

# Proceedings

## Afternoon Proceedings for April 29

### Plenary 1

BISHOP SANDRA L. STEINER BALL: Coming back to order. The sixth plenary session now is called back to order after our recess. Once again, I am Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, and my backups here are Bishop Christian Alsted and Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai.

Let us pray as we begin our work together for this afternoon. Let us pray. Come, Holy Spirit. Continue to move among us and through us. Come, Holy Spirit, and pour your power and your presence into each one gathered here. Come, Holy Spirit, and work within us to lend us your wisdom and your grace. Give to us listening ears and caring hearts that we might be in tune with you and with one another as we continue our work this afternoon. This we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

### Calendar Items

It's good to see you all back. When we recessed for lunch, we were working on Calendar Item 18; it is still pending. And once again you find Calendar Item 18 on p. 1992 and 93. If you remember, as we were leaving for lunch, it was, that calendar item was amended, and we approved the amendment. And so now we are on Calendar Item 18 as amended.

When we recessed for lunch we had had no speeches for and no speeches against because this is now, Item 18 is before us as newly amended.

So, that's where we are. And so, if there is any further discussion on Calendar Item 18, you may now register. Use your devices to register what you would like to do, your action.

*(pause)*

All right, I would like to call on Tracy Merrick from Western Pennsylvania. Please come to mic. 1, I believe.

*(pause)*

TRACY MERRICK (Western Pennsylvania): Thank you, Bishop. Tracy Merrick, Western Pennsylvania, older adult, White male. I stand to speak in favor of this petition.

Those of us who have been delegates to many general conferences have known for decades the need for additional bishops in Africa. Many of us were overjoyed in 2016 when the General Conference finally affirmed the plan to add five additional bishops in the central conferences of Africa. Many of us look forward to the sharing of plans and budget allocations at this General Conference to support the five additional bishops. Many of us understand the issues which have led us to the current plan to add two but not five.

Yes, we definitely appreciate the work of the Standing Committee, and we encourage it to carefully study the needs for episcopal leadership in Africa and to present strong recommendations to the next General Conference.

In my opinion, we are in a new day in 2024 in this denomination, and it is time for us to clearly support and step up to the needs of our regions outside of the United States in new and bold ways, in ways by providing additional episcopal leaders and providing programmatic resources in fashions we've never done before. Thank you.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you. That was a speech for, and I'm turning to Dee Sticklely-Miner for a point of inquiry. Mic. 3, I believe?

DEE STICKELY-MINER (West Ohio): Thank you, Bishop. My name is Dee Sticklely-Miner, clergy, West Ohio, and I have a question. My question is if this petition is supported, does it do away with an episcopal area in Angola? And so, are we just voting on two episcopal areas to go to central conferences or are we also voting on where they go?

BISHOP BALL: I'm going to turn to the Standing Committee.

BISHOP GREGORY PALMER: Thank you very much, Madame Chair. It does not inevitably mean that an episcopal area is removed from anyone. Paragraph 543.8 ultimately leaves the matter of boundaries within the Central Conference, *et cetera, et cetera*, to the Central Conference to decide. That's why in the parens, it says, "it is recommended." So that's the recommendation that comes out of the work of the Standing Committee, but it is not ultimately prescriptive for the Central Conference.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you very much.

(pause)

OK. Julius Nelson, also for a point of information.

(pause)

JULIUS NELSON (Liberia): Mic. 2. Julius Nelson, clergy from the Liberia Annual Conference, African. I want to do the point of inquiry to the Standing Committee and the General Council on Finance and Administration.

BISHOP BALL: What's your question?

NELSON: Would it be a difference if in addition to the two that will be taken care of by the United Methodist budget that an episcopal area in those three central conferences that need additional bishops to complete the five as approved in the 2016 General Conference if they were allowed to pay for their own bishops, will that encourage us to pass for the five as was agreed on in 2026—2016.

BISHOP BALL: OK. Again, Standing Committee.

BISHOP HARALD RÜCKERT: As I have mentioned earlier, to reduce—oh, put it the other way around. Not to go for five additional bishops, but only for two this time, it really was related to financial restrictions we have in the budget. If, as has been mentioned, central conferences raised their contribution to finance their own episcopal leadership, this would be very much welcomed and the Standing Committee is very open to move forward the joint event to increase the numbers of bishops as needed.

Yes, if the finances are provided, and we can have completely different conversations around this.

NELSON: (*indecipherable*) With that information, I want to support—

BISHOP BALL: We need to—only one question at a time. So, if you have an additional question with that information just enter the pool again. Thank you.

We're turning to Alcides Martins for an amendment. Mic. 5.

ALCIDES MARTINS (Eastern Angola): (*simultaneous translation from Portuguese*) My name is Alcides Martins from the West Angola. I am Black. and I am a clergy. Alcides Martins. My question is if I can propose an amend if it is according to the rules of procedure?

BISHOP BALL: Let's try it. You would be in order for an amendment. Let's try it.

MARTINS: (*simultaneous translation from Portuguese*) So, my amend it is with regards to Petition 18 that we are debating right now. On line b, second paragraph. My amend is to remove the word *inclusion*, meaning the inclusion of the conference of the East and West of Angola. Removing that word will have only Annual Conference of the East of Angola and would be important to refer to the two conference. Because the way it is including, putting them together and joining them, then saying that the East of Angola will no longer exist, and then Angola will have only one conference.

BISHOP BALL: OK. I need you to restart what your amendment is.

MARTINS: (*simultaneous translation from Portuguese*) My amend is to remove the word, to put them together, fusion, joining them, merging them. Merging, to remove the word *merging*.

BISHOP BALL: OK. You need to write your amendment out and get it here to the table as quickly as possible so that we make sure that we're understanding exactly what your amendment is.

MARTINS: (*simultaneous translation from Portuguese*) Thank you so much.

BISHOP BALL: Please get the written amendment right as soon as possible so that we can move forward with our conversation.

(*pause*)

BISHOP RÜCKERT: May I, or?

(*pause*)

Do we have a page bringing up the amendment, the written amendment?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He's working.

(*pause*)

BISHOP BALL: Yep, I'm turning to the chair of the Standing Committee on Central Conferences.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: What I heard at this proposed amendment is that you are—you think it is about a merger of two annual conference in the text. Maybe this also has to do something with translation. To make it clear, it is not about a proposed merger of two annual conferences. It's rather about sharing one bishop in two annual conferences.

And again, the decision how the boundaries of the Central Conference and the Episcopal areas are shaped, the responsibility for this conversation rests with the Central Conference and not with the Standing Committee. So, what we propose are strong recommendations, and you have to work it out within your central conference.

(*pause*)

BISHOP BALL: I think the amendment is coming forward.

(*pause*)

Would the secretary of the General Conference read the amendment?

GARY GRAVES (Kentucky, Secretary of the General Conference): If the secretary of General Conference was fluent in Portuguese, I would be happy to do that.

(*laughter*)

However, I have requested an interpreter to join us on the stage.

BISHOP BALL: That would seem appropriate.

(*laughter*)

(*pause*)

We're trying to clarify and make sure we have the amendment correct because we don't have a second yet, because we need to understand what it is that's being requested and then we can get a second. If we get a second to it, then we'll speak to it. But let's make sure that we understand what is being asked.

(*pause*)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (*translating written amendment*) I would like to request the removal of the word *fusion* or *merger* in order to preserve the two annual conferences. So it is what is in English on the DCA appears as *combining*, that *combining* means bring together. So, remove the word *combining* and find language that indicates that it is the sharing of the bishop in the same episcopal area.

(*pause*)

BISHOP BALL: OK. I think we have it. We're working with translation in different languages. I believe, we believe that this would be the amendment. It's in that where it says *combining*. Take that language out and says the new episcopal area of Burundi, having one bishop overseeing the East Angola and West Angola, one episcopal area and the creation of new episcopal area in Zimbabwe. So it removes the word *combining*, which is our trouble word in translation. It is having one bishop overseeing the East and West Angola, one episcopal area.

Is that clear? Is that clear to the body? No. Yes. OK. It striking the *combining*, having one bishop oversee East Angola and West Angola, one episcopal area, and then moving on with the rest. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Second.

BISHOP BALL: OK. There is a second.

OK, since we are on the amendment now, we need to clear the speaker pool. We are speaking on the amendment now, so you need to reregister if you want to have discussion over the amendment. OK, I'm not seeing—oh I do see. OK, we have questions on other parliamentary—Ande Emmanuel, mic. 6.

*(pause)*

ANDE EMMANUEL (Southern Nigeria): Bishop, Ande Emmanuel, clergy delegate, Southern Nigeria Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. I want to move a motion to refer, so I couldn't find the parts to do that, so I have to press the "other parliamentary." So is motion to refer these to Standing Committee appropriate at this time?

BISHOP BALL: Yes, it is.

EMMANUEL: OK. I move to refer. If I have a second, I will speak to it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP BALL: OK, I hear a second. You may speak to it.

EMMANUEL: Bishop, there is adage in English that says what is worth doing is worth doing well. From the conversation that I am hearing here is as if this thing requires that we take time and refer this back to Standing Committee to have time to report back before we leave this General Conference. This will give us the opportunity to understand what they are doing and will give them the opportunity to understand the needs that we have. This one we are discussing here is a future of Africa. Episcopal leadership is very key and is very important if Africa is to succeed in the next quadrennium. With this conversation here we are, not everybody is in the loop of what is happening with amendment, counter-amendment. We need time to refer these to this committee and let the background work be done and be reported to this conference before we close. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you. Let me just clarify. Your motion to refer is for just this wording on the amendment. Is that correct?

EMMANUEL: The motion to refer is including this amendment and the other part of it that will come after this as well. And all this, I am making a motion to refer the whole of this report to the committee, to Standing Committee, and let them report it before we leave this place. After the nitty-gritty have been done.

BISHOP BALL: OK. So it to refer all of Calendar Item 18 back to the Standing Committee. OK. All right. Is there any discussion on the referral? Any discussion on the referral?

All right, there is a speech for. Dave Nuckols if you come to mic. 1.

DAVE NUCKOLS (Minnesota): Dave Nuckols, White, male, adult from Minnesota Annual Conference, lay. I am speaking for the motion to refer, and I don't know if you need a second, but I would provide the second if that wasn't already recorded. My speech for is by way of suggesting to the committee to consider one option to authorize—the final version of this petition could authorize the five bishops without settling the matter of how many would be funded in this General Conference because we will have an episcopal fund report later where we can finalize whatever that is, but we've also heard in this

conference about a possibility of some African conferences contributing more to the episcopal fund. And that, if I heard Bishop Rückert correctly, that might provide more room for some of the bishops. So is it perhaps proper to authorize what had previously been recommended and then a separate action would solidify the funding, and I offer that in my speech for as a way of suggestion something that they could consider once it's been referred.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you. I am calling on Silas Habonimana from Burundi. Mic. 5.

SILAS HABONIMANA (Burundi): *Bonjour*, Bishop. (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) Silas Habonimana from the Burundi Conference. My proposal is to—against the referral of this petition. Why? Because it would slow down the efforts from the—a lot of time work on the petition but it also would slow down the efforts of the beneficiaries. We all work for Africa. Would be better to move forward than to actually stagnate. So the increase of two bishops—two more bishops in Africa would actually be an advantage, not only for Burundi, but also for Africa at large. Thank you.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you. So we've had one speech for, one speech against, and I'm calling on Kenneth Kalichi from Zambia, mic. 2, for a speech for.

(*pause*)

KENNETH KALICHI (Zambia): Thank you, Bishop. Kenneth Kalichi, clergy from Zambia Annual Conference. I want to speak for the motion to support the referral of the same calendar item, 18, to the Standing Committee. Reason being that if you look at the petition itself, there are a lot of irregularities that needs to be revisited. They need to be corrected. For example, I see where East Angola and West Angola which is in the Africa Central Conference, having one bishop leading the two episcopal areas, and then Zimbabwe, which is also in the Africa Central Conference, gets an additional bishop within the same central conference. I think there'll be some confusion because some will be saying that we are being stricken one bishop and then another bishop is added to another bi—another episcopal area. I think there are a lot of items that needs to be revisited. That's the reason I'm supporting for the referral of the (*indecipherable*) of the Item 18 to the Standing Committee. Thank you.

(*pause*)

BISHOP BALL: Matthew Laferty, East Ohio, mic. 5, speech against.

(*pause*)

MATTHEW LAFERTY (East Ohio): Matthew Laferty, East Ohio Conference, clergy, White, male, adult. I rise to speak against the referral. The committee has done its work. The committee has consulted widely. The committee has listened to the recommendations that has come from their work, which has been in consultation with our colleagues all across the connection, including those on the African continent. While I wish that as annual conference delegation we could make commitments, financial commitments on behalf of our annual conference, because I would choose to spend our money differently, in our United Methodist polity, decisions about money of our annual conferences are decisions of the annual conference sessions themselves. Unfortunately, a delegation cannot make that commitment on behalf of their annual conference. We may not be happy with what is being presented. It's the reality of, as we heard earlier, the tension in which we are living in at this moment. But I would

ask the conference to reject referral and to approve the recommendations from the Standing Committee as it has been brought to us. Thank you.

BISHOP BALL: Katie Simpson, mic. 2, Louisiana.

KATIE SIMPSON (Louisiana): Katie McKay Simpson, Louisiana Conference, clergy, White, cisgendered female. I move to close debate. Call to question.

BISHOP BALL: OK, is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP BALL: OK, we are now moving to a vote on whether or not you are ready to close debate on the amendment to refer. OK? So we'll take that. Oh let me announce—let me announce who's in the speaker recognition pool. There are four speakers in favor, seven speakers against, one point of information/inquiry. OK? We will now proceed to the vote on the amendment to refer—or the referral of the Calendar Item 18 back to the Standing Committee.

*(indecipherable chatter)*

Oh, I'm sorry. End debate. I'm getting ahead of myself. End debate. Sorry. We are on the motion to end debate. All right, if you would support ending debate, you will press *one (1)*. If you will support not ending debate, please press *two (2)*. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

If you've got flags, wave them high. OK, I don't see any. So the vote—huh? All right, we've got one, sorry.

