Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

110 Maryland Avenue, NE • Suite 301 • Washington, D.C. 20002
www.unitedmethodistbishops.org

For Immediate Release November 9, 2026

United Methodist Bishops Vote to Convene AI Task Force

Online Fall Meeting also adopts 2027 Episcopal Fund budget and urges leaders to "be good ancestors"

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church concluded its 2026 Fall Meeting on Friday, Nov. 6, after voting to convene a task force on artificial intelligence, adopting a 2027 Episcopal Fund budget and urging its members to "be good ancestors" by making room for a new generation of leaders.

Meeting online Nov. 2 to 6 under the theme "Hallowed Be Thy Name: Learning to Recognize the Reign of God," more than 100 active and retired bishops from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas gathered each day for worship, Covenant Groups, reports and decisions. Each day's worship drew on a phrase of the Lord's Prayer.

Opening the meeting on Nov. 2, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., president of the Council and resident bishop of the Horizon Texas Conference, told the bishops, "The future isn't just something that happens to us. It's something God is bringing."

On Nov. 5, the bishops voted to convene, through the Council's Executive Committee, a task force to develop a statement, related resources and a connectional toolkit on artificial intelligence, grounded in Christian faith and Wesleyan heritage, and to coordinate the work of the general agencies toward the 2028 General Conference. A progress report is due at the Spring 2027 meeting.

"The church has wisdom to offer this conversation, and the time for us to do it is now," said Bishop Lanette Plambeck, who presented the motion with Bishop Tom Berlin. Bishop Mande Muyombo, president-designate of the Council, told the bishops, "The challenge of AI is not technological, but it is theological."

The Council also adopted a $19.85 million Episcopal Fund budget for 2027, presented by Bishop Sharma D. Lewis Logan for the Council's finance team. The plan anticipates $750,000 less income as U.S. apportionments fall 3 percent from 2026 levels. Expenses are expected to rise by about $6 million, mainly from health care costs, which are up 26 percent, and the expected election of an additional bishop in West Africa in December. It draws about $1.2 million from reserves and does not yet reflect any action on bishops' salaries, office allowances or housing allowances. The budget now goes to the General Council on Finance and Administration, which gives final approval.

"All this is not a detour from the Lord's Prayer. It is the Lord's Prayer," Bishop Saenz told the bishops after a day devoted to budgets, leadership and artificial intelligence. "God's will is communicated in sermons, but it's also done through spreadsheets and financial budgets."

The Oct. 20 to 24 Leadership Gathering in Calgary, Alberta, shaped much of the week. Participants named current realities, made recommendations in five areas (discipleship, leadership, impact, stewardship and accountability) and shared a vision for the church of 2050. On Nov. 6, Bishop Saenz said the gathering's report is due in January and that bishops from every region will receive it. Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States will consider its recommendations and decide how best to carry them across the worldwide church. "These recommendations are not coming from the top down," he said. "They come from the people of God, from the young voices in our church."

Adjourning the meeting, Bishop Saenz charged the bishops to be good ancestors. "The church isn't ours to keep, it's ours to tend and then to hand on," he said. He urged them to "release our authority" and "make room and space," giving young leaders "real seats at real tables. Not someday, now." He closed with the words John Wesley spoke near the end of his life: "The best of all, God is with us."

More From the Meeting

Reports and elections from the week, including the University Senate, Connectional Table, ecumenical relations, the Korean Methodist Church covenant, immigration, creation care and chaplaincy endorsement, are collected on a companion page with links to videos and resources. Memorial and worship highlights follow.

- **Memorial service.** On Nov. 3 the Council held a memorial service remembering Mrs. Janet Lewis, spouse of Bishop William Lewis.
- **Day 3 worship.** Bishop Sandra Olewine preached from Isaiah 65 on the petition "Thy Kingdom Come" and called the bishops to remember their baptism. "In the name and likeness of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to bear the love and grace of God into the world," she said.
- **Day 4 worship.** Bishop Robin Dease preached on "Thy Will Be Done," telling the bishops, "The first task of a bishop is not to lead others. It is to surrender." The sermon also described the Lord's Prayer as something entrusted from one generation to the next.
- **Day 5 worship.** Bishop Knut Refsdal of the Nordic-Baltic-Ukraine Episcopal Area preached from Revelation 7:9, John's vision of a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language. "Diversity has not disappeared. It has been reconciled," he said. "The challenge is not to make our differences smaller. The challenge is to make our fellowship larger."

Looking Ahead

The Calgary report will be available in January. The Executive Committee will meet in person Jan. 12 and 13, 2027, in Dallas, Texas, and the full Council will gather May 2 to 7 at Lake Junaluska, N.C., with the church's chancellors the day before. The Executive Committee will meet online July 13 and 14, and the Council's fall 2027 meeting will be online Nov. 1 to 5. The artificial intelligence task force will give a progress report at the Spring 2027 meeting, and the Connectional Table's evaluation of the church's agencies is due in April 2027.

View Videos

Videos from the meeting are collected in the Council of Bishops Fall Meeting 2026 playlist on YouTube.

- Day 1 (Nov. 2): Opening Worship and President's Address
- Day 2 (Nov. 3): Memorial Service
- Day 2 (Nov. 3): Council Updates
- Day 3 (Nov. 4): Worship: "Thy Kingdom Come"
- Day 3 (Nov. 4): Reports
- Day 4 (Nov. 5): Worship: "Thy Will Be Done"
- Day 4 (Nov. 5): Reports and Business
- Day 5 (Nov. 6): Worship: "On Earth As It Is In Heaven"
- Day 5 (Nov. 6): Business and Closing

About the Council of Bishops

The Council of Bishops is the executive branch of The United Methodist Church and is made up of all active and retired bishops in the church. The council is responsible for the church's general oversight and provides spiritual leadership to 11 million people on four continents. Find them online at UnitedMethodistBishops.org.

Media Contact:

Paul Gómez, Lead, Connectional Ministries, United Methodist Communications, 615.742.5402, pgomez@umcom.org

###