

**PART 4**  
**GENERAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT**

**Chapter 1**

**GENERAL CONFERENCE**

**A. Function**

**1500.** The General Conference is the supreme governing body of The Wesleyan Church. The basic provisions, powers and restrictions of this body are set forth in the Constitution (325-360).

**B. Membership**

**1. Plan of Representation**

**1503.** The General Conference shall be composed of voting and nonvoting members as follows:

**Voting Members**

(1) The voting members shall consist of an equal number of ordained ministers and lay members of The Wesleyan Church (325):

(a) The district superintendent of each district and provisional district and a lay delegate elected at the same time and in the same manner as the other delegates (1512-1526).

(b) One ministerial and one lay delegate elected by an established district for every seven hundred fifty covenant members and major fraction thereof. The district superintendent and the lay delegate elected (1503:1a) shall be the representatives for the first seven hundred fifty covenant members.

(c) The general officials of the Church as defined in 1800, the General Superintendents Emeriti, members of the General Board who are not voting members by some other right, the presidents of the general educational institutions (2365), the general directors of

Hephzibah Children's Home, Wesleyan Investment Foundation, Wesleyan Native American Ministries, Wesleyan Women and the Wesleyan Pension Fund, and such delegates-at-large as shall be necessary to maintain parity between ordained ministers and lay members (1508-1510).

(d) Voting delegates from units under the General Department of World Missions according to a plan approved by the General Board (325; 1655:31).

### **Nonvoting Members**

(2) The following when they are not voting members by some other right shall be seated as nonvoting members when present at the General Conference session: former General Superintendents, superintendents of developing districts (1015), the general directors of Wesleyan Medical Fellowship, Wesleyan Men, executive secretaries or directors of subsidiary corporations and missionary directors and such nonvoting delegates from units under the General Department of World Missions as provided for by the General Board (325; 1655:31).

## **2. Forfeiture of Representation**

**1506.** A district or provisional district which has been placed under discipline as provided for in the Judiciary (5365-5370), shall forfeit all rights to any representation in the General Conference (323:9). The delegates, including the district superintendent and any delegate-at-large from that district, shall not be recognized or seated until the district or provisional district they represent is officially reinstated (5365).

## **3. Election of Delegates**

### **a. Delegates-at-Large**

**1508.** The election of delegates-at-large shall be arranged for by the recommendation of the General Secretary and the approval of the General Board in accordance with the following regulations:

(1) The parity of equal ministerial and lay membership in the General Conference shall be maintained (325; 360:3b).

(2) The established districts shall be considered in alphabetical order, and each eligible district in turn shall be appointed to elect one delegate-at-large. A provisional district shall not be eligible to elect a delegate-at-large.

**1510.** The General Board shall act upon the recommendation of the General Secretary in one of its sessions consistent with the provisions of paragraph 1512. The delegates-at-large shall be elected by the appointed districts at the same time and in the same manner as the other General Conference delegates (1512-1526).

### **b. Delegates**

**1512.** The delegates to the General Conference shall be elected by the district conference, by ballot and by majority vote, at its last annual session preceding the General Conference. When the last annual session is within sixty days of the opening date of the General Conference, the district conference may elect its delegates at the previous annual session. The statistical report for the annual session of the district conference at which the delegates are elected shall be used for determining the number of covenant members, and consequently, the number of General Conference delegates (1503:1b). A certified list of all delegates to the General Conference shall be promptly forwarded by the district secretary to the General Secretary (1332:5).

**1514.** A person accepting election as a delegate is obligated to attend faithfully the entire General Conference session, unless hindered by unforeseen and justifiable circumstances. (Cf. 1541.)

### **c. Alternate Delegates**

**1516.** Alternate delegates shall be the remaining nominees not elected to serve as General Conference delegates and shall fill vacancies in the descending order of votes received (cf. 1332:5).

**1518.** Whenever the district superintendent, who is an *ex officio* member of the General Conference (1503:1a), is unable to attend, the place of the district superintendent shall be filled by the assistant district superintendent (if any). If the assistant district superintendent is an elected delegate to the General Conference, the place of the assistant district superintendent shall then be filled like any other vacancy by an alternate ministerial delegate.

#### **4. Qualifications of Delegates**

##### **a. Ministerial Delegates**

**1520.** A ministerial delegate must be an ordained minister who is a member of the district represented, both at the time of election and at the time of the General Conference (327:2).

