: [www.love-first.org](http://www.love-first.org) e-mail: [church@love-first.org](mailto:church@love-first.org)

Rev. Nikki Baker, Lead Pastor

Rev. Amy Wood, Associate Pastor