

Gender of General Conference Delegates: 2008 vs. 2019

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The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) published part one of a [report on the gender distribution of 2019 Special Called Session of General Conference delegates](#). In this second report, GCSRW continues the conversation on delegates' gender distribution and representation. Below is a comparison between 2008 and 2019 data, a reflection on the progress made, and persistent challenges regarding gender representation among General Conference delegates.

Delegates by the Numbers—Then and Now

The overall number of delegates shrunk from 990 in 2008 to 862 in 2019. While the overall number of General Conference delegates declined from 2008 to 2019, it is important to note that both of the numbers and percentages of General Conference delegates from Central Conferences increased significantly (see Table 1).

Jurisdiction	Year			
	2008		2019	
	%	n	%	n
North Central	14%	138	11%	88
Northeastern	13%	126	10%	84
South Central	15%	148	12%	102
Southeastern	25%	252	21%	182
Western	4%	40	3%	26
Central Conferences	28%	276	43%	370
Concordat	1%	10	1%	10
TOTAL	--	990	--	862

U.S. Gender Breakdown— Then and Now

We compared 2008 and 2019 General Conference delegate data on the gender distribution of delegates in the U.S. region, and we found no change in women’s representation among the U.S. General Conference delegates. In 2008, 43% of the 704 U.S. delegates were women; in 2019, 43% of the 493 U.S. delegates who reported their gender were women. While the Southeastern Jurisdiction underwent no change in women’s representation, the North Central, South Central, and Western Jurisdictions saw a decline in women’s representation among General Conference delegates. Northeastern was the only U.S. jurisdiction to show an increase in women’s representation from 2008 to 2019; over half of its 2019 General Conference delegates were women.

Table 2
Gender Distribution of General Conference Delegates in the U.S., 2008 and 2019

Jurisdiction	Year			
	2008		2019	
	Women % (n)	Men % (n)	Women % (n)	Men % (n)
North Central	50% (70)	50% (69)	48% (44)	52% (48)
Northeastern	43% (54)	57% (72)	55% (47)	45% (39)
South Central	39% (57)	61% (91)	36% (38)	64% (69)
Southeastern	41% (104)	59% (148)	41% (77)	59% (110)
Western	53% (21)	47% (19)	42% (13)	58% (18)
Central Conference	28% (62)	72% (160)	25% (87)	75% (250)
TOTAL	40% (368)	60% (558)	36% (306)	64% (534)

