

## Guide to Constitutional Amendments for Annual Conference Members

During our 2017 Annual Conference, members will be voting on five proposed amendments to The Constitution of The United Methodist Church. The 2016 General Conference approved these changes at its meeting in Portland, Oregon and now, members of United Methodist Annual Conferences around the world will have the opportunity to support or reject the proposals. Since these proposals come from the General Conference, they may not be amended by annual conferences. In order for our Constitution to be amended, the Discipline requires that the General Conference first approve a proposal by a two-thirds majority of voting delegates, followed by approval by at least a two-thirds majority of Annual Conference members across The United Methodist Church. This means that the votes of every Annual Conference member around the world will be aggregated to determine if a two-thirds majority has been obtained for any proposed amendment. The Council of Bishops will certify the vote after all Annual Conferences have completed their voting and announce the results early in 2018.

This guide is designed to provide members of our annual conferences with information to assist in making informed decisions concerning the proposed Constitutional amendments.

Proposals are identified by the Petition Numbers assigned at General Conference. Words that appear with a strike-through are proposed to be deleted, while words in bold and underlined are proposed to be added.

- Jan Nelson, Marie Kuch-Stanovsky, OR-ID and PNW Heads of Delegation

### Amendment I (Petition 60659)

Add a new paragraph between current paragraphs 5 and 6.

**As the Holy Scripture reveals, both men and women are made in the image of God and, therefore, men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God. The United Methodist Church acknowledges the long history of discrimination against women and girls. The United Methodist Church shall confront and seek to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large. The United Methodist Church shall work collaboratively with others to address concerns that threaten women and girl's equality and well-being.**

*Perspective supporting the proposal:*

This amendment would add new language to The Discipline acknowledging the equality of men and women in the eyes of God. It would help us to remember that girls and women are of equal worth to boys and men and require that the UMC be especially sensitive to and work with other people and organizations to eliminate all forms of discrimination that limit the rights, opportunities and value of women and girls in our churches, our communities, our nation and around the world. Many such discriminatory situations exist, such as a lack of pay equity, rights to property ownership, limits to advancement in the workplace, perceived limitations of intelligence or skills and sexual objectification, among many others. This amendment clearly places the UMC in support of equality and equity in all aspects of human life.

*Perspective opposing the proposal:*

The UMC already has several expressions of equality for women and men throughout the Social Principles, for example, Paragraph 161 E. We do not need a new paragraph to support the same idea.

**Amendment II (Petition 60163)**

Amend Paragraph 4. Article IV. “*Inclusiveness of the Church*” Delete existing Paragraph 4.IV. and replace it with the following:

**The United Methodist Church is part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection. In the United Methodist church, no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any continent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, ability or economic condition, nor shall any member be denied access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church because of race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status, or economic condition.**

*Perspective supporting the proposal:*

This proposal makes clear that there should be no barriers to membership in The United Methodist Church by adding gender, ability, age and marital status to the existing list of characteristics that may not be used to exclude people from membership. We want to state that no one should be denied access to an equal place in the life, worship and governance of the church.

*Perspective opposing the proposal:*

This proposal unnecessarily extends another list of people who are already protected from discrimination in other parts of the Discipline. It just complicates our polity to put such a level of detail into our Constitution. On the other hand, if we have such a list, it should include sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Amendment III (Petition 60568)**

Amend Paragraph 34. Article III. “*Elections for General, Jurisdictional and Central Conferences*” as follows:

The annual conference shall elect clergy and lay delegates to the General Conference and to its jurisdictional or central conference in the manner provided in this section, Articles IV and V. **Such elections shall include open nominations from the floor by the annual conference**

**and delegates shall be elected by a minimum of a simple majority of the ballots cast.** The persons first elected ...

*Perspective supporting the proposal:*

This proposal seems obvious to us in the US, but for our Central Conference (international) sisters and brothers, this is quite important. There have been annual conferences in which elections have not been democratic and delegates have been appointed by Bishops or others in authority. This proposal insures that elections are open and democratic, with all members of an annual conference having an opportunity to vote and to be elected to General Conference.

*Perspective opposing the proposal:*

Sometimes, local situations require that delegates be selected for expertise and experience. An open election may result in unqualified people being elected to serve as General Conference delegates.

#### **Amendment IV (Petition 60525)**

Amend Paragraph 46, “*Election of Central Conference Bishops*” and Paragraph 542.2 as follows:

46. The bishops shall be elected by the respective jurisdictional and central conferences and consecrated in the historic manner at such time and place as may be fixed by the General Conference for those elected by the jurisdictions and by each central conference for those elected by such central conference, **provided that episcopal elections in central conferences shall be held during a regular, not an extra, session of the central conference, except in the case where an unexpected vacancy must be filled.**

**NOTE:** Our vote will be limited to the proposed change to Paragraph 46, which is part of The Constitution. The following change to Paragraph 542.2, not a part of The Constitution, will take effect only if the change to Paragraph 46 is certified by The Council of Bishops.