*(pause)*

OK, the vote is now closed. And can we have the results? You have moved to—you have moved to close debate. So 6—yes 680, no 44.

[Yes, 680; No, 44]

We will now move to the motion to refer Item 18 back to the Standing Committee on Central Conferences, along with the pending amendment. So, are you understanding? All right. So we're going to move to vote. If you would support the motion to refer Calendar Item 18 and the pending amendment, you will vote *one (1)* for yes and *two (2)* for no. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

BISHOP BALL: The flag over here.

All right, I think we've got it taken care of. All right the vote is now closed, may we see the results?

OK. You have not supported the referral of Calendar Item 18, and we are back on the amendment.

[Yes, 331; No, 391]

And the amendment was in 1(b), having one bishop overseeing East Angola and West Angola, one episcopal area, and the creation of, and it follows.

All right, so we had the pool cleared, and now we're looking for you to be able to enter the pool to continue our discussion.

*(pause)*

I'm calling on Rukang Chikomb from North-West Katanga, mic. 2.

So we're on the amendment.

RUKANG CHIKOMB (North-West Katanga): Thank you, Bishop. Rukang Chikomb.

BISHOP BALL: Chikomb. Thank you very much.

CHIKOMB: Maybe next time, I need to be George.

*(laughter)*

My bishop, I'm supporting the amendment for one of this reason: I think we have to celebrate like the day like this when you think about regionalization. *(indecipherable)* Because this issue as you see it, who are talking about it more is the people that have seen it, have been there, they are there as I speak, they are driving by motorcycle, bicycle, river to get to the conference or the meeting of a church. And here we are producing the job, but you are increasing what we are fighting in this General Conference. You reduce the bishop, you bring a lot of work.

We have told you today that we can support the bishop, just talk about it in Standing Committee. Bring that on the table. I was talking to a member of Standing Committee when we went to break, "What is going on?" And he said to me, "We talk about this thing of helping us just to make sure we can support the bishop." I don't understand why. If we can afford to pay to sixteen bishop, the job can be reduced, let's do it. And this is one thing Standing Committee can, every subject can talk about it, we have spent how many hours on this petition? How many hours?

And, like I said before, I have an amendment, too. I will bring it up. It will be another hour. Do we want to be like that?

*(laughter)*

BISHOP BALL: Excuse me, I have to interrupt here because we have a point of order. You can stay right there at the mic., but Manuel Rodrigues has a point of order. Mic. 4. Western Angola.

Thank you. What is your point of order? Cite the rule please. Your name, conference, and cite the rule.

MANUEL RODRIGUES (Western Angola): *(simultaneous interpretation from Portuguese)* I am Manuel Rodrigues, a lay delegate from the Western Angola Conference. I am a young adult. My point of order: It's to do with the time that we are taking to discuss this issue. This is a very peculiar matter for Africa, especially for Angola. And so I'd like to request—

BISHOP BALL: Sorry, I need to stop you. The time of discussion is not a point of order against any of our rules, so your point of order is not well taken at this time. But, yes, I agree with you we've spent a lot of discussion time on this. Thank you.



RODRIGUES: (*simultaneous interpretation from Portuguese*) I don't know if I could finish my line of thought.

BISHOP BALL: No, we need to move on to the rest, but thank you very much.

CHIKOMB: Bishop, I can finish?

BISHOP BALL: OK, we need to go back to mic. 2, thank you. And you have one minute remaining.

CHIKOMB: Oh another minute. So please just vote yes, and we can finish this matter, and we can move on to the next petition, please.

(*laughter*)

BISHOP BALL: OK, thank you. That was a speech for. We do not have any speeches against that are recorded in the pool, and so I'm going to call on another speech for. Ginford Dzimati from West Zimbabwe.

(*pause*)

GINFORD DZIMATI (West Zimbabwe): Thank you, Bishop. I rise to move a motion to adopt the petition as brought by the Central Conference.

BISHOP BALL: So, are you speaking for or making a motion?

DZIMATI: I'm making a motion.

BISHOP BALL: OK, we can't—that's actually out of order at this time because you registered as a speech for speaking to this amendment. So, if you'd like to make a different motion, you need to go back and register for a point of parliamentary—or "other parliamentary." So thank you very much.

OK. Dave Nuckols you have a point of information? Mic. 1?

NUCKOLS: We've already did that. I apologize if I screwed this up.

BISHOP BALL: OK. Thank you very much. OK. Robert Kilembo from Zambia.

(*pause*)

I think it's mic. 2.

ROBERT KILEMBO (Zambia): Thank you, Bishop, for allowing me to stand here after a long, long, long, great quest to speak.

I move to support the motion based on what I'm seeing here on reducing the number of bishops in Angola and adding another episcopal area in Zimbabwe. That doesn't give us the number of two bishops as the Standing Committee is saying. To my own understanding, I assume that the Standing Committee is reducing the numbers of bishops. Therefore, I support the motion so that we keep the idea of having the same number of bishops and to move on adding two more as it was said. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you. I'm calling on Colette Cummings, mic. 2.

(*pause*)

COLETTE CUMMINGS (Missouri): Colette Cummings, Black, female, lay from Missouri, the Missouri Conference. I call the question.

BISHOP BALL: OK. Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP BALL: OK. This motion is in order. We've had—all we've had is speeches for. There has been nobody registered for speeches against. What was in the pool is there were nine to close debate, one for inquiry, and two people to speak for. So the motion before us is to close debate. This motion requires a two-thirds vote, and we'll now proceed to that vote. The question is on closing debate. So take out your devices if you will want to end the debate on this amendment, you will vote yes. *Two (2)* vote no. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

Any flags? All right. There's one here in the front. And one in the back corner.

*(pause)*

OK, we're getting those persons taken care of. All right. The vote is now closed. Now we can have the results. You have voted to close to end debate on the amendment. Yes, 688. No, 40.

*[Yes, 688; No, 40]*

OK so now we are moving to the amendment. The amendment, once again, is an amendment to what's in Calendar 18 on p. 1993. It's down under *b*: having one bishop overseeing East Angola and West Angola, one episcopal area, and the rest of the petition remains as is. All right, take out your devices, if you will support the amendment, please press *one (1)*. If you will not support the amendment, please press *two (2)*. Please vote now. We have a flag here in the front. If you've got flags, please wave them high. There's two here.

*(pause)*

All right. You voted. You got that? OK. The vote is now closed. May we please see the results? You have voted to support the amendment. Yes, 489; no, 223.

*[Yes, 489; No, 223]*

Thank you, we are now on Calendar Item 18 as it has now been amended twice. Please clear the pool. Please clear the pool at this time.

*(pause)*

Thank you. The pool has now been cleared, so if you would like to speak to Calendar Item 18 as amended. OK. I see no speakers, and so we are getting ready to vote. Calendar It—Oh, I'm sorry. Sorry. I keep forgetting you back here behind me. I apologize. You do get the last word before we vote. So, we turn to you (*indcipherable*).

BISHOP RÜCKERT: Very briefly to make it clear. The petition before you as amended is the result of a long process of conversation, listening, consulting, more than, well starting in 2016 or maybe earlier.

Second, it's about the increase of bishops in Africa from thirteen to fifteen. Two additional bishops, and we also learned that those two additional bishops are already included in the budget that is presented to General Conference. And thirdly, what the Standing Committee offers you in this petition is—these are strong recommendations how the episcopal areas should be made up. But the right to set the boundaries for episcopal areas resides with the Central Conference. So you in the Central Conference in Africa you have all rights to have conversation around this and collaborate with the Standing Committee as well. It's on you to decide, so there's nothing imposed on you. So we think as a Standing Committee it's a well thought and mature plan we offer to you.

BISHOP BALL: OK. Thank you very much. Thank you, Standing Committee, for all your work. We will now proceed to the vote. This motion requires a majority of vote and again the question is on the adoption of Calendar Item 18 as amended. So take out your voting devices. If you will support, please press *one (1)* for yes. And if you would not, please press *two (2)* for no. Please vote now.

*(pause)*

Do we have—there's a flag over here. Any other flags? I don't see any. All right. The vote is now closed. Let us see the results. You have supported Calendar 18 as amended. 640 [645] votes yes, and 96 votes no. Thank you. Thank you for that action.

[Yes, 645; No, 96]

### Prayer after Shooting in Charlotte

BISHOP BALL: For a moment we are going to turn actually to Bishop Carter. There's been a shooting in Charlotte, and we would like to call on Bishop Carter to offer a prayer.

*(pause)*

Bishop Connie Shelton. He made be out. Would you come forward and offer prayer for our area?

*(pause)*

Yes, there's been a shooting in Charlotte. I don't know the details of that, but we have been asked to pause and offer prayer for that situation. Bishop Connie Shelton is one of our bishops of North Carolina.

BISHOP CONNIE M. SHELTON: I invite us to open ourselves to a posture of prayer.

O God, we stand with all those who suffer this day. We're mindful of the violence of the world, desperation, pain, and how desperation then inflicts pain on others. Jesus, we come to you asking that you help us know how to stand with you in the face of violence and how to walk alongside and bring comfort and extend your peace to all those who have been impacted.

O God, in the midst of the chaos right now, we ask that your creative spirit would bring clarity and order in the midst of pain. Help us as your followers, Jesus, not to leap to conclusions but to stand in the midst of the uncertainty, extending arms, caring, loving, being still with you and with your children.

We pray for all those who are trying to navigate as leaders what's going on in this unknown space, O God. Give wisdom, deep, deep wisdom that comes from your presence. Give voice to those who have no voice and for anyone who right now is wondering if someone they love and know is being impacted, O God. Draw near.

(pause)

Keep us from rushing in and trying to rescue and forgive us when we abdicate.

(pause)

In the pain of this moment attaches to pain around gun violence that we have experienced in our communities and around the world, over and over again, O God, help us as your church, to stand against all the practices that allow gun violence to continue in our midst. And may we stand, holding hands together, protecting the most vulnerable among us. Because we know without a doubt that is where you are, even now.

(pause)

We trust this situation and all those impacted and involved to your care, O God. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts to understand how to be your church even now, and we ask this in your strong name, Jesus. Amen.

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP BALL: Thank you, Bishop Shelton, for leading us in prayer. Friends, thank you for this honor to have served as your presiding officer. Thank you for your patience and your kindness, and please forgive me for the times that I mispronounced your name or made other—other slip-ups. Thank you for working with me. I also want to thank my backup presiders, Bishop Bigham-Tsai and Bishop Alsted.

(applause)

Delegates, please—we have reached a point where Bishop Mande Muyombo is going to come forward and preside for the remainder of the first part of this afternoon session. And delegates please remain in your seats during this transition. It's only going to be a break that takes me long enough to pick up my stuff and Bishop Muyombo to come and take my place. Thank you very much.

(applause)

(pause)

BISHOP MANDE MUYOMBO: (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) I invite you to put your headsets on please. Good afternoon, please put your headsets on. My name is Mand—Bishop Mande, and today we are Monday; it is Monday. Monday afternoon. I wanted to thank my colleagues, the committee that is giving me the opportunity to preside this afternoon at this session. And I wanted to also thank my colleagues behind me, Bishop Bard and Bishop Christian Alsted. I would also like to thank the Standing Committee. Can we please applaud for their work?

(applause)

(*simultaneous interpretation from French*) I want to ask them to rest a little bit. We're going to go to other matters. And we'll come back to this.

## Africa University Report

BISHOP MUYOMBO: (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) Now I invite Africa University, who has prepared a report, and that will be given to you by the president of the university, and so here—we will hear the report from Africa University.

(*applause*)

JIM SALLEY (South Carolina, President of Africa University): Good afternoon.

ALL: Good afternoon.

SALLEY: We greet you in the name of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, the one who is able to keep us from falling.

We now present to you, members of the Africa University Board of Directors: Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa, Zimbabwe Episcopal Area; Bishop Gaspar Domingos, Angola West Area; Bishop Mande Muyombo, North Katanga Episcopal Area; Bishop Minerva Carcaño, San Francisco Area; Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, Ohio East Episcopal Area; Bishop L. Jonathan Holston, Columbia Episcopal Area; Bishop Julius Trimble, Indiana Episcopal Area; Mrs. Lisa Tichenor, chairperson of the Africa University Tennessee Corporation, Dallas, Texas; Rev. Greg Bergquist, General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry; Mr. Roland Fernandes, General Secretary, General Board of Global Ministries; Rev. Dr. Chamise Taimo and Rev. Alfiado Zunguza from the Mozambique Annual Conference; Mr. Wehnam Dabale, Nigeria Conference; Mr. Charles Moore from the Baltimore-Washington Conference; Dr. Yeabu Kamara, Sierra Leone Conference; Rev. Dr. Peter Mageto, vice chancellor of Africa University; and Rev. Dr. Betty Masua from the North Katanga Annual Conference. This is the Africa University Board of Directors and a distinguished alumnus of Africa University, Rev. Dr. Betty. Would you give them a round of applause, please?

(*applause*)

It's good for us to be here, and thank you for allowing us this opportunity. (*indecipherable*)

(*pause*)

Bishop Mande Muyombo was to be with us as a participant in the Africa University report presentation today. He holds two degrees from Africa University. He's the chairperson of the Africa University Zimbabwe Board of Directors and chair of the Connectional Table of The United Methodist Church. And overnight, God lifted him up just a little higher in choosing that he preside over this plenary session, Africa University, thanks be to God. It ain't no secret what God can do. What he's done for others, he'll do for you. Brothers and sisters, Africa University is the school of dreams in the valley of hope. Africa University is a gift that God has given to some of the most underprivileged children on Africa. Young people grew up in poverty without confidence that one day they would be educated. God showed up for them through the people who call themselves United Methodists. Give yourselves a hand.

(*applause*)

Rev. Dr. Peter Mageto was born in Nyamira, Western Kenya. He holds two degrees from the Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois: a doctor of philosophy in theological ethics and a master of theological studies. He earned a postgraduate certificate in African studies at Northwestern

University in Chicago. He is the first person in his family, and he has a large family, to become a Christian. Please welcome Africa University's fifth vice chancellor, Peter Mageto.

