LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE 3
CONFERENCES

Renewal and Reform Coalition (RRC)
Priority petitions in bold italics

ANNUAL CONFERENCE MEMBERSHIP

Membership of annual conference includes retired clergy with voice and vote. We have reached the point when there are more retired clergy in most U.S. annual conferences than active clergy. Many of the retired clergy do not participate in annual conference, but they must be matched by an equalizing lay member of conference. This artificially inflates the number of people serving as members of annual conference, leading to extra expense for the meeting and an overrepresentation of laity. This also creates inequity with many of the central conferences, which have far fewer retired clergy, which then reduces their representation at General Conference.

Pet 60603 Page 418 AC Membership of Retired Clergy Support

This petition creates more equity in balancing lay and clergy annual conference membership, as well as addressing the issue of General Conference representation.

Pet 60015 Page 417 Equalization of Annual Conference Membership Oppose

While this petition addresses the lay/clergy imbalance of annual conference members, it does not address the issue of General Conference representation. If this approach is chosen, that element from Petition 60603 should be added here.

DELEGATE NUMBER

The Commission made the decision to reduce the number of delegates from nearly 1,000 to 850 for the 2016 General Conference and wants to further reduce the number of delegates for 2020. Such reductions heighten the inequity of representation between annual conferences and deprive annual conferences of the opportunity to create more diversity within their delegations. We believe the original intent of the *Discipline* was to allow the Commission to adapt the formula to bring the number of delegates just within the upper or lower limits set by the Constitution, not to allow the Commission to set an arbitrary number of delegates within the limits. If a lower number is to be chosen, then the General Conference should set that number, not the Commission. This petition writes that interpretation into the *Discipline*.

Pet 60067 Page 454 Formula Adjustment Support

DELEGATE REQUIREMENTS

Pet 60602 Page 435 Eliminate Conflict of Interest Support

This petition makes full-time paid staff of any general church agency ineligible for service as a General Conference delegate. Since the General Conference exercises oversight of the general agencies, it is a conflict of interest for agency employees to vote on their own agency's provisions. Staff members are still welcome to express their viewpoints in a variety of ways with General Conference delegates. We would be open to removing the prohibition on serving as a jurisdictional delegate.

Pet 60601 Page 403 Requirement for election Support

This petition requires those standing for election as General Conference delegates to have read the entire Bible in order to be eligible for election. Since Scripture is our primary guide for faith and life, it is appropriate to require that those making decisions on behalf of the whole denomination should have read it.

Pet 60522 Page 436 Lay Delegate Residency Oppose

This petition requires that all lay persons elected as delegates to General Conference must reside within the geographical boundaries of their annual conference. This proposal would unfairly exclude from serving lay persons who have legitimate reasons for living outside the conference. If someone has enough connection with the annual conference to be elected as a delegate, they have enough connection with the conference to represent it well, no matter where they live. This decision should be left up to the voters.

EPISCOPAL ACCOUNTABILITY

It is currently nearly impossible for bishops to be held accountable for maintaining their conduct within the requirements of the *Discipline*. No bishop has ever been brought up on charges through the committee on investigation since the church was founded in 1968, despite the filing of substantive complaints. One major reason is that a bishop's colleagues and friends are the ones tasked with holding the bishop accountable. The Council of Bishops sees itself as powerless to foster accountability. Regional differences in the church mean that different standards are used for bishops in different parts of the U.S. and the world. A variety of proposals have been submitted to rectify this situation and enable greater accountability. This petition is part of a comprehensive set of petitions. It envisions using the Interjurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy as the body to handle complaints against bishops, after expanding the IJCE to include members from the central conferences. It may be better to refer this petition to Committee 10, Judicial Administration, which is handling the bulk of these petitions, so that they can be acted on together.

Pet 61028 Page 454 Revision of Episcopal Complaint Process Support

GLOBAL STRUCTURE

These petitions are part of a comprehensive plan to restructure the church at the global level. The ultimate aim of this plan is to create the U.S. as its own central conference that is able to adapt the *Book of Discipline* to the unique needs of our cultural situation. In reality, it is an attempt to structure the church in a way that lessens the voices of African, European, and Filipino delegates in denominational affairs and would ultimately allow the U.S. part of the church to permit same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. It is ironic that for many years the U.S. has had a determinative voice in how the central conferences operated, but now that the central conferences are able to have a strong voice in U.S. affairs, that voice is being rejected. The Renewal and Reform Coalition opposes this attempt to restructure the church in an effort to resolve our theological differences.