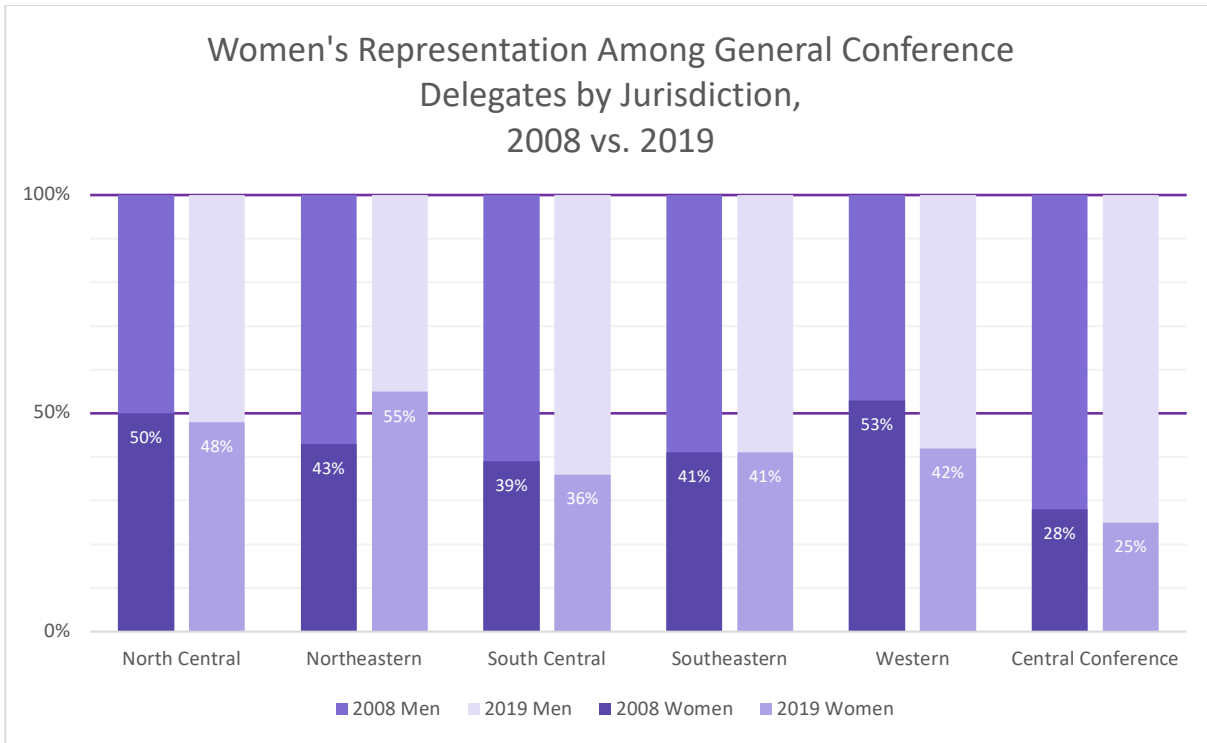


FIGURE 1. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION AMONG GC DELEGATES BY JURISDICTION, 2008 vs. 2019

Women's Representation between Clergy and Lay Delegates— Then and Now

Overall, women's representation between both clergywomen and laywomen General Conference delegates has declined from 2008 to 2019 (see Table 3). The Northeastern Jurisdiction made notable increases in women's representation between both clergywomen and laywomen.

Table 3. Gender Distribution of Clergy and Lay General Conference Delegates, 2008 vs. 2019

	2008 ¹				2019			
	Women		Men		Women		Men	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
North Central								
Lay	57%	39	43%	30	57%	26	43%	20
Clergy	44%	31	56%	39	39%	18	61%	28
Total	50%	70	50%	69	48%	44	52%	48
Northeastern								
Lay	46%	29	54%	34	64%	27	36%	15
Clergy	40%	25	60%	38	45%	20	55%	24
Total	43%	54	57%	72	55%	47	45%	39
South Central								
Lay	46%	34	54%	40	42%	22	58%	31
Clergy	31%	23	69%	51	30%	16	70%	38
Total	39%	57	61%	91	36%	38	64%	69
Southeastern								
Lay	50%	63	50%	63	47%	44	53%	49
Clergy	33%	41	67%	85	35%	33	65%	61
Total	41%	104	59%	148	41%	77	59%	110
Western								
Lay	50%	10	50%	10	50%	8	50%	8
Clergy	55%	11	45%	9	33%	5	67%	10
Total	53%	21	48%	19	42%	13	58%	18
Central Conference								
Lay	41%	45	59%	66	32%	55	68%	117
Clergy	15%	17	85%	94	18%	32	82%	143
Total	28%	62	72%	160	25%	87	75%	260
TOTAL – ALL								
Lay	48%	220	52%	243	43%	182	57%	240
Clergy	32%	148	68%	316	29%	124	71%	304
Total	40%	368	60%	559	36%	306	64%	544

Women’s Representation in the Central Conferences

All delegates from the Central Conference regions were 24% of all the 2008 General Conference delegates. Now they comprise 43% of all General Conference delegates in 2019, which yields significant

¹ 2008 figures were drawn from a [2008 report by GCSRW](#).

implications for the overall gender distribution of delegates. Of 2019 General Conference delegates who reported their gender (n=347), 25% were women and 75% were men ([see the previous GCSRW report](#)). This is a decline in women's representation from 2008, which was 28% among General Conference delegates from the Central Conferences (see Table 2).

As the increase in number and proportion of General Conference delegates representing Central Conferences increases, the influence of these regions on policy-making also increases. It is becoming critical that Central Conferences consider the importance of gender representation and act with urgency to elect more women as General Conference delegates. More women delegates in the Central Conferences improve gender equity among General Conference delegates as a whole.

Take Action...

About half of the global membership of The United Methodist Church is comprised of women. Still, despite years of reporting and recommendations, women are significantly underrepresented among General Conference delegates across the globe. Very little progress has been made over the past ten years toward equitable gender distributions among delegates.

Many annual conferences will be electing delegates to the 2020 General Conference this coming spring. General Conference is the ONLY body that speaks for The United Methodist Church and decides on policies that affect us all. While annual conferences are electing delegates, please remember the elected delegates determine the future of The United Methodist Church. Let us be intentional in making our delegations represent the membership of our annual conferences.