*(applause)*

### **Africa University Report**

PETER MAGETO (Vice Chancellor of Africa University): Good afternoon. On behalf of the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees, it is my joy to bring news of your Africa University. Thank you for this precious opportunity. Today, Africa University is deeply rooted and thriving because of the faithful engagement of The United Methodist Church. Thank you. With your prayers and gifts, you stand in the gap for young women and men who could not access a college education without the support that you provide. Many are first-generation college students, and the majority are women. They represent in a microcosm the breadth of the African experience.

Africa is a beautiful continent, and the need for quality, contextually relevant, and affordable education has never been greater. Your Africa University is relevant. Teaching, learning, research, innovation, and entrepreneurship priorities are continually evolving. AU established their School of Law in the year 2022 and the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences in the year 2023.

In August, Africa University will launch the Sub-Saharan Africa's first bachelor of science degree in Artificial Intelligence. These new offering extends AU's trailblazing efforts in the areas of intellectual property rights, agriculture, business, communicable diseases, and public health and development sector. Strong, fruitful ongoing partnerships between the university and UNICEF, USAID, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the Mastercard Foundation, the European Union through the Berghof Foundation, and many others recognize Africa University as a conduit for sustainable development. Your Africa University is robust, prudent, and stable.

Over twelve thousand alumni that four nations are represented, a student body that is 58 percent female, and more than sixty-five challenging and rewarding degree programs, 350 passport and driven staff, a student successful rate of over 96 percent, a debt-free infrastructure and with a world of prosperity before us. Your Africa University is transformational.

As our young people live and learn together, their experience fosters spiritual maturity, empathy, integrity, and a desire to actively participate in Africa's renewal. Lifetime friendships are formed as they gain the knowledge and skills to evangelize, innovate, flourish, and realize their dreams. Africa University graduates are growing the church and driving change. They are creating jobs by pioneering breakthroughs and crafting inclusive agendas, and championing progress with every graduate who walks out of its gates. Africa University sends forth a ripple of change, building a future where Africa's potential is fully realized.

Africa University exists quite literally under the United Methodist cross and flame. Thanks to the gift from the Mississippi Conference, a massive steel cross and flame stands on the highest point of our main campus, declaring to all that we are a United Methodist Christian university.

We thank you again for your love of Africa University, and know that we are counting on your support. Thank you, and may God bless you.

*(applause)*

SALLEY (South Carolina): It's been said that if you want to determine the relevance, the success of a university, you look at its graduates; you see who they are and where they are and what they are doing. As we celebrate thirty-two years of the Africa University ministry, we've only to look around us in this General Conference to witness Africa University's tremendous impact. Today some of the more than twelve thousand AU graduates, now in the world serving mostly on the continent of Africa, are here! I invite them to stand so you can see the return on your investment. They are delegates at this conference.

*(applause)*

They are clergy and laity. They serve and lead within and beyond their local churches. And today on this stage!

*(applause)*

Africa University graduates, delegates in the General Conference, those persons in the translator booth, those pages and marshals, Africa University graduates, please stand up! Let this General Conference see who you are! If you are a graduate of Africa University, stand where you are!

*(applause)*

Over here, over here, over there. Up here!

And today on this stage is Rev. Dr. Betty Kazadi Musau. She's from the North Katanga area in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Let us hear from you, Reverend.

BETTY KAZADI (North Katanga): Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity. I am Betty Kazadi Musau, clergy from North Katanga Annual Conference, director of communication for the episcopal area, finance officer for Disaster Management, and secretary of the Board of Universities in North Katanga. I am what I am because of The United Methodist Church. I am what I am because of Africa University

Africa University has invested in me as a female, a woman, and a mother. The African girl child is a key area of focus for Africa University. More than half of Africa University annual enrollment is female. Access to a life-changing educational experience at Africa University has kept many young girls out of early marriages—like me. Their education benefits, their churches, their families, their communities and ultimately our global connection.

I am passionate about working with women and children and about having a role in training and encouraging the next generation of leaders to whom we will entrust the future of the church. The development I see in our episcopal area in North Katanga, one of the largest in the connection in both membership and geography, and access across Africa, whether in church circles or in health and social science, agriculture, leadership, governance, human rights, gender, you name it, it is the result of the hard work of Africa University. Thank you.

Africa University is indeed investing in Africa's future. This is not the time to give up, but rather to show up. This is the time to continue the work, grow the grow—the flow—and watch God multiply its impact. This is the time to celebrate.

Across Sub-Sahara Africa, in almost every Methodist-related institution of higher learning and in missional engagement effort of every nature, you will find us, your Africa University graduate, dreaming, bringing the vision to life, serving, and leading and seeing God's promise of abundance and peace realized in the world. I am what I am because of Africa University. All those hats that I wear, I wear them because of education that I received from Africa University. Quite simply, friends, Africa University is the hope of the continent.

I thank you for giving life, my dreams, and fuel for my journey.

Now, here's the video update on your investment in Africa University. Thank you.

*(applause)*

*(video)*

SALLEY (South Carolina): Bishop of the Indiana area is the chair of the Board Development, an advisory Development committee. This is Bishop Julius Trimble, who also June 1 will be the Interim Chair of the Board of Directors of Africa University, Zimbabwe. I know he has another job, but he has to finish his AU work first. Bishop Trimble.

*(applause)*

BISHOP JULIUS C. TRIMBLE: Good afternoon, brothers and sisters, beloved of God. In my book, *Ten Reasons I Am a Methodist*, I tell the story of Africa University as one of the greatest contributions of The United Methodist Church. I'm a United Methodist for many reasons, but Africa University tops the list. I'm a United Methodist because of our commitment to higher education, supporting children and families, and making dreams come true. Africa University is a delightful story that needs no exaggeration. This is our connection at its best.

Imagine that you are Maxwell Chibwatiko, a young man from rural Malawi living with your grandmother on a small plot of land that you farm for survival. You see yourself helping to grow a thriving agriculture sector in Malawi. If only you could get the training and share your knowledge with others. You move to the city, you take a job as a household worker, and start saving to enroll at Africa University. Two years later, you arrive on the campus with a hard-earned \$1,000 only to learn that that is not enough. All scholarships have been allocated and you are advised to go back home. Instead you pray. Somebody say pray.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Pray.

BISHOP TRIMBLE: You pray outside the chapel and that night, the university receives word of a gift of a full scholarship from a local United Methodist church. That gift helps you to register and begin your studies at Africa University. While a student, you go on home for an internship and notice many children are out of school. So you plant and harvest peanuts from your little plot. You use the funds from your own harvest to build a school, hire teachers, and provide a free education for children who cannot pay. You graduate in June 2023 with a degree from AU—Africa University—in agribusiness, return to Malawi, and continue to serve and lead. Beloved, through Africa University we answer prayer, we model grace and mercy, we encounter and encourage young people as they move into meaningful discipleship wherever God calls them. What a privilege. Africa University makes me, and all of us, ambassadors of hope because we are changing lives and preparing leadership for the future. This is happening right now



at Africa University. Every dollar is well spent, and it is important that we United Methodists remain steadfast in supporting this disciple-making transformative ministry. To transform the world we must invest in Africa and Africa University.

Now it is a joy and a privilege to introduce the resident bishop of the East Ohio Episcopal area, the chair of the Audit Committee of Africa University Board of Directors. Please join me in welcoming the incoming president of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, Bishop Tracy Smith Malone.

*(applause)*

BISHOP TRACY S. MALONE: The dream. The seeds that were sown hundreds of years ago that would become Africa University is a gift from God. I am so thankful to have had many opportunities to spend time on the campus with the students, hearing their stories, listening to their hopes, listening to their dreams, and I have witnessed firsthand how an education at Africa University is unlocking these students' lives and their future potential as transformational leaders in their families, in their villages, in their communities all across the continent of Africa and, yes, throughout the world. Education is a passport to freedom. Education is a passport to sustainability. Education is a passport to possibility and to hope. I am a living witness to the difference that Africa University is making, in the lives of students and in the lives of our beloved United Methodist Church. So thank you, Lord, for the gift of Africa University. Let me say that again. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of Africa University! And thank you for your financial support, for your ongoing prayers. And I want to thank you in advance for committing to return to your respective places of worship, for your commitment to return to your annual conferences and be an advocate for Africa University. To God be the glory for what God has already done! To God be the glory for even that which is yet to come! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! And amen.

*(applause)*

SALLEY: I am Jim Salley, lay delegate from South Carolina, the home of smiling faces, beautiful places. President/CEO of your Africa University Tennessee Corporation, and associate vice chancellor for Institutional Advancement of Africa University, Zimbabwe. The choir could not be here today with us, and we leave you with this. Some of you can sing.

*(singing)*

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Thank you, Dr. Salley. And thank you, Africa University.

## General Board of Higher Education and Ministry Report

Friends, the next item of business is the report from Higher Education and Ministry. The chair invites our presenters on the Higher Education and Ministry Report. They will be led by General Secretary Rev. Greg Bergquist.

*(video on General Board of Higher Education and Ministry)*

GREG BERGQUIST (California-Nevada, General Secretary of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry): Good afternoon. My name is Greg Bergquist. White male, clergy, older adult. I am the general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, sometimes known as GBHEM. Our

agency has the privilege of walking beside you as you discern, learn, and lead—leaning into the call God has placed on your life.

As proposed by Charles Wesley, uniting knowledge and vital piety is a theological core value of The United Methodist Church and the Wesleyan Tradition. Students who attend a United Methodist-related school, college, seminary or university receive more than just a world class education, they find a community that nurtures their mind, their body, and their spirit, and are inspired to transform society for the greater good. United Methodist-related institutions are inclusive communities that combine intellectual curiosity with justice, equity, solidarity for the advancement of basic human rights. In fact, United Methodists were among the first to advocate for greater educational opportunities for all people regardless of race, class, or gender.

Consider with me Meharry Medical College, one of our eleven historically Black colleges, located in Nashville, Tennessee. Meharry trains thousands of healthcare professionals in the United States. Additionally, more than 75 percent of Meharry’s medical and dental school graduates go on to practice in underserved communities. Let’s take a look at the impact of this world-class United Methodist-related college.

*(video on Meharry Medical College)*

JESSICA LOVE (Lina H. McCord Ambassador): Good evening. I am Dr. Jessica Love. Black female from the Mississippi Annual Conference and a proud alumna of the illustrious Rust College.

For over fifty years, United Methodist has supported eleven historically Black colleges and universities in the United States through the Black College Fund. We know through our work with HBCUs, as well as social science research, that education is one of the most effective tools for equity and economic justice. And with recent Supreme Court rulings that have undermined affirmative action, the importance of HBCUs is ever more critical now than ever. In proportion to their size and financial resources, these eleven HBCUs continue to produce world-class leaders for the church. I’m talking about civil rights leaders. I’m talking about global innovators in healthcare and education, and classes upon classes of change-makers. For more than fifty years, The United Methodist Church has done more to open doors for HBCUs and to help them to continue thriving than any other Christian denomination in history.

*(applause)*

Yes, that deserves a round of applause. Let’s continue that rich history of change, engaging students as they explore their call to ministry. Thank you.

*(applause)*

LINDSEY FREEMAN (Virginia, GBHEM Board Member): My name is Lindsey Baynham Freeman. Clergy, multiracial, female, adult.

Rarely would I expect a holy moment to overtake a hotel ballroom full of near strangers. And yet, I have felt it happen every time I have attended a GBHEM Exploration event.

Exploration is a three-day conference for young adults who are discerning a call to ministry or trying to faithfully understand their vocational choice. It is a diverse call that extends beyond traditional pastoral work to teaching, counseling, community outreach, community development, and many other forms of

service for both lay and clergy. Perhaps my favorite part of the event comes at the end. During the final worship service, we ask young adults who are ready to step forward and own their call. There's always a pause and a few nerve-racking seconds when it seems like no one's going to stand up. Then one by one, they begin to stand, rising in a steady wave as the Holy Spirit moves in our midst, and we're all enveloped in this holy moment listening to God's call and taking next steps together.

Four of the bishops who participated in this year's event recalled their experiences of discernment as young adults at Exploration. And since the program began in 1990, more than 4,500 young people have engaged their call at Exploration events around the world.

*(applause)*

*(video playing)*

LOUIS ROI ABOUA (Côte d'Ivoire): *(simultaneous interpretation from French)* From the Côte d'Ivoire. John Wesley recognized that various instruments and experiences are essential to help God's people discern their vocation and live into that vocation in their own context. GBHEM works with the Central Conference Theological Formation Fund and the proposed Central Conference Higher Education Fund in order to expand formation opportunities worldwide by supporting scholarships, faculty development, courses of study, Board of Ordained Ministry training, and libraries across all the central conferences. In October 2023, representatives from fifty-two Methodist educational institutions in over fifteen countries gathered in Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo to create a common vision and strengthen partnerships for the future of Methodist education from a pan-African perspective. During that meeting, the African Association of United Methodist Theological Institutions and the African Association of Methodist Institutions of Higher Education discussed the importance of regionalization in the African context. Before that, the Burundi Annual Conference came together as a single entity in 2017. It was a time of celebration, but also a challenge for clergy who had not had access to formal theological training for a lot of years. It was in February 2020, when over 190 pastors graduated from Burundi's first program of studies in a celebration filled with hope for the future. Thank you.

*(video playing)*

JAMISSE TAIMO (Executive Director of the GBHEM LEAD Hub Mozambique): *(simultaneous interpretation from Portuguese)* Good afternoon. I am Jamisse Taimo. I am from Mozambique. I am a pastor, albino, and Black. That institutions collaborate with the major international institutions, educational institutions, and also defined regional areas, regional *(indecipherable)* for education development-denominated regional Hubs in Argentina, in Brazil, in the United Kingdom, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, Alleman—Germany, South Africa, the United States, South Korea, that unite the Methodist Church that all the possibility is to work together ecumenically such as the International Association of Schools, Colleges, Universities, Methodist Universities. Through initiatives such as the Fund for Global Education for the development and leaderships are the regional hubs that will answer all the necessities of ministries or programs and related to The United Methodist Church that promote opportunities for development of leadership of the local churches and communities, general.