Pet 60215 Page 400 Global Church Structure – Connectional Conferences Oppose
Pet 60216 Page 402 Global Church Structure – Boundaries Oppose
Pet 60983 Page 402 Global Connectional Conference – Connectional Conferences Oppose
Pet 60214 Page 405 Global Church Structure – Global Connectional Conference Oppose
Pet 60219 Page 407 Global Church Structure – Name Changes Oppose
Pet 60982 Page 407 Global Connectional Conference – Name and Composition Oppose
Pet 60218 Page 409 Global Church Structure – Regional Conferences Oppose
Pet 60984 Page 410 Global Connectional Conference – Regional Conferences Oppose
Pet 60211 Page 433 Global Church Structure Oppose

Pet 60985 Page 434 Global Connectional Conference – Annual Conferences Oppose
Pet 60986 Page 438 Global Connectional Conference – Boundaries Oppose
Pet 60220 Page 442 Global Church Structure – Legislative Committee on U.S. Oppose

While not establishing a U.S. central conference, this petition would have all U.S. delegates come one week before General Conference to act on U.S. matters as a recommendation to the General Conference. This would dramatically increase the cost and length of General Conference, without any appreciable gain in effectiveness. It would still exclude non-U.S. voices from these early deliberations.

Pet 60981 Page 467 Global Connectional Conference – Concept Proposal Oppose

Pet 60935 Page 412 US UMC as Central Conference Oppose

This petition is not part of the above proposals, but would still create a U.S. Central Conference that would have the same power to adapt the *Book of Discipline* that other central conferences currently have. This proposal would still have the effect of removing non-U.S. voices from our deliberations, and it would ultimately be aimed at providing a way to permit same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals in the U.S. Before taking any step such as this, the underlying theological conflict needs to be resolved first.

Pet 60816 Page 466 Jurisdictional Process Oppose

This petition would provide for a study process by a committee to examine how the U.S. delegates can deliberate on matters that pertain only to U.S. churches. While not opposed to the study *per se,* we believe that the underlying theological conflict needs to be resolved before any steps can be taken in this regard. Furthermore, the study committee does not fairly represent the U.S. jurisdictions. More importantly, this issue is one of the least pressing issues facing a church that is experiencing dramatic membership loss in the U.S. Other priorities should be the subject of our attention.

MINIMUM REPRESENTATION

These petitions aim to correct the current imbalance between church membership and representation at General Conference. Under current rules, every annual conference, no matter how small, receives a minimum of two delegates at General Conference. This means that annual conferences of 500 members all the way up to 60,000 members receive the same representation. (Conferences over 60,000 add additional delegates according to the formula.) The present system encourages the proliferation of annual conferences in order to increase representation. Either of these two petitions might encourage consolidation of small conferences for better resourcing of ministry.

Pet 60196 Page 413 Representation to General Conference by Episcopal Area Consider

This petition would set the minimum at two delegates per episcopal area, rather than two per annual conference.

Pet 60605 Page 414 GC Membership Consider

This petition sets a minimum for an annual conference to be represented at General Conference at 5,000 members. This number ensures a more viable annual conference. Smaller conferences might be made districts in a larger annual conference. However, this proposal might present problems for annual conferences established by language, in that it would require the larger annual conference to accommodate several different languages.

NUMBER OF BISHOPS

Pet 60932	**Page 467**	**Defer Reduction in US Episcopal Areas**	**Oppose**

This petition would delay any change in the number of bishops in the U.S. It conflicts with a number of proposals being dealt with in Committee 12, Ministry and Higher Ed/Superintendency. It might be best if this petition were referred there, so that all proposals about the number of bishops could be handled by one committee. We believe that some changes to the formula for the number of bishops are needed to bring greater balance in terms of the number of members under the care of each bishop. Wide differences between small and large episcopal areas do not serve us well.

