

# Frequently Asked Questions

## How Bethany and the UMC are Governed

August 20, 2022

### How Bethany UMC is Governed

#### **What is the Administrative Board?**

Bethany is governed by its Administrative Board, consisting of approximately 80 – 100 people. These people are first nominated by the Nominations Committee of the church, and then officially elected at the Church Conference. The assignment of new members is staggered, such that each year approximately one third of the members are new, and each person serving on the Administrative Board serves a three-year term.

The Administrative Board typically meets four times a year, and focuses on reports from each of the subcommittees, ministry areas, and pastors. The Administrative Board is led by a chairperson, and a vice-chairperson who serve two-year terms. The vice-chairperson becomes the next chairperson. Each chairperson is alternately male and then female.

#### **What is the Church Conference?**

The Church Conference is typically held annually in January and is open to all members of Bethany. The Church Conference is usually presided over by the District Superintendent. At the Church Conference votes are taken to approve/disapprove the following:

- Administrative Board and other Committee member positions
- Annual budget, including taking on debt if proposed
- Pastor salaries
- Purchases or sales of property owned by the church

#### **What is the Board of Trustees?**

Property and facilities matters are handled by the Board of Trustees, which elects a chairperson from its members, has its own portion of the budget and often brings special needs to the Administrative Board.

#### **What additional committees does Bethany have and how are their members selected?**

Bethany has several committees made up of congregants at the church. Each year the Nominations Committee (see below) nominates people, and the Church Conference approves them to serve on multi-year terms for each committee. Each year a new “class” of members joins the committee (ex. approximately  $\frac{1}{3}$  of its members rotate on and off each year for a committee that serves a three-year term), such that there are always new members and experienced members serving on each committee. The committees, range between 9 – 15 members and are as follows:

- **Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC)** - Provides oversight over the pastors and staff and addresses related personnel issues.
- **Finance Committee** - Provides oversight for financial matters including recommending a budget to the Administrative Board and oversight over the spending by the church staff.
- **Nominations Committee** - Works with the Lead Pastor to identify people to serve on all of the church committees, as well as the Board of Trustees.

### **What are Lay Delegates and how are they selected?**

Lay Delegates are Bethany UMC members who represent our church at the Annual Conference. These delegates are also nominated by the Nominations Committee and approved at the annual Church Conference. Bethany is allotted the number of its lay delegates according to the total membership of the congregation.

Lay delegates typically serve a six-year term and must be able to take off from their jobs for several days during the week to attend Annual Conference. Annual Conference has been held in the recent past at the Convention Center in Corpus Christi, usually the first or second week of June. In 2022 the Annual Conference meeting was held in McAllen, TX. It will be moving back to Corpus Christi in June 2023.

In addition, Bethany is also represented at the Annual Conference by all the Bethany pastors and clergy, who serve as Clergy Delegates.

### **What is the Lead Team?**

The Lead Team is a smaller group (about 20 persons), composed of the chairpersons of the above committees, the senior pastors, and additional laity nominated by the Lead Pastor. The Lead Team is responsible for advising the Lead Pastor on matters related to future programs and emphases for the entire church. As examples, the Lead Team served as the building committee during the planning, funding, and construction of the Worship Center. They also played an advisory role in the crafting of Bethany's updated core vision. The Lead Team is not a voting entity, and all votes for the church are either done by the Administrative Board or the entire congregation.

### **Where could I find a list of who is currently serving on all the above committees?**

The list can be found at [bethany-umc.org/umcupdates](http://bethany-umc.org/umcupdates)

## **How the United Methodist Church Denomination is Governed**

### **What is United Methodist polity?**

Polity refers to the operational and governance structure of the church, including not just a local church, but also the larger global church structure.

### **How is the United Methodist Church structured?**

The United Methodist Church is composed of many local churches, which are then organized into Districts, then into Annual Conferences, then into Jurisdictional Conferences and finally into the General Conference of the United Methodist Church. As an analogy, consider that cities are grouped into counties, which are grouped into states, which are grouped into countries, which are grouped into continents.

### **What is a Bishop and what is the Council of Bishops?**

In the UMC, bishops serve as administrative and pastoral superintendents of the church. A Bishop presides over each Annual Conference. The Council of Bishops is composed of all the elected bishops in the United Methodist Church worldwide.

### **How is a "District" structured and how does it operate?**

Districts are an administrative and geographical grouping of local churches and are headed by a District Superintendent and various District committees. District Superintendents serve as an extension of the office of the bishop by overseeing clergy and churches within their district.

### **What District, Annual Conference, and Jurisdictional Conference is Bethany UMC assigned to and how often do they meet?**

Bethany is in the Capital District of the Rio Texas Annual Conference. Our District Superintendent is Rev. Laura Merrill, and our Bishop is Rev. Robert Schnase.

The Rio Texas Conference meets annually. There are an equal number of clergy and lay delegates, and each church receives a number of lay delegates based on a formula developed by the annual conference, based roughly on the size of the church's congregation. At the annual meeting of the Rio Texas Conference various resolutions and other matters are voted on by the delegates. Prior to each General and Jurisdictional Conference, the delegates at the Annual Conference elect lay and clergy delegates to those conferences.

The Rio Texas Annual Conference is a part of the South Central Jurisdiction, which is made up of the Annual Conferences in the following states: Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. The Jurisdictional Conference meets every four years, a few months after the General Conference meeting. A major function of the Jurisdictional meeting is to elect and assign Bishops to serve the Annual Conferences located within the Jurisdiction.

### **What is the role and structure of the General Conference?**

The General Conference is the legislative body of the United Methodist Church and makes policy decisions for the entire United Methodist Church worldwide. The General Conference is composed of an equal number of clergy delegates and lay delegates elected from the various annual conferences from around the world (not less than 600 nor more than 1,000).

### **How often does the General Conference meet?**

The General Conference generally meets every four years unless a Special General Conference is called by the Council of Bishops. The last General Conference was planned for May 2020, but was postponed to 2022, and now to 2024, due to the pandemic, as it is very difficult to obtain visas for those traveling from some countries.

### **What is the *Book of Discipline*?**

*The Book of Discipline* is the basic law and statement of beliefs of the United Methodist Church and is organized by numbered paragraphs. *The Book of Discipline* is composed of the following parts:

- Constitution of the United Methodist Church (beginning Paragraph 1)
- Doctrinal Standards and our Theological Task (beginning Paragraph 102)
- Ministry of all Christians (beginning Paragraph 120)
- Social Principles (beginning Paragraph 160)
- Organization and Administration sections (beginning Paragraph 201)

*The Book of Discipline* can be changed by the General Conference with a majority vote. However, amendments to the Constitution of the United Methodist Church must receive a 2/3rds vote by the delegates of the General Conference and be ratified by 2/3rds of all the delegates, cumulatively, of all the Annual and Central Conferences worldwide. New Books of Discipline are printed after each General Conference Session. The current *Book of Discipline* is from the 2016 General Conference, although some changes were made at the special-called General Conference in 2019 and went into effect in the US on January 1, 2020.