For example, the GB[HE]M has been working since 2017 with educational—superior educational leaders in Africa, trying to establish in the African context of the Methodist education similar to the university system of the United States and Philippines. In Africa, its offering of standards, policies, adequate for the

evaluation assessment for the Methodist institutions with all the work for the next months. The first senators will start their work in the next few months. The General Conference, of course, will contribute for the development and sustainability for the future of the American institution and through the new presented HIF.

There is also a deep desire with the central conferences to define methodology for appropriate educations for pastors, reverends, and leaders with different denominations with GBHEM, and we work together with the local church and communities in order to establish a program to aim introduction for chapels, in Ivory Coast, South Africa, providing information and training for several lay and clergy.

GBHEM is our working with several central conferences in order to develop training programs and certification in accordance for sustainability, trying to ensure that all people in each region will be prepared and equipped in order to prosper and thrive in their own ministries.

*(applause)*

*(video playing)*

CONNIE SEMY MELLA (Mindanao Philippines, Executive Director of the GBHEM LEAD Hub Philippines): *(speaking in Tagalog)*

I am Connie Semy Mella for the Philippines Central Conference. Through the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry scholarship program, The United Methodist Church prepares the next generation of critical thinkers, economic leaders. Since 2017, more than \$29 million has been awarded to over fifteen thousand students worldwide to help them pursue their educational dreams. For example, the International Grants and Scholarship Program, called GRASP, awards approximately 150 GRASP scholarships each year to students studying at Methodist-related institutions within the Central Conference. The Angella P. Current-Felder Women of Color Scholarship Program celebrates fifty-five women of color scholars who have obtained their doctoral degrees in religious education and are now teaching in colleges, universities, and seminaries around the world. The graduates of the program have achieved significant accomplishments, including Dr. Yar Donlah Gonway-Gono, the first woman president of the United Methodist University of Liberia.

*(applause)*

The Lydia Patterson Institute, a United Methodist-related school in El Paso, Texas, educates six to twelve grade school students from both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The J. A. Knowles Scholarship helps bridge the financial gap to college by providing education for students so that they will be able to obtain their education through the United Methodist institutions of higher learning. Because Wiley University and Huston-Tillotson University are two of the eleven Black College Fund colleges, this connection helps build another layer of assistance for the students.

*(video playing)*

*(pause)*

JAVIER VIERA (New York, President of the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools): *(indecipherable)* and president of the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools.

The landscape of theological education in the United States is changing rapidly, and our thirteen United Methodist seminaries are changing, too, as they commit to innovative education for the future thriving of the church. GBHEM is stewarding Ministerial Education Fund (MEF dollars), by awarding grants of the prototyping of new creative expressions of theological education, especially initiatives that support historically marginalized communities.

Gammon Theological Seminary, our only United Methodist Historically Black Theological Institution is completely reimagining how they operate.

Boston University School of Theology is creating trauma-informed educational practices for their seminarians.

In an attempt to combat clergy isolation, Candler School of Theology is fostering seminarian relationships that offer mutual support across a lifetime in ministry.

Claremont and MTSO are launching extensive joint research from California to Ohio and beyond to discover critical trends in society that have a direct impact on effective preparation for ministry.

My own institution, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, has embarked on a new collaborative partnership with Africa University to create the Peter Mageto Fellows Program, providing scholarships and living stipends for students from Africa, grants for innovative online educational opportunities, and the launching of a faculty and administrative exchange program between our two institutions.

We have so much to learn from each other, and your MEF dollars provide the funds necessary to forge innovative relationships across continents, making a bright future possible for United Methodist theological education.

BERGQUIST: For over 150 years, GBHEM has served as the steward of the intellectual life and educational mission of our church. Through that time our church has gone through many transformations and evolutions. For the past two years, Higher Education and Ministry and Global Ministries have been moving toward greater collaboration and alignment, attending each other's consultations and meetings, and bringing together program ministry staff in the areas of scholarships and granting, regional work, shared services, theological reflection, and leadership formation and training.

Last October, the board of directors of both boards announced that my colleague and friend, Roland Fernandes, will become the general secretary of both agencies when I retire in June. I celebrate this decision as yet another example of the transformation and evolution of our work in ministry together. By embracing the change that God has set before us, as individuals, pastors, agencies, and a denomination, we can ensure that the educational mission of the church will always be a vital expression of what it means to be United Methodist, making principled Christian leaders for the church, the academy, and the world. Thank you, and God bless you.

*(applause)*

BISHOP MUYOMBO: *(simultaneous interpretation from French)* We want to thank the secretary general. Dear brothers, this is the beauty of being in The United Methodist Church. Thank you very much for the report.

*(simultaneous interpretation from French)* Dear friends, we have now come to the time of a break. And we are going to rest to take a break until 4:10. Once again, we're going to take a short break until 4:10, and when we come back, my colleague, Bishop Frank Beard, will replace me in this seat. I wanted to thank all of my colleagues, Bishop Bard as well as Bishop Alsted to have assisted me. Thank you very much, and have a good break.

*(applause)*

## Plenary 2

BISHOP FRANK BEARD: *(singing "O, How I Love Jesus")* Let's do that first verse.

*(singing)*

The Lord be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

BISHOP BEARD: Let us pray. Lord, please send the gentle wind of your Holy Spirit. Blow across the embers of our hearts, and keep us ablaze for Jesus. We believe you for it, and we thank you in advance. In Jesus' name. Amen.

This session is called back to order. My name is Frank Beard, and I am the resident bishop of the Illinois-Great Rivers Conference.

*(applause)*

Riding right alongside of me this afternoon is Bishop Karen Oliveto.

*(applause)*

And Bishop Hee-Soo Jung. I am glad to have these colleagues supporting me.

Now, I just want to be real clear with you upfront. It's not really the blind leading the blind, because they can see. I have the challenge of not being able to see you very clearly. I see movement, I see some folks, and you all look marvelous, you look marvelous. But, they're going to help me out so that the blind is not leading the blind. They're going to help me out, and I appreciate that.

So let me give you a real quick snippet of where we're going to be going this afternoon, because I'm not supposed to be using colloquial phrases, but "we got a long row to hoe".

*(laughter)*

OK. So, here's where we're going:

We're going to do the Wespath report. Then we're going to have the Abundant Health Report. Then we're going to do United Methodist Men. And then we're going to end everything with a Judicial Council decision. And then at 5:50, we're going to get a report from Credentials.

At 6:00—you'll notice I'm giving these some times; y'all are going to have to help me stick with it—we're going to turn to Courtesies and Privileges. Then we'll have our closing devotions, and then Secretary

Graves will give us the announcements before we depart. So, y'all ready? Buckled in and ready to go? OK.

## Wespath New Retirement Plan Overview

The next item is the Wespath New Retirement Plan overview. The chair recognizes chairperson of the Wespath Board of Directors, Bishop Robert Schnase, and General Secretary of the Wespath Benefits and Investments, Andrew Hendren. Would you please welcome them?

*(applause)*

BISHOP ROBERT SCHNASE: Thank you, Bishop Beard. Hello, friends, and greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm heartened to see so many people in this room who are committed to the vital future of The United Methodist Church. We are driven to reclaim and revive and renew The United Methodist Church as we refocus ourselves on the mission and ministry of our church, and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I speak today, not just as the Bishop of the Rio Texas Conference and the New Mexico Conferences, but also and especially, as chair of the Board of Wespath, and on behalf of the Board of Wespath. It's been my honor through this extended quadrennium to serve as chair of the Wespath Board.

Wespath is one of the thirteen general agencies of The United Methodist Church. We administer pension, retirement, and other benefit plans for many of you who serve the church, clergy and lay alike, so you can focus more directly on your work and on your ministry.

Some think of Wespath as the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. That's how Wespath is still identified in our current *Book of Discipline*, but we've been actually known as Wespath since 2016. The name "Wespath" honors John Wesley and reflects our agencies commitment to provide a path to financial security for people who serve the church in the United States and across the central conferences.

The name "Wespath" conveys integrity, competence, and transparency. This General Conference has already officially voted, through consent agenda, to change the name from General Board of Pension and Health Benefits to Wespath in our next *Book of Discipline*.

Wespath has been caring for Methodist ministers since 1908, and they've been participating in some form of Methodist pensions for over two hundred years. And Wespath will be serving the United Methodist ministers, churches, and congregations for many decades into the future. Wespath deeply cares about the future of our church and especially the people who dedicate their lives to ministry.

Wespath's legislation for this General Conference is grounded in our mission of caring for those who serve; caring for those who serve. You may see a picture of some of the folks who work with Wespath, a few of the many dedicated folks who support this mission. Wespath's petitions for this General Conference are designed to support the long-term sustainability of The United Methodist Church and its pensions program; and for a church that that has changed so much, even since 2016.

The Board of Directors, elected by the church, has worked carefully in trying to balance in the new plan equitable, affordable and sustainable. The petitions seek the stability and adequacy of the benefit plans for the over one hundred thousand people that Wespath serves around the world.

In a few minutes, Wespath's General Secretary, Andy Hendren, will bring greetings and share his thoughts about how Wespath's petitions support the church. But, before Andy steps forward, I want to share a little bit about him.

Andy is one of the most engaging and dynamic leaders I know. He is passionate about his work, he is passionate about the work of Wespath, he's passionate about The United Methodist Church and its future. Andy has served with Wespath for twenty years. This is his third year as general secretary and his fifth time attending General Conference. Andy is widely known and trusted across United Methodism. Some of you will recognize him from the 2016 and 2019 General Conferences where he was called to the microphone many times to answer questions about pensions, clergy benefits, and disaffiliation. Andy believes in the power of relationships; meet him once and you instantly sense this. Get to know him and you'll know that he truly cares about you, your family, your church, your ministry.

Andy has built strong relationships worldwide throughout The United Methodist Church, but his relationships also span beyond The United Methodist Church across a diversity of faith partners through his interfaith work on behalf of the churches and their workers. It is this broad web of relationships that provides Andy with a depth and breadth of perspective that is so important in this role as Wespath's general secretary. As chair of Wespath's Board of Directors, I can say unequivocally that Andy was the right person at the right time to become general secretary when our previous secretary, Barbara Boigegrain retired at the end of 2021. Barbara led Wespath for twenty-seven years, and it's just incredible the impact that she's had directly and indirectly, on the lives of tens of thousands of clergy and their family. Andy has worked with Barbara for fifteen of those years, and learned the ropes under her competent guidance. And Wespath could not be in better hands with Andy Hendren's leadership.

Andy is leading Wespath into a new era. Not only for this general agency, but more importantly for The United Methodist Church as we find new ways of being United Methodist; "Be UMC". In renewing our commitment to the ministry and mission of The United Methodist Church, we're at a crossroads. And Wespath has been and remains a steady, trusted, and balanced presence in the face of uncertainty and disruption.

As our church finds a renewed sense of purpose and rededicates itself to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, Wespath stands committed to its responsibility to be faithful stewards of your resources and for your wellbeing.

Help me welcome Andy Hendren, the General Secretary of Wespath.

*(applause)*

ANDY HENDREN (General Secretary of Wespath): Hello, Methodist brothers and sisters. I am Andy Hendren. I am White, male, adult, proud husband to an English woman who will be getting her Master's in Social Work on Sunday.

*(applause)*

And on behalf of my colleagues of Wespath, I want to extend our prayers for you as you discern the future of this United Methodist Church. If you are going to trust what I am telling you about the retirement plans, you need to know a little bit about my journey to this stage. I was born, I was raised in the Southern Baptist Church, and the Southern Baptist Church did not fit with my heart. I wasn't allowed



to ask the challenging theological questions, and it really made me not like church. So I had a friend in my high school whose dad was the youth pastor at The United Methodist Church directly across the street from First Baptist Church in Jefferson City, Missouri.

Actually, in 2008 in Fort Worth at my first General Conference I ran into Beverly Boamer, as a delegate, when I was fresh and new on Wespeth staff. And she was the leader of that youth group. That youth group let me ask those questions. It fed me with United Methodism's ability to view scripture through reason and experience. And at lock-ins, they let us dance, dance with girls, but it drew me in.

In young adulthood I was really, essentially—to be candid with you—unchurched. And that lasted even until my early part of my career at Wespeth. But the more I worked at Wespeth, the more opportunities I was given to work with clergy across the denomination, conference treasurers, ultimately with bishops. The more I was drawn into United Methodist churches' vision of social holiness. The more I worked at Wespeth, the longer I was there, the more I fell in love with the church. You know, like all of us, I've had moments where the church, this church, has let me down. My church has let me down.

In the General Conference in 2019, there was a moment when there was a tough vote after a pretty vigorous debate, and everyone in the room was pretty crestfallen. There were a lot of embraces, and Bishop Sally Dyck saw me and saw that I was really affected by that moment. She came up to me and asked if I was OK. Asked if I needed a hug. And I nodded yes. And we embraced. And she asked me if I was United Methodist or if this was just my job. And it was in that moment that I realized that I am United Methodist, and it is more than my job. I found my faith through my work at Wespeth.

*(applause)*

And that faith means a lot to me. So, Wespeth does a lot of work with the denomination across the entire connection, across the worldwide connection. We have a program for central conferences. Most of my time today I am going to talk about the United States, the U.S. clergy pension programs. But we have programs for the overseas conferences. If you'll bring up the next slide, and maybe bring the—yeah, there you go. We have a few priorities, before I turn to that, for this conference. And those are the benefit plans legislation that I am going to talk about, and really it's about the retirement plan; the sustainable investments in paragraph 717, another calendar item that is woven into the benefit plans; and regionalization.

To go back, if you would, a slide, I do want to talk about how the Central Conference program works. To distinguish it from the U.S. program. The overseas program was started by this conference in 2004 through a fundraising effort. We raised twenty million dollars in over two quadrennium, and then we raised five million more. Wespeth manages that account to support retirees in the central conferences. We support over thirty-six hundred retired pastors and survivors in Africa, the Philippines, and Europe.

