

Chapter

16

We Are United Methodist

A Connected Church

People move for many reasons: college, a job, or some kind of opportunity. Moving is uncomfortable because familiarity is lost. Regardless of where one moves, he or she probably will always be able to find a familiar United Methodist community of faith nearby. These connected churches rely on the same basic language, format, and operating procedures. In the chaos of moving and traveling, there can be a great deal of comfort and security in being a part of the connection that we call The United Methodist Church.

Another strength of “the connection” is that it encourages people to work together and to share resources. Sharing and striving together is much more productive than working individually and is a great model of Christian stewardship. Ministries sponsored by the congregations, districts, annual conferences, jurisdictions, central conferences, and general church unite our denomination to be an effective witness of God’s gifts.

Organization of The United Methodist Church

Local Churches

The first and most basic unit of organization is the local church, referred to as the charge. Sometimes more than one church is served by the same pastor, creating a multi-point charge. The local church is where we gather for worship, outreach, and nurture. Administration in the local church is by laity and clergy working together. Laity and clergy cooperatively provide leadership for all forms of ministry in the local church.

Each year the leadership of the charge meets in what is called charge conference. This is where church officers are elected.

Districts

Districts provide churches in a given region opportunities to work together more closely and to support one another. Each district has a unique name, different from the other districts in the same conference. Oversight of the district is provided by the district superintendent, a clergy person appointed to the position. Many districts have a district coordinator of youth who helps coordinate youth ministry at the district level.

Annual Conferences

Each local church is located within a district, and each district is located within an annual conference. The term *annual conference* refers to both the geographical boundaries of the conference and to the yearly meeting of the members of the annual conference. The membership of the annual conference includes all the clergy members of the conference and at least an equal number of lay members. Each local charge has at least one lay member of the annual conference who is elected by the local church charge conference.

Oversight and spiritual leadership for the annual conference is the responsibility of the presiding bishop. The bishop, working with the district superintendents (called the cabinet), appoints clergy to serve in local congregations and other places of ministry.

The annual conference can offer opportunities for mission and service that are beyond the abilities of a local congregation. Many annual conferences sponsor camps, volunteers-in-mission trips, and training opportunities.

Most annual conferences have a coordinator of youth ministry. Some annual conferences have a full- or part-time staff person who also works with youth ministry at the annual conference level. These people work with and for youth to effectively handle programs and events for the youth in their conference area.

Jurisdictions

Each jurisdiction is composed of various annual conferences in a specific geographical area. The United Methodist churches of the United States are in five jurisdictions: Western, North Central, South Central, Southeastern, and Northeastern.

Every four years each jurisdiction holds a jurisdictional conference. The members of the jurisdictional conference are elected by the annual conferences. There are an equal number of lay and clergy members. One of the primary functions of the jurisdictional conference is to elect bishops.

Central Conferences

In areas outside the United States annual conferences are organized into central conferences. These conferences meet every four years. There are seven central conferences: Africa, Central and Southern Europe, Federal Republic of Germany and West Berlin, German Democratic Republic, Northern Europe, Philippines, and West Africa.

General Conference

The General Conference meets every four years and is composed of equal numbers of laity and clergy elected by the annual conferences. General Conference is the only body that can speak officially for The United Methodist Church. Some of the responsibilities of General Conference include defining the conditions, privileges and duties of church membership; defining the powers and duties of clergy; providing a hymnal and ritual for the Church; and enacting legislation that will become part of *The Book of Discipline* (the book of law for The United Methodist Church).

Youth Ministry Beyond the Local Church

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church. Every church is a member of a district, and several districts make up an annual conference. Several annual conferences combine to form a jurisdiction. Youth ministry is organized along these same lines.

District Youth Ministry

Many districts have a district council on youth ministries composed of youth representatives from the churches of the district. District youth councils provide programs and organization to support youth ministry in all the churches of the district. They can hold regular meetings, and they can sponsor occasional worship rallies or mission opportunities/training for youth adult leadership. The district coordinator of youth, typically appointed by the district superintendent or elected by a district program council, serves as one of the adult advisors.