**1522.** Whenever a ministerial delegate-elect shall transfer membership to another district, the right to represent the district shall be vacated and an alternate ministerial delegate shall be certified (1332:5; 1516).

##### **b. Lay Delegates**

**1524.** A lay delegate must be a lay person who is a covenant member of a local church in the district represented, both at the time of election and at the time of the General Conference (327:3).

**1526.** Whenever a lay delegate-elect shall cease to meet the requirements in 1524, the right to represent the district shall be vacated and an alternate lay delegate shall be certified (1516).

#### **C. Sessions**

##### **1. Regular Sessions**

**1528.** The General Conference shall meet quadrennially, in the spring season at a place, date and hour determined by the General Board (330:1; 1655:3).

**1530.** Whenever an emergency shall require a change in the plans of the General Conference for the time of the next regular session, the General Board may, by a two-thirds vote, declare that such an emergency exists and authorize the necessary changes (cf. 330:1; 1655:4-5).

##### **2. Special Sessions**

**1532.** A special session of the General Conference shall be called by the Board of General Superintendents (1920:7) whenever authorized to do so by a two-thirds vote of the General Board (1655:5), or when requested to do so by two-thirds of the established district conferences (330:2; 1180:6). The time and place for the special session shall be decided by the General Board

(1655:5), or, in the interim of its sessions, by the Executive Board. The time shall always be later than the next session of each district conference (330:2).

**1534.** Any duly called special session of the General Conference shall have full authority to transact any item of business which may be transacted at a regular session.

## D. Organization and Procedure

### 1. Officers

**1536. The Presidency (332).** The General Superintendents shall preside over the General Conference in such order as they shall determine (1920:6). When no General Superintendent is present, the General Conference shall elect by ballot an ordained minister as president pro tem.

**1539. The Secretary (334).** The General Secretary shall be the secretary of the General Conference. The General Secretary shall accurately record the proceedings, preserve them in permanent form, and perform any other such duties as shall be required by the General Conference (1948; 1951).

### 2. Procedure

**1541. Delegates.** Once a delegate has been seated at the General Conference, an alternate delegate cannot thereafter be seated in place of the seated delegate (cf. 1514).

**1543. Quorum (336).** A majority of all the delegates elected by the districts shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. A smaller number shall have the authority to adjourn from time to time until a quorum is obtained.

**1545. Voting (338).** The ministerial and lay delegates shall deliberate in the sessions of the General Conference as one body. However, upon the final vote on any question, except proposed amendments to the Constitution (200-385), on a call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide so that ministerial and lay delegates shall vote separately. It shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

**1547. Rules of Order.** General Conference business shall be conducted according to the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, except when formally suspended by the General Conference or when other procedures are required by *The Discipline* (360:1).

**1550. Appeals on Questions of Order.** The chair shall decide all questions of order, subject to an appeal to the General Conference. In case of

such an appeal, the vote shall be taken without debate, except that the chair may state the grounds of the decision, and the appellant may state the grounds of the appeal.

**1553. Suspension of Rules.** The General Conference may suspend for a particular session any statutory law (155) set forth in *The Discipline* governing the procedures of the General Conference by a two-thirds majority vote.

### 3. Memorials

**1557.** Memorials to the General Conference, including proposed changes in *The Discipline* other than the Constitution (200-385), may be submitted by a district conference, a district board of administration, the General Board, a General Conference committee, the governing board of an educational or benevolent institution, the governing board of a subsidiary corporation, the general executive committee of an auxiliary organization or any ten members of the General Conference.

**1560.** Memorials proposing an amendment to the Constitution (200-385) may be submitted to the General Conference only by a district conference by a two-thirds vote (1180:1) or by the General Board (1655:6).

### 4. Committees

**1563.** The General Conference shall have such committees as it may deem necessary. The committees shall be nominated by the General Board, unless ordered otherwise in *The Discipline* or by the General Conference, and elected by the General Conference.

#### a. Committee on Memorials

**1565.** The General Board shall serve as the Committee on Memorials. It shall be the duty of the Committee on Memorials to receive all memorials for the General Conference, classify them, pass on each of them and submit such memorials to the General Conference, together with the committee's recommendation, and in such order as the committee shall determine. All memorials received no later than November 1 of the year prior to the General Conference shall be classified and printed for distribution to the General Conference delegates no later than sixty days before the opening date of the General Conference. Any memorial received by the Committee on Memorials after November 1 shall only be presented to the General Conference if it is

recommended for adoption by the Committee on Memorials and if the General Conference votes to hear it.

