

Terms and Definitions

Trust Clause

The clause that must be included in the deeds of all United Methodist properties. All properties held by the General, Jurisdictional, Annual, and District Conferences or by a local church or by any agency or institution of the denomination are to be held in trust for the denomination. The titles are not held by "The United Methodist Church" since it is a connectional structure and not a legal entity in and of itself. The titles to the properties are held by boards of trustees established for the purpose of holding and administering property. In the case of local churches, the deeds to all local churches, parsonages, and other properties must include a trust clause. This clause indicated that the property is to be maintained for the benefit of the local church as this ultimately relates to the ministry and work of the Annual Conference. When a local congregation disbands and services are discontinued, the property becomes the responsibility of the Annual Conference Board of Trustees. The property can be sold only after it is declared abandoned by a vote of the Annual Conference.

Bishop

During a jurisdictional conference session, bishops are elected from among the elders, by lay and clergy delegates. Bishops oversee and supervise one or more annual conferences and meet with other bishops to lead The United Methodist Church. Bishops commission and ordain deacons and elders and appoint licensed local pastors, deacons and elders from the annual conference in which they lead. They are authorized to "guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine and discipline of the church" and to "lead all persons entrusted to their oversight in worship, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in their mission of witness and service in the world". Bishops elected in the U.S. service in that capacity until retirement and remain on the Council of Bishops after retirement (§§ 401-403).

Book of Discipline

The book of law for The United Methodist Church that determines how the church governs itself. It includes historical information, doctrinal standards, laws, and policies that can only be changed by the General Conference. After each General Conference session it is updated and reprinted based on decisions made by delegates of the General Conference session.

General Conference

The international gathering and business meeting of the United Methodist denomination. It convenes once every four years, in a different location. There are 998 delegates (half are ordained, half are laypersons) representing each annual and central conference. This body decides on petitions to change the Book of Discipline. It is the only body authorized to make decisions and speak on behalf of The United Methodist Church (¶¶ 8, 501-511).

Social Principles

The Social Principles are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit; however, they are not church law. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice (¶ 509).

Apportionments

A portion of local church offerings that churches contribute to their district and conference to support the annual conference and general church ministries. That name was developed because each church is 'apportioned' their share according to a specific formula based on membership and budgetary commitment.