542.2. Each central conference shall meet within the year succeeding the session of the General Conference at such time and place as the central conference itself or its bishops may determine, **for the purpose of electing Bishops when vacancies occur and for attending to other matters as required. The central conference has the** right to hold such adjourned sessions as it may determine. The sessions of said conference shall be presided over by the bishops. In case no bishop is present, the conference shall elect a temporary president from among its own members. The bishops resident in a central conference or a majority of them, with the concurrence of the executive committee or other authorized committee, shall have the authority to call an extra session of the central conference to be held at the time and place designated by them.

*Perspective supporting the proposal:*

This proposal provides that Bishops in Central (international) Conferences be elected at a regular session of the Central Conference, rather than at any special session. The practice of holding episcopal elections at a special session often results in all delegates not being able to attend, thus potentially skewing the results. Adopting this proposal puts Central Conference episcopal elections on the same footing as elections in the US Jurisdictional Conferences.

*Perspective opposing the proposal:*

Often, in large conferences with many members living great distances away from meeting sites and facing hardships in traveling, it is necessary to hold elections with fewer than a full complement of delegates. This situation is unique in Central Conferences, therefore special consideration is necessary. This proposal would place undue burdens on elections in Central Conferences.

## **Amendment V (Petition 60912)**

Amend Paragraph 50 “*Council to have Accountability Authority*” by adding the following after the last paragraph:

**These provisions shall not preclude that adoption by the General Conference of provisions for the Council of Bishops to hold its individual members accountable for their work, both as general superintendents and as presidents and residents in episcopal areas.**

**NOTE:** Though not a part of the submitted proposal, the following paragraph that is not a part of The Constitution would come into force if the change to Paragraph 50 is approved. This paragraph is not in force at this time. The annual conferences may not change this paragraph.

Paragraph 413.3d “*Complaints Against Bishops*”

**(i)** If the supervisory response results in the resolution of the matter, the bishop in charge of the supervisory response and the two episcopacy committee members appointed to the supervisory process (§ 413.3) shall monitor the fulfillment of the terms of the resolution. If the supervisory response does not result in resolution of the matter, the president or secretary of the College of Bishops may **either dismiss the complaint with the consent of the College of Bishops and the committee on episcopacy, giving the reasons therefore in writing, a copy of which shall be placed in the bishop’s file, refer the matter to the committee on episcopacy as an administrative complaint pursuant to Paragraph 413.3e, or refer the matter to counsel for the Church pursuant to Paragraph 2704.1 to prepare a complaint to forward to the committee on investigation.**

**(ii) If within 180 days of the receipt of the complaint by the president or secretary of the College of Bishops (as specified in Paragraph 413.2), the supervisory response does not result in the resolution of the matter, and the president or secretary of the College of Bishops has not referred the matter as either an administrative or judicial complaint, then the matter will move to:**

- (1) In the case of a bishop from one of the central conferences, a panel of three bishops, one from each continent, as selected by the Council of Bishops, or**
- (2) In the case of a bishop from one of the jurisdictional conferences, a panel of five bishops, one from each jurisdictional conference, as selected by the Council of Bishops,**

**who shall then continue the supervisory process and within 180 days, either dismiss or refer the complaint, as required above.**

**(iii) All costs associated with the actions taken pursuant to paragraph (ii) above, will be paid by the Episcopal Fund.**

**(iv) The Council of Bishops may, at any time in the process, after a complaint is filed, including after a just resolution, remove the complaint from the College of Bishops to the Council of Bishops with a 2/3 vote by the Council.**

*Perspective supporting the proposal:*

There have been occasions in which Bishops have not been held accountable for actions contrary to the Discipline, because the Jurisdiction or Central Conference responsible for the supervisory process has not followed or adequately enforced provisions for holding Bishops accountable. This provision provides that the Council of Bishops may step in to enforce global accountability if the Council deems that a Bishop has committed a sin that rises to global importance.

*Perspective opposing the proposal:*

Should this proposal be adopted, local responsibility for holding Bishops accountable would be threatened. Especially onerous is the proviso that the Council of Bishops may take over direct management of a complaint against a Bishop at any time, even after a case has been resolved according to the Discipline. In addition to obvious double jeopardy, this opens the way to second-guessing the actions of a College of Bishops (Bishops from the region where a Bishop facing a complaint resides), who best know the individuals and situations involved.

The real change that this proposal promotes is not contained in the new Paragraph 50 language. Instead, adoption of this proposal would bring into effect provisions of Paragraph 413.3.d, which is not in keeping with the current Constitution.