



Dear Friends,

Introduction:

There is widespread consensus within the leadership of the United Methodist Church that regionalization is a win/win proposition for the whole church. Most Bishops, the Connectional Table, the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, the Central Conference authors of the Christmas Covenant, and multiple advocacy groups--including Mainstream UMC, are all working together for this goal. For it to work, we must dramatically ramp up our collective efforts to pass it.

- It allows the sharing of resources without imposing cultural views on others.
- It takes the US Church out of the center and creates a common global structure.
- It creates necessary missional space between progressive and traditional annual conferences.
- It focuses the church on mission, not conflict.

This would be the biggest change in polity and structure in the UMC since 1968—and maybe even before. This big of a change would be hard on a good day—and, you may have noticed, these are not good days.

5 Challenges to Regionalization at General Conference 2024:

1. **We have tried regionalization before.**

There have been attempts at regionalization at every General Conference for a generation. The 2019 One Church Plan was only the most recent. They all have failed because each time it came up, the votes were taken as a proxy on homosexuality. Traditionalists have long believed that with regionalization, the United States and Western Europe would allow ordination and marriage for LGBTQ persons. And they are right. A US or European-only vote would have passed 12 years ago, similar to other US denominations. We need assurance that regionalization is a compromise that traditionalists will support this time.

2. Regionalization requires multiple Constitutional Amendments

According to the United Methodist Book of Discipline, ¶ 59. Article I.

“Amendments to the Constitution shall be made upon a 2/3 majority of the General Conference present and voting and a 2/3 affirmative vote of the aggregate number of members of the several annual conferences present and voting.”

In 2008 regionalization passed General Conference and failed at the annual conferences. In 2016 an amendment to the constitution saying women are equal to men passed at General Conference and failed at the annual conferences. There is no guarantee that a hard-won deal at General Conference survives a year of global politics for ratification. We need to build a consensus in our church, not just a majority!

3. Communication in the UMC is hard.

This is a delicate subject. Mainstream UMC can find the name, address, and email for almost every General Conference Delegate in the US, Europe, and the Philippines—because the names are publicly posted. Annual conferences in Africa do not post this information, so we can only find a small fraction of the names and contact information for their delegates. This is compounded by the reality of poor internet, lack of services, and unforeseen changes in who can get visas. This creates turnover and a communication vacuum that no one—not even the General Conference has solved. The General Conference struggles to get official UMC materials into the hands of delegates in Africa. This vacuum is a crisis that envelopes nearly 1/3 of all General Conference participants. We simply cannot communicate with one another. Developing new communication channels and relationships is critical ahead of General Conference 2024.

4. We do not know where delegates from Africa stand on regionalization.

Every region of the United Methodist Church has publicly expressed support for regionalization, except Africa. Every US Jurisdictional Conference has voted for it. Annual Conferences in the US, Western Europe, and the Philippines have publicly voted for it. Not a single annual conference in Africa has publicly voted to support regionalization. African delegates comprise 1/3 of the votes at General Conference and delivered 60% of the votes for the Traditional Plan in 2019. There will be no regionalization without their approval.

This is the question only African delegates can answer: Does regionalization provide enough distance and space to stay connected? The US and European regions will openly ordain gay pastors; Africa will not. Traditionalists in the US have said “No.” If African delegates say “No,” then we all need to work together on plan B. If the answer is “Yes,” then anecdotal assurances do not pass legislation—we have had these before. The last thing we need is another fruitless General Conference. We need annual conferences in Africa (not just Bishops, individuals, and advocacy groups) to publicly state their position.

5. The same groups are still working against regionalization.

The staff and board members of the conservative US advocacy groups oppose regionalization, and they are not leaving. The Institute on Religion and Democracy, Good News, and the Wesleyan Covenant Association are all coming to General Conference 2024 to harvest more churches out of the UMC. All these groups have said they will actively work against regionalization if they cannot extend the timeframe for disaffiliations. These groups have an undefeated record at General Conference in influencing votes in Africa. We must build a new coalition of those of us staying United Methodist, so our future church is not hijacked—again—by those who are leaving.

Conclusion:

We have 9 months before General Conference 2024. Those of us around the globe who want to stay United Methodist have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to work together to build a great church! Regionalization offers the best path forward.

We need your help. Please donate today to Mainstream UMC: www.MainstreamUMC.com/Donate

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Mark Holland
Executive Director, Mainstream UMC
www.MainstreamUMC.com

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Here is a great UM News article about the regionalization work: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/efforts-for-regionalization-move-forward>



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