

**Subject:** Bishop Steiner Ball Shares about General Conference  
**Date:** Friday, May 3, 2024 at 10:07:52 PM Eastern Daylight Time  
**From:** Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church  
**To:** Bryan Beaty

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Dear Fellow Laborers in Jesus Christ:

**TODAY** is the day that the **LORD** has made. Let us **REJOICE** and be **GLAD** in it!

The postponed 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church just concluded. My friends and colleagues were **overwhelmed** with how the spirit of God was present and moved throughout the two weeks and guided the work of the Church as we seek to continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

General Conference has been filled with prayer, worship, music and witnesses to the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church around the world and there is so much good work being done.

Opening worship brought tears to many eyes as the long awaited postponed General Conference began. Amid denominational and worldwide headlines, the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ is moving and impacting lives – we see that right here in West Virginia each and every day. It's taking place in local congregations, in missions, in neighborhoods, and in homes. This week challenged us to not overlook, but to share the good, hope-filled news of our denomination and how they this work is making a difference for Jesus Christ. With the work that was accomplished at this General Conference, we must now ask ourselves, **how do we become the church, the people, God needs for us to be?**

I want to make sure our West Virginia family is aware of some of the most significant work done by the General Conference and share with you that more information about these items will be coming in the days leading up and during our 2024 Annual Conference. **We will begin these conversations with two webinars planned for Wednesday, May 8, 2024, at 12 p.m. and 7 p.m. You can learn more about this at the end of this email.**

Until then, here is a short summary of some of the work that was completed at this General Conference that I've not already shared with you.

### **WORLDWIDE REGIONALIZATION**

Several petitions on the worldwide regionalization plan were affirmed by the General Conference. The worldwide regionalization plan is a multi-step plan. The process includes constitutional amendments that will require an aggregate vote of the annual conferences around the world for regionalization to move forward within our denomination. This means that we will now begin a time of information sharing and education on the regionalization plan so that annual conference members will be enabled to make an informed vote at an upcoming annual conference session. Annual Conferences will most likely consider the required vote on constitutional amendments at annual conferences sessions held in 2025. Once the outcome of those votes are received and certified, then we will know whether or not the worldwide regionalization plan in whole, or potentially in part, will be implemented.

### **CHANGES TO APPORTIONMENT BASE RATE**

**U.S. annual conferences will be asked to pay lower apportionments**

## **compared to what delegates passed at the 2016 General Conference.**

Delegates voted to reduce a key component of calculating apportionments — the portion of church giving requested to fund the general-church budget — shifting from the current base rate of 3.29% to a base rate of 2.6% for 2025 and 2026. Then, if the apportionment collection rate is 90% or higher in those years, the base rate will jump to 2.9% for 2027 and 2028.

## **FULL COMMUNION WITH EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

Delegates also approved full communion with the Episcopal Church. The agreement needs the approval of the Episcopalians before going into effect, but if the Episcopalian Church affirms the agreement, which might not happen until meetings scheduled for 2027, it will mean that the two denominations recognize each other as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in which the Gospel is rightly preached and taught.”

## **CHANGES TO CLERGY RETIREMENT – THE COMPASS PLAN**

The General Conference approved the Compass Plan, a new way of handling clergy retirement funds. Wespeth proposed this new retirement plan at General Conference to increase the sustainability of the clergy retirement program, to help clergy retire comfortably, and to promote more equity and fairness in clergy compensation amounts.

The Compass Plan will allow clergy their own their retirement accounts (something like a 401(k) plan.) The clergy and their accounts will continue to be supported and cared for by Wespeth to help ensure clergy have the resources needed to be sustained into and through retirement. Amid an ever-changing world, Compass preserves the integrity of clergy retirement plans, and congregational budgets.

## **SACRAMENTAL AUTHORITY FOR DEACONS**

In what presiding Bishop David Graves called a “historic moment,” the General Conference passed new legislation granting authority to deacons to preside at the sacraments in their ministry settings. This means deacons can now offer communion and conduct baptisms where they have been appointed to serve, whether that is a church, outreach ministry or mission. After the vote’s passage, many celebrated the historic change, which should take effect January 1. Our

own Rev. Jeff Taylor, delegate to General Conference and chair of the Order of Deacons in the West Virginia Annual Conference said, "This change recognizes that it is ordination, not order or itineracy, that authorizes the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion".

This update is in addition to updates that have been shared earlier this week on other actions which changed language in The Discipline in regard removing language that prohibited pastors from officiating same gender marriages and prevented self-avowed practicing gay and lesbian persons from Licensing, Commissioning, or Ordination.

At the time of this summary, we are still awaiting decisions by The United Methodist Judicial Council on several questions. The General Conference has done a great deal of work this week and it will take some time, as it does after every meeting of every General Conference, to determine all the changes made to the Book of Discipline.

We will share more information as legislative action is clarified and will need to wait, probably for at least a year, before we know the result of any General Conference decision that included a constitutional amendment. As we have shared, a Constitutional change requires multiple steps to know whether or not the General Conference decision can move forward and becomes part of the Book of Discipline.

All the work of the General Conference does **NOT** change the **call of Christ** to go **make disciples of Jesus Christ**. The mission of the Church **has not changed**. We are called **to reach people** for Jesus Christ. We are called **to baptize, to teach, to heal, and to bring love and life to the people of this world**.

There is no doubt that even though we may feel differently about some of the General Conference decisions, we are called by Christ to **work together as the church** and walk arm and arm **with deep respect** so that others may come to know that the God who created them loves them and desires for them to know about and accept His saving power and their place in His Kingdom.

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In fact, God loved the world **so much** that He sent His Son not to condemn the world, but so that the world might have **life** through Him.

**Let us recommit ourselves to be United Methodist people and churches who share Christ's light, love, healing, forgiveness, and life-giving, transforming power to the world.**

In His Service,

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

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## JOIN US FOR A GENERAL CONFERENCE RE-CAP WEBINAR

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 | 12 p.m.

[Register for May 8 Webinar at Noon](#)

Wednesday, May 8, 2024 | 7 p.m.

[Register for May 8 Webinar at 7 PM](#)

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