I had a chance to travel to Mozambique and Zimbabwe last year. My first trip to the central conferences. And it was a powerful trip. These photos, a couple of these photos, are from that trip. I went to Africa University and I met Dr. Mageto and his staff. And we actually are trying to work with them on programs for the staff at Africa University that are not from Zimbabwe, because they can't be in the state program there. But mostly I spent my time—and I met with Bishop Nhwatiwa and Bishop Nhanala in their space and with their benefits officers—but mostly I spent time with pensioners and survivors like Rev. Ennose Lithio here in this picture. I met him in a tiny village outside of Cambine, the United Methodist mission in

Mozambique, and he was one hundred and six years old. One hundred and six years old! Born just shortly after Wespath—the Board of Pensions—was founded by this denomination. We talked, we had to use a couple of people translating between his Tswa dialect to Portuguese and Portuguese to English so that I could understand some of what he said and vice versa for me to talk to him. Even though we may not have understood everything we said to each other, we formed a strong connection. We sang a few hymns. He explained to me how much his small pension from Wespath means to him. How he uses it to buy prescription drugs, prescription glasses to read, and volumes of reading materials because that was his hobby, his favorite pastime.

What it showed to me was, it was a vivid, real-world demonstration of how much clergy pensions have meant to this denomination for 240 years. 240 years ago in 1784, the denomination established the first “fund for worn-out preachers”. And I am pretty sure they did it after their week of committee work at the General Conference.

*(laughter)*

Bishop Schnase, as he noted, our focus for this conference is on the sustainability of the entire church. Our role in that is making the benefit plans sustainable and affordable, and also adequate for a good retirement. We submitted a bunch of petitions, and most of them are on the Consent Calendar, and that’s great. The retirement plan petitions are our main focus, and sustainable investments is another. Regionalization is the third, but this conference has already passed that. This is amazing. U.S. plans are governed by the entire worldwide church. We can’t change a word of the retirement plan for U.S. clergy without this conference agreeing to it. Central Conference plans can change their plans to meet their context. Delegates from North Katanga don’t have to vote on plans for the Philippines, but for the U.S. plans everybody from North Georgia to North Katanga to the Philippines to Germany have to vote. Have to understand what the plans are, and it absorbs their time and it’s not a very efficient use of the General Conference’s time. I’d rather not be on this stage, talking to you about retirement plans for a bit. And if we have this regionalization approach, we’ll be able to amend the U.S. plans in a U.S. setting with people for whom the plans apply.

So the main plan I am focused on is Compass. It’s kind of really switching from the current plan which is called The Clergy Retirement Security Program, or CRSP, we like acronyms at Wespath. We want to close that plan. In fact, this morning on the Consent Calendar A03, you voted to close that plan. The second plan is a petition to replace CRSP with a plan called Compass. That’s what I am going to talk about a bit more. To understand a little bit about why. Why do we want to shift from a pension program? Why? People ask, “Pensions are great.” “I’ve been told I should fight for my pension.” “I don’t want to go to an account balance plan. That’s like the corporate world.” Well, we have studied the sustainability of the denomination and we lament some of it, but if you see this graph here. In 1982, when the pre-’82 plan was stopped and MMP was begun, there were a thousand church-going, church-giving members for every retiree. Forty years later, in 2022, there are two hundred; 2023, there are undoubtedly fewer. There are fewer local churches, there are fewer church members to support the pension supporting retired pastors.

Now believe me, the plans that we’re closing are well funded. I want you to understand that. But to make these plans sustainable for the long term, we need to shift to a different design. In fact, the delay of this General Conference to 2024 has added several hundred million dollars to the overall long-term liabilities, obligations, of this denomination. It is shown here, the obligations extend into the next

century even if we close it today. They are funded well, but to keep adding, keep extending that tail and adding more to the hump is hard in a church that is shrinking. And that's not unique to United Methodism. U.S. denominations, Protestant denominations, are shrinking, and we do lament that. But in order to ensure that the clergy of today have a solid retirement benefit, we need to shift to a new way of doing it. We want to make sure that the clergy who are called to serve will have a good retirement.

But, I'm going to start with what doesn't change. So if you're in the audience, or if you're on the livestream and you're listening and you're concerned about *what does this mean for me...* If you are retired already, and you are receiving benefits, nothing will change for you. A vote by this conference to close the old plan and start a new one will not affect people in pay who are receiving pension payments at all. You'll still get your checks from Wespeth, your direct deposit, you'll get cost-of-living increases and all of that.

If you're in active service, and you already are accruing benefits, those are safe. They will stay in the plan that we are closing. We're not making it go away, we're not converting it to accounts. Those pension benefits that you've earned will stay for you. They will remain at Wespeth, waiting for you in retirement with increases for inflation.

You will begin in January of 2026 accruing benefits in the new plan, and those are all account-based benefits. If you're kind of in the middle of your career, you're going to have a foot in both worlds. And that's OK. You'll have a guaranteed pension of some sort, and you'll have this account balance that's more flexible on top of that. For young clergy, the plan will be their primary support. That's who we'll focus a lot of time on in education over the next eighteen months. A compass is something that provides guidance. It directs you. It gets you to where you want to go, and that's why we named the plan "Compass".

The other that doesn't change is eligibility. Everybody who's eligible to be in CRSP in the United States remains eligible in the plan. Annual Conferences, however—keep in mind—can change the eligibility for part-time clergy from year to year, and sometimes they do. So that can impact you; that can bring you in and out of the plan. If you're part-time and not eligible, you have other options. Your conference can cover you through other plans that Wespeth manages, but just not the mandatory U.S. plan for clergy.

We designed the plan with five values in mind. And those values reflect some foundational values of The United Methodist Church. We focused, for supporting the church—a challenged and disrupted church—on sustainability and affordability. We focused, for clergy, on adequacy of income in retirement, equity for lower-paid clergy, and flexibility for a work force that is starting to move in and out of ministry. We worked with numerous stakeholders; we didn't do this in a vacuum. We did it with the backdrop of what I just talked about, and we did it by engaging stakeholders from across the church.

As we engaged our Young Leaders Advisory Board, our conference treasurers, clergy from various areas, we realized that this balance was going to be hard. It's not an easy thing to balance affordability with adequacy. So it forced us to make some trade-offs. And that's just to be candid with you.

The effort to balance sustainability and affordability and income adequacy led to the plan—the new plan, Compass—being slightly less generous than CRSP, as a result. And that's just to be open and transparent. It's not quite as generous, and also to be transparent, it shifts risks. A defined benefit—a pension—the risks are on the church completely. In an account balance plan, the participant bears some

of the investment return risks, but if they educate themselves they can mitigate that risk, and if we, Wespath, are partners in our conferences, invest in education, we can mitigate that risk.

But sustainability, that first value, again that's focused on the benefits will be comfortably funded when you retire, when your children and even their children feel called to ministry. Sustainability also means that we need to mitigate the unpredictable financial risks for a diminishing church.

With regard to affordability, this plan is less expensive for local churches and annual conferences. That means more money can be put into ministry. What it also means is there, it may mitigate some of what we know is going on in the church, and that is appointment drift, appointing people to appointments so they're not in the primary pension program. But affordability ultimately means that it's less of a burden on the church.

Income adequacy. I'm gonna talk about that. We designed the plan intentionally to produce a replacement income in retirement that is, at minimum, 75 percent of what a person earned in their active career when combined with social security. We also built the plan so that it produces higher replacement rates for some, particularly those in lower income thresholds. Studies show that 75 to 90 percent is adequate for comfort in retirement, but is also produces something that is more affordable for the church.

Equity, another value that we're focused on. Equity is fairness. It's one of the fundamental values of The United Methodist Church. It's one of our connectional values. So with that in mind, Compass has several special features that help clergy at the lower end of the pay scale, including clergy who are paying seminary debt or undergraduate debt, clergy who live in parsonages, and those who may serve small churches, rural areas, underserved urban areas, where income is lower. One such feature is a basic income, is a basic contribution that everyone gets regardless of their salary, the same. This actually creates a higher contribution percentage for those at the lower end of the pay spectrum. For pastors living in a parsonage, the value that we compute and use to determine retirement plan incomes, will be increased under the new plan for those who live in parsonages. And that should help retirement security for those who will need to buy a home once they retire. Conferences will make a contribution on a higher rate of compensation.

And then, lastly, the plan also adds flexibility for participants. You have the opportunity to leave remaining money in your account to heirs after you and your spouse pass away. That's not the case with the pension program. Once a participant and his or her spouse passes away, the benefit ends. This allows a transfer—the new plan as an account balance allows a transfer of wealth between generations. That can also mitigate equity in incomes.

Compass is also different than the pension program because it has, as I said, account balances. It's an account balance plan. That's different than a pension. Everyone owns their own account. You know the dollar amounts in it every day through our open online record keeping. That money is yours. So I will talk about why that matters a lot for investments in just a little bit, but as I said, the remaining balances can pass.

Also, account balance plans provide the same value for everyone, whether you live a long time or you pass away early, because that money is yours and it passes to heirs. In a defined benefit plan—in a

traditional pension plan—people who live short lives, you know, tragically, their benefit is actually less under those plans.

So Compass builds a little bit on the concept of shared responsibility, and we've heard concerns about this, too. The first portion of Compass is \$150 a month for everyone in the plan. That's the basic benefit, and again it produces—that's a higher percentage contribution for lower paid clergy. The church also makes a second contribution, 3 percent of the person's compensation overall. That's the second tier, and those two are for everyone. The church will make a third contribution if the participant also makes a personal contribution of his own or her own or their own from their paycheck, and that's up to another 4 percent of pay, so if you put in 4 percent, you get another 4 percent. So you're getting 4 plus 3 plus 150. It's just asking clergy to be a more active partner in saving for their own retirement, and that's how retirement plans work for most laypeople in this General Conference. Most of the lay delegates in the United States have plans that work that way, and some of the Central Conference plans work that way. They are contributory, folks are required to put in some of their money.

Compass has two special features that I kind of alluded to earlier. The number one is payments for student loans are counted as though you made a personal contribution from your paycheck, so if you pay your loan provider from your student debt, and you tell us that, that counts and the church makes a match on what you paid your student loans. So you don't have to pick. Do I contribute to my retirement, or do I pay down my student loans? You can pay down your student loans and get the contribution.

Another thing that will help get us to a better future in saving for retirement is automatic enrollment. Clergy are automatically enrolled at the get-go, contributing 4 percent of their pay. They can opt out, but they're automatically enrolled. And we know there's a lot of inertia in our lives, and we're hoping that means people will just get used to that. And it has automatic escalation. So each year the percentage of the—that's coming out of your paycheck goes up by a percent to a maximum set by the conference. That can again get people just through, through this nudge, as economists call it, to be saving more.

So, this important distinction with Compass is again that it's an account-based plan. It's just different than a traditional pension plan. A pension plan like CRSP pays a dollar amount for the rest of one's life. And to be, again, open with you, Compass doesn't do that. It doesn't guarantee lifetime income, and that's a big change. But, we've tried to mitigate the risks of that as best we can. Compass has an innovative and award-winning managed payout feature. A feature that tries to replicate what a pension does with your account balance that you own. It tries to—it tries to recreate the ease and security of a pension program. So you don't have to decide how much to take. We have an algorithm. A program that does that for you based on your age, your account balance, inflation for the previous year, and your risk tolerance. So you can kind of make it suit you. That will help your account balance last your lifetime. So it strives to live into the United Methodist commitment to lifetime income.

But it doesn't create new long-term obligations for the church. It doesn't extend that tale of risk that was on the earlier slide. We've been fortunate to interact with many of you here, with many delegations, with many others in education opportunities, and we have heard some concerns. So Compass was published today in the *DCA* in the Consent Calendar A04 as a calendar item. But we have already heard that it has been removed from the Consent Calendar and will be debated on the floor as a calendar item. We're listening to the concerns. I think the folks who removed it from the Consent Calendar have some concerns about the equity pieces that I talked about earlier. And what I want to

commit to you is that Wespath has heard this. It's important for sustainability that we get there, that we get this plan approved, amending it on the floor of the conference is hard to do. This is complex. We spent eight years designing this. But we want to be responsive to the church, and we want to hear you. So, I will commit that our staff will listen and work and bring improvements to the 2028 General Conference if we need to. We know that this is a bigger problem than a retirement plan. We know there are pay equity issues in the church, and we know there are pay equity issues in our society. In a retirement plan, it's hard to solve those through a retirement plan. But we can make the retirement plan better. That's what our vision is. So, I can only ask that you trust us in that.

So, account balances. Again, in Compass, your money belongs to you. It doesn't belong to Wespath or the church in some big pool to pay you in retirement. It's your balance. If you leave ministry because you lose your call, you have flexibility to take and move some of it and start distributing it. When accounts belong to individuals, we know that one hundred thousand individuals—and these aren't all clergy. In Compass, they will all be clergy, but, our investment programs, our investment funds, apply to all of our retirement plan products. The retirement plan products that cover General Agencies, the ones that cover retirement homes and children's homes, and lay employees that work at local churches. And one hundred thousand people have one hundred thousand viewpoints. We invest in alignment with the United Methodist Social Principles, and we have and we always will. But what I told the board, the search committee, when they asked me what, why I wanted the job—Bishop Schnase was on that committee—and they said, "Why do you want this job when there's all this disaffiliation and you know, market uncertainty, and shrinking of the church going on?" And I said, "It's because I'm inspired by the investment philosophy, by our sustainable investment approach. I believe that Wespath's investment approach is a real world, living example of the Social Principles in action. We strive to make a difference." That's why I'm committed to Wespath's charge not only to be a prudent steward of your assets, of the church's assets, of our institutional investors' assets. Being a prudent fiduciary, we need to seek to maximize returns. That's our number one charge in the *Discipline*, meaning it's sacred. And it's our number one charge under secular law. But, at the same time, I know and I believe and we always have, and I think we can do even better, at caring for our communities in the natural world through our investment approach. I think together we can use Compass and the accounts in it to create a sustainable retirement plan for our church, and at the same time use our investments to do good in the world. So we've worked hard over the years to be a thoughtful and engaged investor. I bring it up today because it is our responsibility to make sure these accounts grow so that everyone has a secure retirement for all the individuals in the plan.

