

Analysis of Connectional Conference Plan Bishop Scott J. Jones

Summary

The Connectional Conference Plan provides a new form of unity that includes shared name, logo, doctrine and services. This plan creates three values-based connectional conferences that have distinctive definitions of accountability, contextualization and justice. Current central conferences have the choice of becoming their own connectional conference or joining one of the three values-based connectional conferences.

Strengths

- Creates a new form of unity comparable to but closer than current structures with the World Methodist Council and the Pan-Methodist Commission.
- Maintains shared doctrine and services.
- Maintains a Council of Bishops for the whole United Methodist Church to handle ecumenical relations and plan for joint mission and work for justice, especially combatting racism and sexism.
- Allows various parts of the UMC to follow their understandings of human sexuality without breaking unity completely by forming three Connectional Conferences: Traditional, Unity and Progressive.
- All connectional conferences get to use the cross-and-flame logo and name “United Methodist Church” but may develop their own logo and name if desired.
- Wespath could continue to provide pension services to all connectional conferences
- Each U.S. jurisdiction will decide which Connectional Conference it will join.
- Central Conferences may either join one of the three Connectional Conferences formed by jurisdictions or form its own Central Conference.
- Annual Conferences will follow their jurisdictions into a Connectional Conference, with the option that an annual conference may choose a different Connectional Conference by taking action up until July 31, 2021.
- Local churches will follow their annual conference into a Connectional Conference, with the option that a local church may choose a different Connectional Conference by taking action by July 1, 2022.
- All active and retired clergy will follow their annual conference unless they opt to transfer to a different Connectional Conference.
- All active and retired bishops will choose which Connectional Conference to affiliate with.
- Allows for reform of boards, agencies and seminaries.
- Some leaders suggest there may be only two connectional conferences in the U.S.
- Each connectional conference elects and (in the U.S.) pays for its own bishops. Bishops outside the U.S. would continue to be supported by all U.S. annual conferences.
- In addition to the shared doctrine and shared services, each connectional conference has its own structure, agencies, and method of financing its ministry and the shared services, as well as support for bishops and annual conferences outside the U.S.

Weaknesses

- Requires constitutional amendments which show little sign of gaining support at this time.
- Creates geographically overlapping units of United Methodism that could lead to confusion in the mission field. There could be United Methodist Churches with three different approaches to human sexuality in the same community.
- The structure appears to be overly complex.
- The role of the General Conference is minimal.
- The role of the Council of Bishops is minimal.
- Future funding of present general boards and agencies is uncertain.
- Funding for Africa University, seminaries and other entities would be left to the connectional conferences, putting these institutions at risk.
- Division of general church assets among the various connectional conference will be complicated.