### **b. General Conference Planning Committee**

**1570.** The General Secretary, General Treasurer and four other persons elected by the General Board at least one year before the convening of a regular session of the General Conference, shall constitute a General Conference Planning Committee.

**1573.** The General Conference Planning Committee shall be responsible to arrange all necessary matters for the General Conference such as the lodging, meals, exhibits, space allotments and whatever else may be necessary for the convenience and efficiency of the General Conference. They shall have the authority to carry out this responsibility and to enter into any necessary contracts, subject to the approval of the General Board or, in the interim of its sessions, the Executive Board.

**1576.** The General Conference Planning Committee, together with the Board of General Superintendents, shall formulate a program for the General Conference, including any worship services, and other special features, all of which shall be subject to the approval of the General Board or, in the interim of its sessions, the Executive Board.

### **c. Committee on Special Nominations**

**1580.** The General Board shall serve as the Committee on Special Nominations (1655:6). The duties of this committee shall be:

(1) To present to the General Conference one or more nominations for each of the general officials elected by the General Conference. In the event an incumbent is not nominated, the committee shall normally present two or more nominations for that office. The general officials involved are: The General Secretary, the General Director of Spiritual Formation, the General Director of Evangelism and Church Growth, the General Director of Education and the Ministry, and the General Director of World Missions.

(2) To present nominations for the members of the Board of Review (1590:19; 5400:3; 5405).

(3) To present such other nominations or fulfill such duties as may be assigned to them by the General Conference.

#### **d. General Conference Editing Committee**

**1585.** The General Conference Editing Committee shall be elected by the General Board and shall be responsible for editing *The Discipline*, the *General Conference Journal* and any other item assigned by the General Conference or the General Board. It shall consult with the Board of General Superintendents on matters of interpretation and shall be amenable to the General Board. All recommendations concerning the dedication of the *General Conference Journal* shall be referred to the General Board which shall determine the matter and instruct the committee accordingly.

#### **e. Duties and Powers**

**1590.** The duties, powers and restrictions of the General Conference are set forth in the Constitution (325-360), and as hereinafter provided:

#### **The Essentials and the Constitution**

- (1) To vote on an amendment to the Essentials (cf. 125).
- (2) To propose an amendment to the Constitution (200-385) by a two-thirds vote, subject to ratification by two-thirds of all the members of the several district conferences, present and voting (385; 1180:1; 1560; 1920:28); to ratify, by a two-thirds vote, an amendment to the Constitution, which has originated in a district conference and has been approved by a two-thirds vote of all the members of the several district conferences, present and voting (385; 1180:2; 1560; 1920:28). When the voting is completed, the Board of General Superintendents shall canvass the vote; and when the amendment has received the required majority, they shall declare it effective as constitutional law (385; 1920:28).
- (3) To request, by a vote of one-fifth of its members, present and voting, a judgment from the Board of Review as to the constitutionality of an action of the General Conference (375:1); and to overrule such a judgment by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting (380).

#### **General Legislation**

(4) To have full power in keeping with the Constitution (135; 145) and by majority vote to enact statutory law (155) and to adopt ritual (175) for *The Discipline* and to adopt other rules and regulations for the Church, all of which shall be the chief authority for the North American General

Conference of The Wesleyan Church and its subordinate units (cf. 2550); to ratify amendments to the Charter of The International Conference of The Wesleyan Church (see Appendix A) or to authorize the General Board to approve such amendments in the interim of General Conferences.

(5) To authorize a corporation to be formed and maintained for The Wesleyan Church to facilitate the management of its legal and corporate affairs (4200); and to approve its articles of incorporation and bylaws and any or all amendments thereto, by a two-thirds vote (4270).

(6) To authorize the incorporation of any agency, institution, board organization or other similar body, as a subsidiary corporation of The Wesleyan Church (4300), and to approve the articles of incorporation and bylaws, and any amendments thereto, for such a subsidiary corporation (4300-4320). In the interim of General Conferences, this authority shall be vested in the General Board (1655:34; 4300; cf. 2362).

(7) To receive reports of the spiritual, numerical and financial condition of The Wesleyan Church, worldwide, including reports concerning their official duties from the general officials and others designated by the General Conference (cf. 1800; 1840; 1920:10; 1976; 2308; 2321; 2341; 7195:2; 7420).