Annual Conference Youth Ministry

Youth from all churches in the conference have an opportunity to serve on and to be served by a conference youth ministry structure. Youth and adults are selected or elected, usually through district channels, to work with the conference coordinator of youth ministries. Together these groups constitute what is called in most conferences the conference council on youth ministries. Their purpose is to develop ministries that enrich youth ministry throughout the conference.

The conference council on youth ministries meets as needed to outline policy, to set budget, and to plan special emphases and projects. These might include training youth and adult leaders; organizing institutes, assemblies, and camps; enabling youth representation and participation in the ministry of the annual conference; and suggesting resources to use in district and local church programming. The conference council should, in cooperation with the district councils on youth ministry, help youth in every church carry on their ministry more effectively and live more abundantly as Christian disciples.

The conference youth council is also responsible for promoting the Youth Service Fund and for administering its portion of the Youth Service Fund.

Jurisdiction Youth Ministry

In each jurisdiction there is a jurisdictional youth ministry organization that meets in a convocation at least every other year. This organization includes four voting representatives from each annual conference in the jurisdiction. This group is responsible for electing three youth members and one adult member to serve on the National Youth Ministry Organization Steering Committee.

In some jurisdictions the jurisdictional youth ministry organization also initiates jurisdictional camps, conferences, training, and other events that serve to strengthen youth ministry.

The National Youth Ministry Organization (NYMO)

The National Youth Ministry Organization (NYMO) is the vehicle through which youth can express themselves in a united way to the general church. Its purpose is not to direct the youth ministry program on all levels (local, district, conference, and jurisdiction). Rather, NYMO listens to youth on all levels because it is composed of youth from all

levels. Then NYMO communicates what it hears to the general church. NYMO has three basic units: Convocation, Legislative Assembly, and Steering Committee.

The purpose of NYMO is to:

- Be an advocate for youth and for the concerns of youth.
- Empower youth as full participants in the life and mission of the church.
- Be a forum for the expression of youth needs and concerns.
- Provide a means of outreach through the Youth Service Fund.

The NYMO Convocation meets biennially and is responsible for providing leadership training, opportunities for spiritual growth, and strengthening connectional youth ministry. Any United Methodist youth or adult worker in youth ministry may participate in the Convocation.

At the NYMO Legislative Assembly, annual conference delegations of three voting delegates—two youth and one adult—come together to accomplish several things:

- Raise major concerns of the youth the annual conference delegations represent, and bring those to the attention of the general or national church.
- Empower youth throughout the church, through the support of communication with annual conference and jurisdictional youth ministry structures.
- Determine the policy and criteria for selection of projects and distribution of the national portion of the Youth Service Fund.
- Select monetary goals for the Youth Service Fund.
- Provide an opportunity for youth and adults from throughout the church to share and to grow in Christian commitment for discipleship.

The NYMO Steering Committee includes four elected representatives from each jurisdiction (three youth and one adult). This group carries on the work of NYMO between convocations. The Steering Committee administers the national portion of the Youth Service Fund; selects projects to receive funding from the national portion; plans and implements the convocations; convenes the NYMO Legislative Assembly; and communicates the actions of the assembly to the appropriate places.

FOR MORE HELP

NYMO staff offices are in Nashville, Tennessee. Questions about NYMO, the Youth Service Fund, the convocation's legislative assembly, and NYMO priorities may be directed to the NYMO Office, P.O. Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202-0840 (telephone, 615-340-7184; e-mail, NYMO@aol.com).

Questions about the organization and structure of The United Methodist Church and its ministries with youth may be directed to Office of Youth Ministries, General Board of Discipleship, P.O. Box 840, Nashville, TN 37202. E-mail at umyouth@gbod.org, or during business hours call toll-free 877-899-2780.

For current press releases and other information on The United Methodist Church, visit the website at www.umc.org.

For general questions about The United Methodist Church, call InfoServ toll free, 800-251-8140.