

As stated in the *2016 Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church, “bishops are elected from the elders and set apart for a ministry of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision. As followers of Jesus Christ, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church. The role and calling forth of the bishop is to exercise oversight and support of the Church in its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” (§403.1)

In the regular course of mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church bishops are consecrated, serve, and retire in ways that reflect the ministry of pastors in local churches.

This document serves to answer some questions about the bishop and her/his role, term, etc. under the provisions of the *2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline*. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, we are operating under unusual circumstances that will be expanded upon later in the document.

We would like to answer your questions related to the office of the Bishop in general. You may have questions such as:

- How does a person become a bishop?
- What does the term Episcopal or Episcopacy mean?
- Who decides the area where the bishops serve?
- Do bishop’s move? If so, when do they move?
- Do bishops retire?

What are Bishops?

Bishops are the spiritual leaders in the church who provide ministry of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision within The United Methodist Church. They are to lead with a vital and renewing spirit; an enquiring mind and commitment to teaching; with vision and commitment to transform the Church and the world; with a passion for the unity of the church; and with a ministry of administration (§403 of the *2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline*).

Sometimes the word Episcopacy or Episcopal is used when referring to things related to the bishop, the work, or the office of the bishop. This is not referring to the Episcopal Church. It was established by the United Methodist Constitution as a part of the organizational structure of United Methodism.

There are several levels of the church to which bishops have roles including:

Local Church

District

Annual Conference

Jurisdiction

General/International

Election of Bishops

Bishops are elected by the delegates to jurisdictional conference that takes place every four years, typically in July. In the months prior to jurisdictional conference, ordained elders who have felt God's call on their life spend time in prayer and discernment as to whether they would be willing to be considered for the position of bishop. If they discern that God is leading them in this direction, they make this information public. Some annual conferences endorse a candidate or candidates to run for the office of bishop. During jurisdictional conference, conversations are held with persons who are considered for election. Voting during jurisdictional conference is done by delegates from each annual conference, conducted by ballot. The number of bishops that a jurisdiction must elect depends on various things that can include: number of vacancies (due to retirement or other reason) or the number of bishops that need to be elected.

Assignment of Bishops

Once the required number of persons is elected to the office of bishop, the process of assigning bishops begins. A group of people called the Jurisdictional Episcopacy Committee begins their work. They are a representative body from members from each annual conference.

The committee has the responsibility to assign bishops to what is called an Episcopal area. It is another way of referring to the annual conference to which they have oversight. Sometimes this encompasses more than one annual conference. The Desert Southwest Conference is also called the Phoenix Episcopal Area.

Every four years, the committee enters into a process of evaluating all of the bishops, those who are current active bishops as well as those who were newly elected. The committee considers criteria such as the qualities, gifts, as well as the needs of the annual conference; the gifts and skills of the persons who were elected bishops; along with other factors.

After long and prayerful discernment, the committee makes their recommendations in consultation with the other current bishops. The assignments are finalized and announced publicly. The newly elected bishops are consecrated and if a bishop beginning a new assignment, they begin a process of transition and moving. They begin their new assignment that typically begins on September 1 of the same year.

Bishop's Role in an Annual Conference

Shortly after arriving in the new area, an installation service takes place that celebrates the arrival of the new bishop.

Within an annual conference, various forms of ministry that bishops do include but are not limited to:

- Guiding the clergy and laity in the conference;
- Providing spiritual leadership and vision;
- Ordaining deacons and elders in the church;

- Presiding during annual conference session;
- Making appointments of clergy to local churches and other ministries;
- Working with the Appointive Cabinet in clergy and local church matters;

Also, within an annual conference, there is a group called the Episcopacy Committee, which serves to support and provide counsel to the bishop and assists in the determination of the episcopal needs of the area, making recommendations to appropriate bodies. The committee functions as an advisor to the bishop concerning issues and conditions of the people in the area and to help interpret the function of the bishop's office to the people in the conference. (§637).

Bishops' Role beyond an Annual Conference

Bishops who serve in the same jurisdiction or central conference (region) in The United Methodist Church, become part of the College of Bishops (§48). The College of Bishops is responsible for determining the plan of episcopal supervision of the annual conferences, missionary conferences and missions within their respective territories (§48).

They also become part of the Council of Bishops, which is a body of all of the bishops in the entire United Methodist Church. The Council plans the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of the entire Church. They also carry into effect the rules, regulations, and responsibilities by the General Conference (§47)

Some bishops serve on our general boards and agencies across The United Methodist Church.

Bishops' Retirement

As it is for all clergy, The Book of Discipline sets a mandatory retirement age for our bishops and requires that they follow this requirement. Once a bishop turns 68, they are required to retire (§408.1).

Some bishops retire before that age marker due to health or personal reasons. Other times, bishops are retired by voluntary (§408.2) or involuntary (§408.3) processes.

Once a bishop enters into retired status, they can continue to serve in various roles and ways they desire. For example, retired bishops may teach in seminaries, serve the Council of Bishops in a variety of roles, even temporarily return to lead an annual conference when there is a vacancy in the episcopal office.

Special Adaptations Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dates of the General Conference has been postponed twice. Likewise, the dates for the regular sessions of the Western Jurisdiction Conference have been postponed. The Council of Bishops determined that new bishops cannot be elected until the Jurisdictional Conference that follows a regular, in-person session of the General

Conference. Since the anticipated date for this regular, in-person session of the General Conference is now 2024, new bishops cannot be elected until after this General Conference. The date for the next regular session of the Western Jurisdiction Conference is November 2-5, 2022.

This change in the regular rhythm of General and Jurisdictional Conferences means that although bishops may be retired as described above, no bishops can be elected to fill the positions of the bishops who retire until the November 2022 Jurisdictional Conference.

When a bishop retires prior to the time when a new bishop can be elected, it creates a need for episcopal leadership during the interim time. A plan of coverage is determined by nomination of the College of Bishops of the jurisdiction and election by the Council of Bishops.

QUESTIONS

This information is important for you to have so that you know more about the role of the bishop, her/his role in our conference and in The United Methodist Church. We ask that you hold in prayer our Bishop Grant Hagiya and our conference in the days ahead.

If you have questions, please visit [our website](#) or contact us via [email](#).

09/22/22