We're called in the first stead in *The Book of Discipline* to invest in ways that maximize returns. But we're also encouraged to invest in alignment with the Social Principles, including upholding human rights and protecting the environment. And let me assure you, Wespath shares the desire to care for God's creation. I share the desire to care for God's creation. And I share the desire, and Wespath shares the desire, to care for the rights of all people. We're actively pursuing a transition to a sustainable low-carbon economy in the future by engaging companies on their carbon footprint and shifting investments to companies that are better adapting to climate risks. We're conscious that the shift to a lower-carbon economy has risks. And most of the risks are borne by those who have the least. Particularly regarding food security and access to electricity. So we want to pursue ways not just to transition to a lower economy, but to do it in a way that is just and equitable. That takes care of communities, and takes care of people, and takes care of workers. We actually engage companies frequently on human rights. In fact,

I recently in a public opinion piece in *The Financial Times*, called out the CEO of Mondelez International, the maker of Oreo cookies, claiming—he claimed that investors don't morally care about their businesses in Russia. But I said that we do care. I said he was wrong.

We use a variety of approaches. We have three different kinds of approaches to making a difference in the world and making sure the investments get a good return. We don't see it as inapposite. We don't see it being a choice between divestment or engagement. We apply all of these to make changes in the world. We use a multi-pronged approach—three different pillars, we call them—for sustainable investing. They are to invest in a positive way for making a difference, like investing in renewable energy, like investing in affordable housing, and these get market returns. Like investing in micro-lending in the developing world so people can build businesses and build wealth. The second pillar is to engage. We engage companies as I just described. And then the third is to avoid. And we do avoid when it's prudent. When, when sec—when the investments we hold have risk or when they are not in alignment with the long-held values of the Church around alcohol, tobacco, gambling, pornography, private prisons, and weapons.

We also exclude companies that have extreme financial risk, like thermal coal companies. We did that in 2015. Like, the Israeli banks that support the settlements, which we did in 2016. We agree that sometimes avoiding investments to certain companies or businesses can be an effective tool for reflecting our values. And we do so when it's justified from both the financial and church perspectives. This is what we call our selective divestment approach. And it's based on objective analysis and thoughtful examination. And for those who feel strongly about avoiding certain types of investments in their retirement accounts, this is, this is the part that I feel is most in spirit of this conference.

We have funds, we have created funds, they are called our Social Values Choice funds. They are our—they are an option for participants to invest in. And they exclude fossil fuels, and they exclude companies identified as having higher involvement in human rights concerns. They're an option. They allow participants to align their retirement investments, their money, their account that they own with their personal convictions. We intend to make those more widely available, we've announced already that this year we'll make them available to our foundation and other investors. And when Compass becomes implemented in 2026, those options will be available for every clergyperson for all of the money in their plan. We know that some people won't embrace our thoughtful engagement approach, and we know some people want more exclusions for their values. And we believe that having the choice and making more options available, as we're listening and we're trying to make those social choice funds reflect more and more of their concerns of many of you in the church. We believe that that's the inclusive and the better approach to aligning investments with values. All of our funds will be invested in alignment with the Social Principles. But we will continue to build these funds for those who have greater concerns. I'm hoping that after years of conflict in the church, we can let people have options and agree to disagree.

We're going to wrap up with some final thoughts. It's been really good to be here. This conference, after five other conferences I've been to, is distinctly different. It, it makes me to be a United Methodist. I'm a member of Urban Village Church in Chicago, Illinois. It's a, it's a small multi-site church, very inclusive, and we really struggled through COVID. We worship in a stage play theater. And during COVID, there were only about a dozen of us coming on Sundays or like, kind of as we came out of COVID. We had moved right before COVID into a bigger theater because we had outgrown our space and then we

struggled. We got a new site pastor, Juan Pablo Herrera, and he has brought new energy and he has connected with the community around us, particularly the Latino community in the neighborhood next door. And now we have more families coming, and on Easter Sunday we had seventy-five people in worship and I—it was, it was so good. And I credit Pastor Christian Coon, our executive pastor, for his vision. And I credit the Northern Illinois Conference for trusting and believing in Urban Village Church. But that’s a story of renewal and mission. And the focus that I want to leave with you is if this plan—if the benefit plan is made more sustainable and more affordable, while we listen to make sure it’s equitable and adequate, it can release more resources for ministries like Urban Village Church to reach their communities and make a difference in the world. And that’s what we want to do at Wespeth, is support this church as best we can. Because we’re part of it. And I thank you for your time today. And God bless you the rest of this conference.

*(applause)*

## Abundant Health Report

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you for this report. The next item is the Abundant Health Initiative report. The chair recognizes Roland Fernandes, General Secretary, and his team to provide a report.

ROLAND FERNANDES (North Georgia, General Secretary of Global Ministries and UMCOR): Good afternoon. My name is Roland Fernandes, and it’s an honor for me to serve as General Secretary of Global Ministries and UMCOR. Member of the North Georgia Annual Conference, Asian American, adult, male. Promoting health and wholeness has always been part of United Methodist tradition. From John Wesley’s *Primitive Physick* through our long history of medical missionaries, to the current work of United Methodist health boards and many other partners supported by Global Ministries, to the “Abundant Health for All” initiative. Global health is one of the four missional priorities for Global Ministries and an integral part of our mission and ministry. It is a means for alleviating human suffering. This initiative grew out of the church’s successful eight-year “Imagine No Malaria” campaign. That campaign was launched in 2008, and the final disbursement of those funds is happening this year.

In 2016, the General Conference voted to expand its global health reach from addressing a single disease, as devastating as that still is, to promoting abundant health for all, and it set a goal to provide life-saving interventions to one million children over the following four years. With your help, we reached that goal in 2020. And while this one million interventions is a very small drop in the large bucket of needs in this world, it is something that we can celebrate together. Thank you for being part of this ministry with us.

KATIE DAWSON (Iowa, Director of Board of Global Ministries and Secretary for UMCOR): Amen.

*(applause)*

My name is Rev. Katie Dawson. I am a White clergy female from Iowa. And I am a director with the General Board of Global Ministries and the Secretary for UMCOR. Global Ministries’ global health work didn’t stop when we hit the the goal of one million children in 2020, because sickness and disease have not stopped. Health challenges, especially those that disproportionately impact women and children, and are exacerbated by poverty, insecurity, and climate change, continue to impact the world. To this end, Global Ministries was privileged to receive funds to support partners globally in response to the COVID pandemic. During and after the pandemic, the Global Health Unit and its partners, mainly in sub-



Saharan Africa, have continued working on closely aligned or integrated programming. Like health systems strengthening to support and strengthen United Methodist health facilities networks; maternal and newborn child health services, including HIV and AIDS; water, sanitation, and hygiene services, both at health facilities and in communities; and “Imagine No Malaria”, which has promoted malaria awareness, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment in areas drastically effected by this infection. We are humbled and overjoyed to report that over the last five years, through the work of our partners, the lives of over five million women, youth, and children have been impacted.

*(applause)*

DAWSON: I think we all should give thanks for that. Our congratulations and thanks to you all, for your part in this. And especially for those who have worked and continue to work on implementation, some of whom are present today. This success belongs to all of us, and we are so grateful to God. However, it does not end here. I will invite you to hear in just a moment from one of our partners in the Abundant Health work, who will share her story after a short video. We have several fine representatives present, but we have asked Ms. Joyce Madanga, Maternal Newborn and Child Health Coordinator in Nigeria, to share her story today as she did when the Abundant Health Initiative was launched in 2016.

*(video playing)*

JOYCE MADANGA (Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Coordinator in Nigeria): *(via video)* I’m Joyce Madanga, the Maternal Child Health Coordinator, the United Methodist Rural Health Program, Nigeria area. Maternal and infant morbidity and mortality in the remote northern Nigeria has been an alarming rate. And mostly as a result of preventable causes, such as delay in taking decisions to go to the health facilities. As women have to be given permissions by their husbands, according to the Muslim practice of *purda*. Delay in access and means of getting to the health facility and the use of native medicines and concoctions instead of rushing a child to the health facility. Women may not be permitted to go for antenatal care because of the misconception that routine drugs will make the baby very big. Which can result to women’s inability to deliver on her own but leading to Caesarean section. For religious beliefs, men will not want a male health worker to examine the wife. To some, home delivery is the most preferred. But outcomes of mother and child are much better when mothers deliver at maternity units.

As a result, the community men meeting was established to include the district heads, Muslim clerics, and village men from our catchment areas. These men come together to intensify awareness creation by the health team. The group was able to foster solutions and was willing to change cultural practice for the sake of pregnant women and children. This brought about the decision by the men to allow their wives to come to the maternities for routine antenatal health care and postnatal services, even in their absence. The community men agreed to refer all children to access health care services without any delay.

I’m so happy that women now have rights. Women of integrity serve as our village volunteer health workers. They follow up on the intake of routine drugs and pregnant mothers’ well-being. They identify pregnant women and children at risk and refer them, sometimes escorting them to the health facility. The local taxi union helps with the transport, and transports are paid by the facility. Treatment at the health facility for pregnant women and children under five is also free. In this way we have made a headwind in quickly reducing maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity. And we’ve increased

women rights. This is how far we have gone since the Abundant Health Campaign started in 2016. And we hope and pray to sustain the relationship. Thank you very much.

RENÉ PEREZ (New England, Global Board of Ministries Director): My name is René Perez, LatinX, male, immigrant, clergy, and I serve on the Global Board of Ministries as a director. Global Health is not just another church program. It is all of us, as individuals and communities, together seeking to live the abundant life God offers us in Christ Jesus. Your support has allowed us to work together to share holistic health around the world. But you can continue to be part of this great movement by living well yourselves, by seeing holistic health as your own mission to the community, by incorporating healthy living in your congregations and annual conferences, by supporting the denomination's global health work, and by praying that all may know God's healing grace. This ends our report, and I want to invite us to pray together.

Loving God, your healing Spirit calls each of us to live in the fullness and abundance of the holistic health that you offer to us. God, we thank you that you care for us in our body, mind, and soul. We thank you for the ways in which we have experienced your healing and your support in the midst of our sickness, pain, and suffering. May we not only experience your healing and life-giving presence in our own lives, may we also join you in your mission of extending healing and health to others around us. We pray this in the name of your son Jesus, who cured the sick and delivered the suffering. Amen. Thank you.

*(applause)*

## United Methodist Men Report

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you for this report. The next item is the United Methodist Men's Report. The chair recognizes General Secretary of the United Methodist Men, Bishop James Swanson, and the Board President of the United Methodist Men, Bishop Gary Mueller.

BISHOP JAMES E. SWANSON SR. (General Secretary of GCUMM): Thank you, Bishop Beard.

BISHOP GARY MUELLER (President of the GCUMM Board of Directors): I tell you what, Bishop Swanson, I am exhausted from this marathon that is General Conference.

BISHOP SWANSON: I can understand.

BISHOP MUELLER: I'm gonna eat some carbs with these pancakes.

BISHOP SWANSON: Pancakes. Now that sounds like a Methodist Men's meeting, a good breakfast. So enjoy yourself, Gary.

BISHOP MUELLER: I'll share.

BISHOP SWANSON: Will you? With everybody here?

BISHOP MUELLER: We can do that.

BISHOP SWANSON: Amen.

BISHOP MUELLER: It brings back memories for me of all the United Methodist Men's pancake breakfasts I have been to over the years. And the funny thing is, I always seemed to be the youngest one there,

regardless of what my age actually was. Even back in the days of John Wesley, we were dubbed as “them old Methodists”. And I thought I had the gift of snark.

BISHOP SWANSON: Well, enough, just enough of all this talk about pancakes. Let’s talk about some significant things that can happen because of the impact of United Methodist Men around the world. It feels as if we should be today—especially with all the changes we are making—maybe we should now begin to sing a song that Toby Keith, a country western singer, sung, and that is, “How do you like us now?” Amen?

BISHOP MUELLER: *(laughs)* Good afternoon, United Methodist family. I am Gary Mueller, a retired bishop in the South Central Jurisdiction in the United States, now residing in the Western Jurisdiction.

BISHOP SWANSON: And I am James Swanson, retired bishop now serving in retirement as the Interim General Secretary of United Methodist Men. We’re here to let you know about one of the great secrets of our denomination, and that is the invaluable work of the General Commission of United Methodist Men, men who are working, not only in men’s ministry, but for some of you who are not aware of it, in scouting ministries as well. And as we delve a little bit more into this discussion, we want you to understand something about ministry that we are involved in, and it is primarily with men, but it touches the lives of boys and girls and young people as we involve ourselves in youth services as well. This is really important, Gary, today because as we have visited, back in the time when we were active bishops, we saw a lot of our churches where men seemed to have ghosted the place, and they were not there. And we need them to be involved in the lives of not only their churches, but their communities. Especially as we now in the United Methodist Men are focusing our attention on the challenge of bringing young men not only into our congregations, but sending them out into the vastness of this world to do mission and ministry.

BISHOP MUELLER: Things like curating an identity, discovering purpose, coping with peer pressure, dealing with mental health issues, searching for role models, and finding a deeper relationship with God are some of the challenges our young men face daily.

BISHOP SWANSON: And you see their journey is rife with complexities, but within these challenges are tremendous opportunities for their growth, their service, and transformation for themselves and for their communities.

BISHOP MUELLER: Enter United Methodist Men, a beacon of hope, a catalyst for change, sanctuary for young men seeking purpose, belonging, and significance.

BISHOP SWANSON: But you see, United Methodist Men now transcends mere membership or pancakes. Amen? Our focus is having a living relationship with Jesus Christ, embodying his teachings in our lives and serving those who are in need.

BISHOP MUELLER: It is the right mission at the right time, and our new logo is designed to communicate this. We both are wearing it.

BISHOP SWANSON: As you can see, we’re trying to be a little hip. Amen?

*(laughter)*

Absolutely, we believe that we are being called by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to begin providing many new resources to embark on a journey of self-discovery, humility, and renewal.