ORGANIC JURISDICTIONAL SOLUTION

These petitions are part of a comprehensive plan to allow each jurisdiction to set its own standards for ministry, which would allow some jurisdictions to permit same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. This plan would also allow local churches to affiliate with a different annual conference, annual conferences to affiliate with a different jurisdiction, and jurisdictions to change their boundaries to include churches that want to affiliate with them. The Renewal and Reform Coalition believes that allowing jurisdictions to set their own standards would lead to a slow-motion splintering of the church and would not resolve the conflict over the church's stance on sexuality and marriage. We oppose parts of the Organic Jurisdictional Solution that would allow that.

Pet 61003	***Page 416***	***Powers of Jurisdictional Conferences***	***Oppose***
Pet 61011	***Page 456***	***New Duties of Jurisdictions***	***Oppose***

We do see merit, however, in giving congregations the flexibility to switch to a different annual conference with which they more closely align in theology and/or culture. We also favor giving annual conferences the flexibility to switch to a different jurisdiction for the same reason. We believe this move could lessen conflict and tension within annual conferences and lead to healthier functioning. It would assist congregations who feel theologically isolated and misunderstood in their current annual conference.

Pet 61001	Page 411	Basis for Jurisdictions	Support
Pet 61002	Page 415	General Conference Powers	Support
Pet 61004	Page 439	Flexible Boundaries	Support
Pet 61005	Page 440	Minimum Jurisdictional Membership	Support
Pet 61006	Page 441	Annual Conference Boundaries	Support
Pet 61007	Page 441	Transfer of Local Churches	Support
Pet 61013	Page 443	Conferences Transferring Jurisdictions	Support

PROGRESSIVE JURISDICTIONAL SOLUTION

These petitions are part of a comprehensive plan to create an additional Progressive Jurisdiction within The United Methodist Church that could allow same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals. The current five jurisdictions would continue to operate under the current requirements of the *Discipline*. Many progressives oppose this plan because they do not want to be segregated within the larger denomination. Many evangelicals oppose this plan because it would still allow part of the church to engage in practices that the Bible prohibits—this time with the church's blessing. In addition, progressives would continue to carry their fight to change the church's position to General Conference every quadrennium. Thus, we do not believe it would resolve the conflict over our church's stance on sexuality and marriage.

Pet 61021	***Page 412***	***Basis for Jurisdictions***	***Oppose***

Pet 61022	***Page 416***	***Equal Representation***	***Oppose***
Pet 61023	***Page 440***	***Creating a Sixth Jurisdiction***	***Oppose***
Pet 61025	***Page 445***	***Customized Participation***	***Oppose***
Pet 61026	***Page 447***	***Forming the New Jurisdiction***	***Oppose***
Pet 61024	***Page 455***	***Jurisdictions and Race***	***Oppose***

TWO JURISDICTION SOLUTION

These petitions are part of a comprehensive plan to dissolve the current five jurisdictions and put in their place two jurisdictions, a progressive jurisdiction and a traditionalist jurisdiction (or perhaps three jurisdictions, including a moderate jurisdiction). Each could modify the *Discipline* on the issues of same-sex marriage and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals, with one jurisdiction permitting it and the other strengthening prohibitions against it. Annual Conferences, local churches, and clergy would be free to choose which jurisdiction to belong to. Some evangelicals have been open to this idea as a possible compromise that would keep us together, while other evangelicals have found it unacceptable because it would still allow part of the church to engage in practices that the Bible prohibits—this time with the church's blessing. Most progressives have not been supportive of this proposal because they desire to change the whole church, not just have part of the church to themselves. So the struggle would continue every four years at General Conference—this would not resolve the church's conflict.

Pet 61015	***Page 412***	***Basis for Jurisdictions***	***Oppose***
Pet 61016	***Page 417***	***Constitutional Powers of Jurisdiction***	***Oppose***
Pet 61017	***Page 439***	***Jurisdictional Boundaries***	***Oppose***
Pet 61020	***Page 444***	***Forming New Jurisdictions***	***Oppose***
Pet 61019	***Page 456***	***Powers and Duties of Jurisdictions***	***Oppose***

PETITIONS

Pet 60035 ***Page 449*** ***Petition Submission*** ***Oppose***

This petition would restrict clergy and lay members from submitting petitions to General Conference. It is undemocratic to limit access to General Conference by individuals. This proposal also puts a premium on the institution of the church because all the entities allowed to petition General Conference are institutions of the church. It leaves out the voice of the grassroots.

