



NORDIC AND BALTIC EPISCOPAL AREA

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

BISHOP CHRISTIAN ALSTED

Pastoral Letter from bishop Christian Alsted after General Conference

Denmark
Estonia
Finland
Latvia
Lithuania
Norway
Sweden
Ukraine

Dear United Methodists in the Nordic, Baltic and Ukraine Episcopal Area

Grace and peace to you!

The General Conference of the Methodist Church brings together approximately 800 delegates from around the world. They come together to seek God's will and way for the church. The conference is meant to be inspiring, future-oriented, and above all, shaped by the Holy Spirit. And it was.

The atmosphere was completely different than it has been for decades. There were no conflicts, no harsh words and no demonstrations. The General Conference 2024 was both willing and able to make significant future-oriented decisions and work together to find common solutions.

Surprisingly, quickly and with a significant majority, the conference adopted a plan for regionalization that transforms the denomination from an American church with branches on different continents to a truly global church, where all parts of the church will function on an equal level. In the future, the General Conference will be much more focused on common global concerns, mission, education, relief, ecumenism, theology and social ethics. In the future all regions of the church will have the right to adapt the Book of Discipline enabling them to serve as effective as possible in their unique setting relevant to their missional needs.

There is one caveat, however, as the change involves constitutional changes that must be voted on by all annual conferences before they become effective. The result will be known in November 2025.

The General Conference has approved new Global Social Principles, which were created after extensive global consultations with thousands of participants. The new Global Social Principles are succinct and with a clearer biblical basis, and they will guide and inspire us to live as Christians and as churches in our society. The Social Principles no longer contain a sentence that discriminates and condemns homosexuals.

The decision to allow for same-sex marriages and allow for homosexuals to be ordained and licensed for pastoral ministry was made with a more than a 90% majority. This happened not least due to the fact that all central conferences also were given the authority to set their own policy and boundaries for marriage and ordination, and to delegate the same authority to their annual conferences. We will be able to do this at the Central Conference in April 2025, as none





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of the decisions will come into effect until 3. May 2025, one year after the end of the General Conference.

The general conference decisions will be received differently in the countries of the Episcopal Area and in different congregations. Methodists have studied the Bible and come to different understandings of human sexuality, and some will see the General Conference decisions as a liberation that they welcome with great joy, while others will find the decisions difficult.

We all know that Jesus has taught us to welcome all people and to love them without judgment or conditions. In the United Methodist Church we welcome all people, without exception - our communion table is open to all, and we want everyone to live out their calling, gifts and talents in our churches. It has always been that way - this General Conference has made it even clearer.

We have much to pray and talk about at the Annual Conferences in the coming months. We have time to consider how the decisions will affect us and how we will respond in each country. I know, we will be able to do this in a good and respectful manner, recognizing and make room for different understandings.

Even though there have been big changes at this General Conference, our common task remains the same, to share our faith and make more people followers of Jesus, to work for justice, freedom, equality and peace, to be church with children and youth, to develop and create new faith communities. We have much to do, so let's get started together.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us.

Christian Alsted
bishop

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