BISHOP MUELLER: And that includes brand new resources like “Camp Is My Parish” for scouts and the United Methodist Men’s app for ministry with men. And all you have to do is to go to the app store— whichever one you use—type in “United Men’s Ministry”, and it will come up. And it’s free, and it’s just filled with resources for doing ministry with men and starting ministry with men.

BISHOP SWANSON: I mean, we’re doing new things in a new way for a reason. And that reason is we want to reach men, but too many of them are only nominally involved in our churches. We want to see their lives transformed by Jesus Christ, and we want to see them become involved in transforming this world through hands-on ministry, serving those who suffer in this world, and we believe men can do that.

BISHOP MUELLER: It’s working. It’s working. From scouts participating in life-changing service projects and growing as Jesus’ disciples, to initiatives like Strength for Service and Rise Against Hunger, our impact reverberates far and wide. Through mentoring programs—Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and Amachi—we are making significant social impact.

BISHOP SWANSON: Indeed, United Methodist Men is no longer just eating and meeting and being Romeos, retired old men eating out. Amen.

*(laughter)*

BISHOP MUELLER: We’re reaching men so they can fall in love with Jesus and then see God’s justice in our world, among other things, by ending domestic violence, being peacemakers, providing safe, clean water, eliminating hunger, and mentoring young people.

BISHOP SWANSON: We are a small agency, but our mission is huge, and we can’t do it alone. We need every one of you. And so I ask you, my friends, my sisters and brothers in faith, will you join us as we support you in your ministry because it happens basically in your locales, of reaching all men?

BISHOP MUELLER: Will you go back to your church, speak boldly on behalf of this life-changing ministry, make our resources available, support ministry with men, especially younger men, and encourage men to get involved?

BISHOP SWANSON: And look. It’s really pretty simple.

BISHOP MUELLER: We can just eat pancakes...

BISHOP SWANSON: Or we can make a personal commitment to fully include all men in the mission of The United Methodist Church, helping them to become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, who will joyfully use their hearts, minds, hands, and hammers so that one day God’s will can be just as fulfilled on earth as it already is in heaven.

BISHOPS MUELLER AND SWANSON: The choice is yours!

BISHOP SWANSON: God bless you. Bishop, this concludes our report.

*(applause)*

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you for this report. The chair appreciates everyone who have provided a report to us today. We have received valuable information that will help us complete the work of the church. We appreciate your dedication, and we appreciate your love for The United Methodist Church.

## Judicial Council Decision

BISHOP BEARD: We turn now to Secretary Gary Graves for the Judicial Council decision.

GARY GRAVES (Kentucky, Secretary of the General Conference): Thank you, Bishop. We have submitted a request for declaratory decision and we have received that decision. I remind you that the questions that were placed were in two parts:

First part, in light of the fact that paragraph 511.1b states that the membership of the Commission on the General Conference shall come from the elected delegates of the General Conference, but paragraph 511.1a states that there shall be one youth serving on the Commission on the General Conference. How can these two sections be reconciled when no youth is elected as a delegate to the General Conference?

And number two, in light of paragraph 511.1a, is it legal to elect a Commission on the General Conference membership that contains no youth representation?

The decision of the Judicial Council: "If there is no youth representation among the members of the Commission on the General Conference, the General Conference is required to identify, nominate, and elect at least one youth who meets the qualifications set forth in paragraph 511. Dated 4/29/24."

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you for reading this Judicial Council decision. This report is for information only. And there is no action needed.

## Calendar Items

BISHOP BEARD: The chair will now invite the team from the Standing Committee to return to the microphone to present the next calendar item as they come. This will be Calendar Item No. 19. As they are approaching the microphone, I want to remind us that at 5:50 P.M., we will stop with our calendar items in order to present the last two reports of the day. If we haven't finished Calendar Item 19 at that time, it will be completed later during the conference, so thank you for being reminded of that. The chair recognizes the Standing Committee to present our next calendar item, No. 19.

BISHOP HARALD RÜCKERT: (*speaking in German*) Friends, it seems like you want me to stand here on the stage all day. Well if you're happy to do so, I'm happy to be here as long as you want me to be here. But I reveal a secret to you. If you gear up, I will be with you. And if we speed up together, it's fine with me. Otherwise I'll be here as long as you request the Standing Committee to be here. So let's move to Agenda Item No. 19. Previously we were dealing with a number of bishops for Africa, with the increase from thirteen to fifteen. This petition now before us deals with the number of central conferences in Africa. Actually there are three central conferences in Africa, and the proposal that has come before you from the Standing Committee is increasing this to four central conferences in Africa. You find the materials in the ACDA with all our reports and background information, and I'm sure you've read all the information and your questions and comments refer to what we already have provided on full information. And you'll find a little update on this in the DCA on p. 1993. The Standing Committee found there is a need for an additional fourth central conference in Africa. And also when we had our meeting

here in Charlotte, we stood with the petition that was forwarded previously, and we also corrected the timeline which is in this petition under the No. 2A to adjust to the current budget line. General Conference is supposed to set the number and the boundaries of the central conferences according to Article 28 and to paragraph 540, and we vote on it. A two-thirds majority is required.

BISHOP BEARD: It is moved to adopt Calendar Item 19 and I believe the reference was *DCA* p. 1993. The question is on the adoption of Calendar Item 19. You may now register to speak, should you sense the need to do so. Is there any discussion? The chair recognizes Delegate Edwin Momoh at mic. 5.

EDWIN MOMOH (Sierra Leone): Bishop, I am Edwin Momoh, male clergy, of the Sierra Leone Conference, West Africa. Bishop, I have been in the pool for quite some time. When dealing with the—

BISHOP BEARD: Excuse me. Would you please get a little closer to the mic.?

MOMOH: Thank you.

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you very much. Sorry to interrupt.

MOMOH: I have been in the pool. When we're dealing with the issue of the central conferences regarding bishops and the number of episcopal areas together with the superintendency. I don't know appropriate this time will be, Bishop, to move or request for a declarative decision by the Judicial Council with regards to certain questions pertaining to the superintendency in the central conferences.

BISHOP BEARD: Right now we are dealing with Calendar Item No. 19, and your motion at this time is out of order. Perhaps later we will be able to recognize the concern that you are raising. But right now we are dealing with Calendar Item 19. So thank you for understanding that.

MOMOH: I appreciate it.

BISHOP BEARD: The chair recognizes Delegate Emmanuel at mic. 6.

Mic. 5.

EMMANUEL SINZOHAGERA (Burundi): Thank you, Bishop. Emmanuel Sinzohagera, clergy, from Burundi Annual Conference. I stand here to support the petition because creating a new central conference, especially the East Africa Central Conference, will be a very important step but also to benefit for the ministry in East Africa, part of region. Why? Because as you are aware, the—most of the countries in East Africa, they are part of Africa Central Conference. And if you look at geographically, those countries are very far and it requires a lot of logistics when it comes to have our Central Conference sessions. Therefore, I will ask, request with humility, members of this room to support this petition by granting the countries in East Africa a new central conference. I'll also take this opportunity to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters how they handle this issue, and they've agreed really to grant us a new central conference. Therefore, members of the house, with humility, I request the support of this petition. Thank you, my bishop.

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you. That was a speech in favor. Are there anyone—anyone wishing to speak against Calendar Item 19? OK, seeing none, we will proceed. The chair recognizes Delegate Rukang Chikomb at mic. 2. Mic. 2.

RUKANG CHIKOMB (North-West Katanga): My bishop, Rukang Chikomb plus George from North-West Katanga.

*(laughing)*

Bishop, I find that my name is not—I don't know what to say. Thank you.

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you.

CHIKOMB: Bishop, I rise to support the petition. It's just a change of names and adding some countries. As we struggle about not getting enough bishops to do this job, I think it is a step, as we always say, a baby step make a difference. So, we'll get there one of those days. So folks, let's vote and keep moving. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BEARD: OK, thank you, that would be a speech in favor. Is there anyone wishing to speak against Calendar Item 19?

*(pause)*

OK, the chair is at this time going to recognize Anne Kiome at mic. 4.

*(pause)*

ANNE KIOME-GATOBU (Great Plains): Anne Kiome-Gatobu, Great Plains Conference. First-generation immigrant to the U.S. I'm here to propose an amendment to the petition in the change of the name from Central Africa Central Conference to Mid-Africa Central Conference. May I speak to that?

BISHOP BEARD: Is it possible, or—not is it possible—please would you get that to one of our pages so that we can have that in writing?

KIOME-GATOBU: Yes. Bish—

BISHOP BEARD: And then I will ask, is there a second to this motion that you are seeking, this amendment, is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second

BISHOP BEARD: OK, would you please get to us—that to us in writing? I really would appreciate it.

*(pause)*

Have—have you written that out in—and if so, would you mind repeating your request?

KIOME-GATOBU: Yes, Bishop. My proposal is to make an amendment to the petition by changing the name of Central Africa Central Conference to Mid-Africa Central Conference.

*(pause)*

BISHOP BEARD: Are you, are you saying, M-I-D? Mid?

KIOME-GATOBU: Yes.

BISHOP BEARD: Yes.

(pause)

Would you please give us your reason and rationale for your amendment?

KIOME-GATOBU: The rationale is that for the first conference we have Central Africa Central Conference. Having the name *Central* twice is confusing. And so changing the first one to state *Mid* instead of *Central*.

(pause)

BISHOP BEARD: Is there any discussion concerning this amendment?

(pause)

BISHOP BEARD: OK, I'm going to ask the tech team if they will get us ready to vote if you will ready your voting devices. Is there any discussion regarding this amendment? If so, please register at this time and we will—

Seeing none, let's proceed to vote. The amendment before you, if you would favor it, vote *one (1)* for yes, *two (2)* for no. Please vote now.

(pause)

I don't see any voting flags at this time. So the voting is now closed. Would we please have the results of the vote? There's 519 affirmative votes; 193 negative. So that amendment has been accepted and so that word change will be made. Thank you very much.

[Yes, 519; No, 193]

We're now back to Item No. 19. The question is on the adoption of Calendar Item No. 19. You may register to speak. We've had two speeches in favor, and if you are ready to proceed to the vote, we can do that as well. But if there is anyone speaking—seeking to speak against, we will take the time to recognize that. OK we had someone in the queue, and they removed their name. So are you all ready to proceed with this item?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Yes.

BISHOP BEARD: Some are yes, and some are saying no, and we've got some registering in the pool.

(pause)

The chair at this time recognizes Tolbert Nyenswah at mic. 1. Tolbert, mic. 1. And please remember, if I butcher your name it is not intentional. They are writing the names down for me and with one eye it's kinda hard to get. So I probably would have messed it up with two eyes, just to be honest.

(laughter)

BISHOP BEARD: So I do apologize.

TOLBERT NYENSWAH (Liberia): Thank you, Bishop. The name is Nyenswah.

BISHOP BEARD: Nyenswah. Please forgive me.



NYENSWAH: Tolbert Nyenswah, male, lay leader of the Liberia Conference, Black. Mine is an inquiry from the—if you saw the (*indecipherable*) on the calendar item—I want to know the rationale and the reasoning behind a committee having to apportion the bishops before looking at the geography areas of petitioning or renaming the central conferences. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BEARD: OK, so there is a question, and I will turn to the chair to answer the question. Or any committee member that you have that will be able to give us some help.

BISHOP GREGORY V. PALMER: This petition is about aligning geographically, dealing with some matters of efficiency, and the matter of the number vis-à-vis adding a central conference were correlated together as we went through our process.

NYENSWAH: Can I follow up, Bishop, because the question is not answered.

BISHOP BEARD: Please.

NYENSWAH: Great. The reasoning is—

BISHOP BEARD: Hang on just a second.

NYENSWAH: Sorry.

BISHOP BEARD: We've gotten you the answer. We are not going to debate it with you and if—yes, that's the answer I need to give you. Thank you for understanding.

NYENSWAH: Thank you.

BISHOP BEARD: The chair recognizes delegate Alcides Martins, mic. 5. Would you please go ahead and state your question?

ALCIDES MARTINS (Eastern Angola): (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) My name is Alcides Martins from the West Angola Conference. I am Black. I would like to know if with the approval of regionalization, will we come back to discuss nomenclature because now we are debating this issue. We are trying to change names and make suggestions. With regionalization, will we change or just the conference names? Thank you.

BISHOP BEARD: I don't believe that is before us at this time, and those nomenclature and those changes may be addressed at a different time but for now that's not before us. So we're not here to change at that point. We're here to decide whether we are going to adopt it or not adopt it. So thank you for your understanding. Are we ready to move forward? The chair recognizes Eric Lee, mic. 5.

ERIC LEE (North Georgia): Bishop, Eric Lee. It's mic. 6.

BISHOP BEARD: OK. Thank you.

LEE: Clergy, North Georgia, White male adult. He/his pronouns. I move that we end the debate.

BISHOP BEARD: Is there a second?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP BEARD: Delegates have been granted the opportunity to debate, and we have fulfilled the obligation for Rule 7.1; therefore the chair will announce that there are one speaker in the pool and that person was seeking to speak in favor of the motion, and there are zero against. So we will proceed to the vote. Please ready your voting devices. So we are closing debate, and we are ready to proceed to the vote. Those in favor will press *one (1)* for yes. Those opposed will press *two (2)* for no. The voting is now open. Please vote now.

(*pause*)

Voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote? There are 687 in affirmative and 30 in the negative. The motion is adopted, and we will now proceed to vote on Calendar Item 19.

[*Yes, 687; No, 30*]

(*pause*)

We will vote on this now as amended. Calendar Item 19 is now before us. Are you ready to vote? Voting devices are ready. We will now proceed to the vote. The motion requires a majority vote. The question is on the adoption of Calendar Item 19 as amended. Vote *one (1)* for yes, press—I'm sorry the chair wants to speak.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: No, not a speech, but in my understanding, not a majority vote but a two-thirds majority required for this, according to paragraph 540.1.

BISHOP BEARD: So this is a constitutional—

BISHOP RÜCKERT: Yep.