(8) To adopt plans for the advancement of the Church in all phases of its ministry, including the financial plans for the General Church (cf. 1995-2050).

(9) To define in a general way the duties of the general officials, subject to the additional definition of their duties by the General Board in the interim of General Conference sessions (1845).

(10) To organize the work in the United States and Canada into districts and to determine their boundaries, for which a recommendation shall be received from the General Board (317; 1036; 1655:33; 2400-2403); to authorize the establishing of an established national conference as set forth in 2610:10; and to authorize the establishing of a general conference as set forth in 2620.

(11) To authorize the establishing of a developing district (1006) or a provisional district (1020); to reclassify a provisional district (1034) or an established district (1042-1045).

(12) To group the districts into representative areas (2430-2445) to serve for the election of area representatives to the General Board and as the area divisions of Wesleyan Men, Wesleyan Women, Wesleyan Youth and Young Adults International, for which a recommendation shall be received from the General Board (cf. 1655:13).

(13) To authorize the establishment, merger or dissolution of any educational or benevolent institution for the General Church or an area of the same; to define the purpose and adopt any regulations deemed necessary for the government of such institutions (cf. 2362).

(14) To determine the boundaries of the educational areas in such a way as to provide an equitable distribution of the membership and financial strength of the Church among the approved schools, for which a recommendation shall be received from the General Board (2365-2371; 2450-2470; cf. 1655:13).

(15) To designate a criterion of parliamentary procedure for itself and other representative or official bodies of The Wesleyan Church as desired (360:1).

### **Elections**

(16) To elect by ballot and by majority vote, from among the ordained ministers of The Wesleyan Church three General Superintendents (1900-1909). The first ballot for election of General Superintendents shall be a "yes/no" ballot for incumbent General Superintendents available for reelection. Any vacancies remaining after the first ballot shall be filled by using unprinted ballots until elections are completed.

(Prior to January 10 of each General Conference year, a survey will be mailed to each voting delegate seeking the names of up to three ordained ministers for consideration as General Superintendent candidates. The survey will include a description of the duties, responsibilities and expectations of the office of General Superintendent and a call to prayer and thoughtful consideration by the Church. It is not necessary to include the names of the incumbent General Superintendents. The incumbent General Superintendents are automatically placed on a "yes/no" ballot for reelection. Delegates shall return the completed survey to the General Secretary prior to February 28 of that year.

(Based on the names submitted, the General Secretary will confirm the eligibility of each ordained minister; list the eligible ministers' names alphabetically along with their current ministry assignments, but not report numerical counts. Individuals listed will be generated from names that appear on ten percent or more of the survey responses and will be contacted by mail to inform them that their names are on the report. The list of ordained ministers shall be forwarded to conference delegates by mail at the time the conference agenda is distributed. The report shall be provided as information to delegates only and does not constitute an election ballot or nomination.)

(17) To elect the following general officials by ballot and by majority vote, from one or more nominees for each office presented by the Committee on Special Nominations (1580:1) and any additional nominations from the floor of the General Conference: the General Secretary, the General Director of Spiritual Formation, the General Director of Evangelism and Church Growth, the General Director of Education and the Ministry and, the General Director of World Missions.

(18) To elect by majority vote three ordained ministers and three lay members from each of the representative areas (2430-2445) as members of the General Board (1605:2), who shall be nominated by an area caucus. Area caucuses shall be held simultaneously at a time decided upon by the General Conference, for each of which a chair shall be appointed by the presiding officer. In an area caucus, the delegates of each district and provisional district which comprise the representative area shall nominate three ordained ministers and three lay members of that area, by ballot and by majority vote, as their area representatives on the General Board.

(19) To elect by majority vote, from nominees submitted by the Committee on Special Nominations or made from the floor, five ordained ministers and four lay members as members of the Board of Review, and four ordained ministers and three lay members as alternate members (cf. 1580:2; 5400:3; 5405).

(20) To confer the title General Superintendent Emeritus upon a former General Superintendent when recommended by the General Board (1945).

### **Judiciary**

(21) Space reserved.

(22) To hear and determine appeals from decisions of the Board of Review, and to overrule such decisions by a two-thirds majority vote (380; 5450).

(23) To receive a report from the Board of General Superintendents of their rulings on points of church law, interpretations of *The Discipline* and rulings on the legality of district actions; to sustain, modify or annul such rulings, in whole or in part (1920:24-26).