What Kind of Church Are We Becoming?

Authority • Accountability • Connection • Calling

General Conference did more than change paragraphs in the Book of Doctrines and Discipline. The decisions made in Johannesburg help us see more clearly how the Global Methodist Church understands leadership, connection, and ministry.

1. Bishops: Real Authority, but Accountable Authority

One of the questions the Global Methodist Church has had to answer is: What kind of bishops are we going to have?

We did not choose bishops who are simply ceremonial. Bishops have real authority in the life of the church. They preside, provide spiritual and doctrinal leadership, ordain clergy, and retain the authority to appoint clergy.

But neither did we recreate a model in which a bishop becomes the permanent executive of a particular region. Our episcopal areas are intentionally international, reflecting an understanding of bishops as teachers, spiritual leaders, and general superintendents of the whole Church rather than primarily regional executives.

And bishops still are not bishops for life. Our polity limits episcopal service to a maximum of two six-year terms. Bishops are elected by General Conference and remain accountable to the doctrine and discipline of the church. The church has structures to evaluate episcopal leadership and processes for complaints, suspension, and removal when necessary.

That balance became especially clear in Petition 1309. On the floor, General Conference deliberately adopted language saying that the Global Methodist Church "authorizes bishops to ordain," while also stating that "the bishop appoints clergy to serve." The bishop exercises real authority, but it is authority entrusted by the church. The amended petition passed 354–0.

Bishops have authority—but they are accountable for how they exercise it.
Bishops lead the church—but they do not own the church.
Bishops exercise episcopal authority—but that authority is entrusted to them by the connection.
Bishops serve for a season—not for life.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ARE WE BECOMING? A church with strong episcopal leadership without creating an unchecked episcopacy. We want bishops with enough authority to lead, teach, ordain, appoint, and guard the faith—and enough accountability to remember that their authority is exercised on behalf of the whole church.

Legislative references: New ¶504 — Petition 1309; ¶603; ¶604; ¶605. Petition 1309 final plenary action is recorded in the Thursday Daily Journal.

2. Appointments: The Bishop Appoints, but Discernment Is Shared

This may be one of the clearest examples of the kind of connectionalism we are creating. General Conference considered a proposal that would have allowed Conference Superintendents to fix appointments. That proposal was rejected. The bishop's appointive authority was retained.

At the same time, appointment-making is intentionally more than a bishop making a decision from a distance. Petition 1247 strengthened the consultative process and names meaningful roles for the cabinet, Conference Superintendent, Presiding Elder, pastor, and local church.

- The Pastor-Parish Relations Committee may suggest potential candidates to the Presiding Elder.
- Whenever possible, at the cabinet's discretion, a church may be given more than one candidate to consider.
- Churches and pastors may decline a proposed appointment "without malice."
- A final interview requires the approval of the pastor being considered, the Presiding Elder, and the Conference Superintendent.

The Presiding Elder is important because this leader is close enough to know pastors and congregations. Presiding Elders maintain regular contact with pastors for counsel and supervision and work with the bishop, Conference Superintendent, cabinet, and affected churches on the best strategic deployment of clergy.

The principle is simple: the bishop appoints, but the bishop does not discern alone.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ARE WE BECOMING? A church that still believes in an itinerant, connectional ministry—but one that wants appointment-making to be relational, consultative, and missional.

Legislative references: ¶610.7 — Petition 1247; ¶610 — Petition 1285; ¶608–609. See Wednesday Daily Journal, pp. 43–44, and Thursday Daily Journal, p. 23.

3. Ordination: A Calling, Not a Job

This may be the most theological of the three decisions. Petition 1309 begins with Jesus' description of himself as the Good Shepherd rather than a hireling. From there, it describes ordained ministry as a sacred calling under the authority of Christ and his Church and places clergy within the covenantal and connectional life of the church.

A pastor is not simply an employee hired by a congregation to provide religious services. Ordination is the church's recognition of God's call and the setting apart of a person for ministry within the covenant of the whole church.

That is why the wording "authorizes bishops to ordain" matters. The bishop performs the act of ordination, but does so on behalf of the church. Likewise, the bishop appoints clergy to serve, while clergy remain accountable to the doctrine, discipline, and mission of the Global Methodist Church.

Johannesburg also showed humility about what remains unfinished. The Ministry Legislative Committee said the church still needs a fuller Wesleyan Global Methodist theology of the call to ministry, the orders of ordained ministry, the meaning of ordination, appointive ministry, and sacramental authority.

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH ARE WE BECOMING? A church recovering a deeply Wesleyan understanding of ordained ministry as calling, covenant, accountability, and service—not simply employment or professional credentialing.

Legislative references: New ¶504 — Petition 1309; ¶509 / Petition 1413 and the Ministry Legislative Committee task-force recommendation. See Monday Daily Journal, pp. 6–7; Thursday Daily Journal, p. 4; Saturday Supplement, p. 1.

The Bigger Picture

- We are episcopal—but bishops do not own the church.
- We are connectional—but connection does not mean every decision is made far away from the people it affects.
- We are itinerant—but pastors and congregations participate meaningfully in the discernment of appointments.
- We ordain clergy—but ordination is a calling and covenant, not simply a professional credential.
- We distribute authority—but we also try to make clear who is responsible for what.

The pattern that emerges is authority joined to accountability. The bishop has responsibilities that belong to a bishop. Conference Superintendents and Presiding Elders have their own work. Pastors have responsibilities that come with ordination and appointment. Local churches have a meaningful voice. And all of those relationships exist within something larger than themselves: the connection.

THE QUESTION UNDERNEATH THE LEGISLATION How do we order our life together so that authority serves the mission of the Church rather than becoming an end in itself?

Want to Dig Deeper?

Daily Journals & Pre-Conference Workbook: https://www.beautyofholiness2026.org/workbook-and-journals
Access the official Daily Journals from Johannesburg and the Pre-Conference Workbook.
2026 General Conference Petitions: https://www.beautyofholiness2026.org/petitions
Read the petitions considered by General Conference.
Current Book of Doctrines and Discipline: https://www.globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines---discipline
Access the current published Book of Doctrines and Discipline.
Post-Johannesburg BDD: The Global Methodist Church states that the 2026 General Conference updates will be incorporated after they are vetted and translated. Until then, the Daily Journals provide the record of the 2026 legislative actions.