BISHOP BEARD: OK. Thank you. I am always in favor of being corrected. Forty-two years of marriage will do that to you. To a wonderful, beautiful bride.

(*laughter*)

And she would say the more you open your mouth, the deeper your foot gets. OK.

BISHOP RÜCKERT: It is not constitutional, but it needs a two-thirds vote. This is what is in *The Book of Discipline*.

BISHOP BEARD: OK. We've got it now. Not constitutional, but it requires a two-thirds vote. So now ready your voting devices. Those in favor press *one (1)*. Those opposed press *two (2)*. You may vote now. Voting is open.

(*pause*)

Voting is still open. Just a second.

(*pause*)

OK. Voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote? There are 692 in the affirmative, and 43 in the negative. The affirmative vote has it, and the motion is now adopted. Calendar Item 19 is adopted as amended.

[Yes, 692; No, 43]

## Credentials Committee

BISHOP BEARD: We have taken care of that item of business, and I believe we are now ready to turn to our—OK. During our opening session there was a motion adopted for the Credentials Committee to provide additional information to the General Conference regarding this—

*(laughter)*

It's Groundhog Day. The chair recognizes the chair of the Committee on Credentials, Diane Brown, to provide us with a report.

DIANE BROWN (Michigan, Chair of the Committee on Credentials): Thank you, Bishop Beard. Good afternoon or evening, whichever interpretation you have. Good afternoon, church. I am Diane Brown, a lay delegate from Michigan in the United States of America, a White, adult, female. I stand before you on behalf of this year's Commission on Credentialing. I've spent my career as an information officer, interpreting information so it is accessible and understandable to many. Thus, my motivation to provide the following detailed information to you today. Thank you for your grace with this somewhat lengthy report.

Previously, you have heard numerous reports of updates on credentialing for this particular session. The Rev. Gary Graves gave updates during the orientation webinar on February 29 and March 1. There were also articles from UMCComs. On Tuesday Kim Simpson, chair of the Committee on General Conference, and I spoke to you as well, and then I returned on Friday to give you some additional information. Here is more.

The credentialing process for the 2020 General Conference began in 2017, with the calculation of the disciplinary formula by the secretary of the General Conference, and the data services department of the General Council on Finance and Administration. The allocation of the number of delegates to be elected by each annual conference was communicated to the annual conference secretaries and the bishops of each annual conference. For those annual conferences which were part of the central conferences in Africa, only one part of the certificate of election was able to be distributed, since the numbers of delegates to be elected as additional delegates to the central conference could not be collected and verified for a variety of reasons.

For two of those conferences, the name of the secretary of the central conference could not be confirmed, since one individual was reported to the leadership database at GCFA and another was claiming to hold the position in one case, and another one no one was listed anywhere. For the third central conference, the secretary submitted numbers which were not in alignment with disciplinary requirements over the span of many years. After many years of requesting information, certificates of election, part two, were able to be constructed and distributed to annual conferences in the Congo Central Conference and Africa Central Conference, thanks to the presidents of those colleges of bishops.

The additional complication came when it became apparent that some annual conferences had elected four categories of delegates, rather than the required three. Often the same names were reported on multiple lists and in different orders of election each time a new list was submitted. To this day, even after the name of the secretary of the West Africa Central Conference was provided and multiple requests were made for the number of delegates to be elected by annual conferences in that central

conference, no such reporting has occurred. Therefore, there was no way to certify reserve delegates to this General Conference in these annual conferences.

But as an alternate, the staff has reviewed journals, if they had been submitted, which supported the election of persons and were in order, and individual discussions were held with those bishops and annual conference secretaries. Reserve delegates who could be verified through this alternate certification effort were issued letters of invitation.

Another challenge was the confirmation of accurate information when there was internal conflict within an annual conference leadership and multiple claims that information should be received from one party or another.

Another break in communication occurred due to the extended hospitalization of one of the secretaries without that information being conveyed to the office of the secretary of the General Conference.

Unofficial groups went so far as to issue letters of invitation to individuals in which they invited them to attend the General Conference in Charlotte as delegates. These letters were then fraudulently used to secure visas by individuals who had not been officially certified. Lists of names were also submitted by various individuals and groups which claimed to know the true list of delegates and reserve delegates and requesting letters of invitation which could not be verified.

As you can see, this became even more complicated than what we have experienced with postponements of this conference. Since the enhanced review of the certificate—excuse me—certification documents was implemented by the Commission on the General Conference, staff could not move ahead in the process without proper certification. To this point, even though the process is understood by some to be somewhat lacking, it has resulted, however, in a situation in which there is confidence that the delegates who were able to secure visas and travel here to General Conference are properly seated delegates.

Some also believe that the staff, officers, or the Commission on the General Conference would be able to influence or override the process of securing visas. This is simply not the case. This is entirely a governmental process and is dependent on the interview between the individual and the consular officer. However, staff had been advised that a denial rate for visas of up to 80 percent could possibly be expected. While it is disheartening that more delegates could not be present, it is with assurance that we believe this to be a legitimate and properly certified gathering of delegates.

And now a few numbers. As you know, this General Conference had an allocated number of delegates to be seated of 862: 492 of those delegates from the United States jurisdictions, and 370 from central conferences. Of that 862 number, the office was able to confirm proper elections of 775 delegates or 89 percent of that total. Of that 775 number, 487 were from the United States and 288 from central conferences. Of the 775 confirmed delegates, we have been able to badge 765 or 88 percent of the number of allocated seats. Of that 765, 487 are from across the jurisdictions of the United States, and 278 are from central conferences, or 75 percent of the central conference allocation. There are approximately ten persons who are still traveling to be here this week. There are a number of persons who are not known as to what their situation is, and there are sixty persons who are not coming and do not have a replacement, either from visa denials, medical emergencies, or similar kinds of issues. Those

sixty persons not coming are all from the central conferences and do represent 16 percent of the allocated seats.

Therein ends the report from the Committee on Credentials. Thank you.

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you for the report.

## Committee on Courtesies and Privileges

BISHOP BEARD: We now turn to Courtesies and Privileges. The next administrative committee report is the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges. The chair recognizes Raquel Feagles—Feagins. Got it.

RAQUEL FEAGINS (Rio Texas, Chair of the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges): *Buenas tardes.*

ALL: *Buenes tardes.*

FEAGINS: Good afternoon, brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ. My name is Raquel Feagins and I am a clergywoman from the Rio Texas Conference.

*(cheers)*

This is the last day of presentations for the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges. And according to our rules, after today, if you would like consideration for an item of privilege, it requires a two-thirds vote of the conference. With me today are the officers of our committee: the vice-chair and the secretary. And I will let them introduce themselves.

EMMANUEL SINZOHAGERA (Burundi): Good afternoon, members of the room. I am Emmanuel Sinzohagera, member of clergy. I'm from Burundi Annual Conference. Thank you very much.

AMIE STEWART (North Carolina): My name is Amie Stewart and I am an adult White female deacon serving with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and I am a member of the North Carolina Annual Conference.

FEAGINS: We have received a number of prayer requests. And one of them is from Dr. Elizabeth Corrie, on behalf of students from the Candler School of Theology, some of whom are present with us and experiencing deep grief and need our support. Emmanuel will now say a prayer for them.

SINZOHAGERA: Would you please join us in this prayer? Gracious and loving God, we ask your blessing on the students of Candler School of Theology. During this time of grief and anger as they continue to call for an end to violence in Palestine and Israel. And to offer spiritual care to their fellow students at Emory University. We ask that the Holy Spirit continue to move through them, here in Charlotte, and back in Atlanta, as they engage in a prophetic witness to a world in desperate need of healing. We pray especially for the students who have been injured by police violence and ask that you empower all of us to seek your peace. We ask this in your Son's name. Amen.

STEWART: Our next request for today is an invitation to pray for the annual conferences whose homes, schools, places of work and worship have been ravaged by recent tornadoes in the past week across the United States.

Let us pray. Most Holy God, we are a people who need you in your fullness. Our lives have been impacted by the ravages of these devastating storms. But we were made in your image and the wind of

your Spirit was breathed into us that we might experience hope in your goodness even in the midst of a storm. We pray now for those whose lives have been affected by these winds of destruction. We lift to you the families of the four people whose lives were lost in these storms. Those in Holdenville, Oklahoma; Trinity, Texas; Minden, Iowa; and Lancaster County, Nebraska. For these and so many more areas around the world impacted by natural disasters, we pray. Jesus, we see you calming storms. Extend your power and grace again, especially upon these most recent storm victims. Our hope and trust are in you, for you are the resurrection and the life. Amen.

FEAGINS: The final prayer will be done by Bishop Julius Trimble, who will say a prayer for peace for the war in Gaza, the war in Ukraine, the war in Congo, and other conflicts around the world.

BISHOP JULIUS C. TRIMBLE: As people of prayer, let us commit ourselves as we go and come from this place tonight and tomorrow that we all commit ourselves to be people of prayer. Let the word go forth that United Methodists believe in the power of prayer across the globe.

Let us pray. Gracious, loving God, we worship a God who invites us to pray and is committed and proven to be a prayer-answering God. We thank you, O God. We pray for peace in Ukraine and Gaza and Congo. We know when bombs and bullets drop, whether it's in Ukraine or Gaza, that children die. We pray, O God, as we worship the Prince of Peace, for those who have been wounded today: police officers, here in Charlotte; people who are grieving, because they've lost loved ones. We pray, O Lord, knowing that darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hatred cannot drive out hatred, only love can do that. As United Methodists, we commit ourselves, O God, to pray and to pray more. In the powerful name of Jesus Christ may love prevail. Amen.

FEAGINS: Thank you, Bishop Trimble. This concludes our report. Thank you.

## Announcements

BISHOP BEARD: The next order of the day is our devotions. Raymond Trapp. Before Raymond Trapp and the worship team comes forward, the chair recognizes the secretary of the General Conference, Gary Graves, to provide any announcements.

GARY GRAVES (General Conference secretary): Thank you, Bishop. We need to give you an update on the work with our nominating process earlier today. The nominations for the Commission on the General Conference. There are two updates: Jeovanni Mendes has withdrawn his name. And Cimpaye Valentine of Burundi is ineligible because that person is not a primary delegate, is a seated reserve.

For your attendance forms, a reminder to please complete one form per day. Do not send multiple forms that all have the same date. Delegation chairs should take attendance in the morning and in the afternoon, each day. And when completing the form, please list the correct date. And if you would, use local Charlotte, North Carolina, time, not what might be on your computer or your watch.

Delegation chairs, please print and sign your name on one of the numbered lines and check if you attended morning or afternoon as well as everyone else in your delegation. Please list delegates only one time on each form. Please do not list the same person more than one time on a form. And if you seat a reserve, you must indicate this on the form, and the reason for doing so. Please bring your completed form every day to room 103. Thank you for your cooperation that keeps them from coming to find you.

The question was asked earlier in the day about the service of lament, confession, and hope. It will occur this evening at 6:30 and again at 7:00 on the terrace outside of the Richardson Ballroom on the upper level. It is being provided by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women and the purpose is to denounce sexual abuse in The United Methodist Church, while sharing the truth of God's redeeming love.

And we do want to give you an update on an announcement and a prayer time that we had earlier today. We have been able to gain information that the shooting that occurred in Charlotte is not in this immediate area. It is described as a contained scene. It is still an active scene as of the time of the latest update. There is a connection between the shooting and some of our delegates and hosts as a family of one of our United Methodist Church families here is involved with one of the shooting victims. Bishop Carter and the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, I trust, will be supporting all as we will support them with our prayers.

That is the conclusion, Bishop.

BISHOP BEARD: Thank you. Thank you for this opportunity to serve as your presiding officer. All of your bishops appreciate everyone's participation today. So thank you all. Now before I recognize our worship team, I want to pause for a moment to show appreciation to our interpreters. Let's express our appreciation for their work.

*(applause)*

I also want to again express my appreciation to Bishop Karen Oliveto and to Bishop Hee-Soo Jung for having my back.

## Evening Devotion

I now turn and recognize Raymond Trapp and the worship team. They're going to lead us in our closing devotions for today.

After that devotion, the sixth plenary session will be in adjournment. Thank you.

*(chimes)*

TED HARTLEY (Illinois Great Rivers): Our working time has concluded. We have much to be grateful for; much to continue to work. In our service, we know God is here. Let us prepare our hearts to encounter our God.

*(chimes)*

Let us pray: Living presence of Christ, open our eyes that we might see that you are here in this place. Help us listen closely to your voice in all who have spoken here today. Draw us from where we are to where you would have us to be. Guide our actions so we do not brush you away. Give us an open heart to receive you and the humility to allow you to be our Lord and Savior, the lover of our souls. Amen.

*(music)*

CALEB MCGREGOR (Wisconsin): Christ lives among us. Christ is in the world today, dwelling on every continent, speaking every language. We often refuse to acknowledge Christ because Christ dwells within the very least among us.

LINDA ELAM YOUNG (West Ohio): Look around you. Look closely. Where did you see Christ today in your life? The voice of God is the voice that you would rather not hear. The cries of God are the ones that you would rather not respond to.

HARTLEY: Allow the Christ in you to see the Christ in others. We are all the least of these, for only God of importance. None of us is good because God alone is good. None of us is wise because God is only wise. So how do we treat this God who is Immanuel, God with us? Micah says, "Be just, show loving kindness, and be humble." This is how we are invited to treat the Christ who dwells in each of you.

MCGREGOR: Treat Jesus with justice.

YOUNG: Show Jesus every kindness with the deepest affection.

HARTLEY: And be humble in Christ's holy presence.

MCGREGOR: This is impossible until we see Jesus in the lives of each other. Otherwise, we will say, as we stand before the throne of God, "When did we see you?" We already know God's answer.

*(music)*

*(chimes)*

YOUNG: Let us pray. God, whose power remains beyond measure, and whose love finds a home in simple acts of compassion and service, we ask you to bless us as we leave this evening. Open our hearts and our hands to serve you in every person we meet. Open our eyes to see you in those we serve. Keep us focused in our pursuits to building your kin-dom on earth. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.