

PART SEVEN CONFERENCES

¶1701. THE CONFERENCE SYSTEM. Beginning in 1744 when John Wesley first met with his brother Charles and a few other clergymen to consider "how we should proceed to save our own souls and those that heard us," the principle expression of connectionalism within Methodism has historically been within its conference system.

The agenda for the first conference was a simple one: "1. What to teach, 2. How to teach, and 3. What to do, that is, how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice," and the agenda for that and subsequent meetings was generally expressed in a question and answer format.

Organized at multiple levels -- charge conferences, district conferences, annual conferences, regional conferences, and a general conference -- the conference system is at the spiritual center of Methodism, and refers not simply to a meeting and the decisions that may be made at such a setting, but both to the act of gathering together in holy conferencing, and to the persons themselves who do so. The conference system provides for collective discernment and collective decision-making as the governing principle of our church polity (Proverbs 15:22, Acts 15:1-35).

¶1702. THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE. Embodying the covenant of our connectional church is the Annual Conference, whose composition and character are set forth in the Constitution (¶203, Article VII.)

1. *Meetings.* As its name implies, the Annual Conference of each designated area shall meet at least once a year, presided over by the bishop in charge, or in his or her absence, by a president who shall be elected by the members of the annual conference from the clergy of that conference. Bishops shall appoint the times for holding the conference. The Annual Conference or a committee thereof shall select the place for such meetings, provided that should it become necessary for any reason, a majority of the presiding elders, with the consent of the bishop in charge, may change the place. A special session of the annual conference may be called by action of the annual conference or by the bishop, with the concurrence of three-fourths of the presiding elders, at such time and place as established in the call. A special session shall address only such matters as stated in the call, unless a two-thirds majority votes to add a matter.

2. *Boundaries.* The boundaries of each annual conference shall be adopted, and any changes approved, by the General Conference or, if there is one, by a regional conference which includes the geographical area of the annual conference (see ¶ 203, Article VI). A special annual conference or district that is not geographically bound and overlaps the boundaries of other annual conferences or districts can be formed by the decision of General Conference at the request of a group of churches.

3. *Powers and Duties.* In addition to those responsibilities enumerated in the Constitution, the Annual Conference may adopt rules for its own governance, provided they do not conflict with the requirements of the *Book of Doctrines and Discipline*.

4. *Boards and Agencies.* Annual Conferences shall create such boards, commissions and agencies as may be required to further its mission (§ 202, Article III and § 203, Article VII). These shall include:

- a. A Board of Trustees to care for the property of the annual conference, if any
- b. A Finance Committee to oversee the financial operations of the annual conference (This committee may be combined with the Board of Trustees.)
- c. An Episcopacy Committee (§ 604, 611) to care for selecting a bishop to serve in the annual conference, act as a liaison between that bishop and the leaders and members of the annual conference, and to be the first step in episcopal accountability (§ XXX)
- d. A Board of Ministry (§ 505ff) to care for the process of recruiting, vetting, and recommending persons for ordained ministry

§703. REGIONAL CONFERENCES.

As per the Constitution (§203, Article VIII), with the approval or at the request of annual conferences within a geographical region, the General Conference may organize those conferences into a Regional Conference in order to better carry out the mission of the _____ Church. In addition to those responsibilities enumerated in the Constitution, the regional conference may adopt rules for its own governance , provided they do not conflict with the requirements of the *Book of Doctrines and Discipline*.

§704. ADAPTABILITY OF THE DOCTRINES AND DISCIPLINE. All provisions of the *Book of Doctrines and Discipline* shall be generally applicable to all geographic, national, and cultural parts of the church. The adaptability of any provisions shall be written into the provisions themselves in order to be recognized as valid.

§705. GENERAL CONFERENCE. The global nature of the _____ Church shall be expressed in its General Conference, whose composition and character are set forth in the Constitution (§203, Article VI). All actions of the General Conference, including this *Book of Doctrines and Discipline*, shall be translated at general church expense into the official languages of any part of the _____ Church. This material shall also be available in digital form.