Pet 60226 ***Page 449*** ***Mandatory Vote*** ***Support***

This petition requires that every petition receiving an affirmative vote by a legislative committee must receive a vote by the plenary session of General Conference. It is unfair to have legislative committees do all their work and then not have it acted upon by the plenary body. In 2012, at least one legislative committee did not get to present any of its petitions to the plenary (other than those on the consent agenda). This requirement would act to deter those who seek to prevent action through delaying tactics and would require better time management of our plenary sessions.

ABORTION

Abortion is a controversial subject within both our church and society. As Christians, we should lean toward protecting and preserving life whenever possible. Scripture lifts up the personhood of the unborn (e.g., Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:44). The early church consistently spoke against abortion and infanticide, which was a common practice among the Romans. While acknowledging that there are

difficult and exceptional cases to consider, we believe United Methodism does best when it advocates on behalf of the lives of unborn children and supports the lives of women in crisis pregnancies. It should not be controversial to compile lists of resources that can help women facing unplanned pregnancies find feasible alternatives to abortion, which is what this petition recommends.

Pet 60583	Page 463	Mother-Child Resource List	Support

ANNUAL CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

Pet 60513	Page 434	Annual Conference Structure	Support
Pet 60959	Page 464	Permissiveness in AC Structure – Connectional AC Parallels	Support

These petitions aim to give greater flexibility to annual conferences in how they structure themselves to accomplish the mission of the church in linkage with the general church. This kind of flexibility is helpful in adapting to unique circumstances in individual annual conferences, as well as adapting to changing circumstances over time without needing to change the *Discipline* to do it.

COMMISSION ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE

Pet 60528	Page 452	Discontinue Commission on General Conference	Oppose

This petition aims to dismantle the Commission on the General Conference and turn its tasks over to the Connectional Table. However, running the General Conference is not in line with the CT's mission. It is also an overwhelming task in and of itself. Adding it to what the CT already does would be totally unworkable. The coordinating mission of the church would not be attended to, and the running of General Conference would not be done with excellence.

CONFERENCING

Pet 61044	Page 404	Christian Conferencing	Oppose

This petition adds to the Constitution the mandate that General Conference is to be for the purpose of worship, prayer, and fellowship done in a spirit of Christian conferencing. As classically understood, Christian conferencing is the sharing of one's own faith understandings and experiences with a small group of fellow disciples for the purpose of helping all grow in grace and holiness. This is not the purpose of General Conference. Trying to make General Conference a venue for Christian conferencing distorts the meaning of such conferencing and would lay upon General Conference an unrealistic duty that distracts from GC's true purpose.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Pet 60516	Page 455	Conflict of Interest on Committee on Episcopacy	Support

This petition aims to eliminate potential conflicts of interest by disqualifying persons in a direct reporting relationship to an active bishop from serving on the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy. This common-sense provision will enhance trust and foster healthier functioning of the committee.

DELEGATE ELECTION

Pet 60568	Page 435	Elections	Support

This proposed amendment enshrines one of the principles of election in our Constitution. It protects the right to nominate potential delegates from the floor of annual conference, opening up the process. This provision ensures consistency across the church in how our annual conferences elect delegates to General Conference. It is meant to correct processes followed in some annual conferences that manipulate the process toward hand-picked delegates.

EPISCOPAL OVERSIGHT

Pet 60512 Page 414 Authority of General Conference Support

This petition changes the Constitution to overturn the Judicial Council decision that ruled Plan UMC unconstitutional at the 2012 General Conference. The petition clarifies that General Conference has the authority to delegate specified and limited authority for oversight without it being a limitation of the general oversight by the bishops.

EPISCOPAL SUPPORT

Pet 60068 Page 417 Episcopal Support Support

This petition requires that each jurisdiction bear all the financial costs of the bishops serving in that jurisdiction. Financial support for bishops should be a foundational financial obligation. If a jurisdiction cannot support its own bishops, it has too many bishops or needs to develop greater financial capacity. Otherwise, it sets up a situation of long-term financial dependency upon the general church. We would ultimately like to see the central conferences moving in this same direction, as they build their financial capacity, as well. But this petition deals only with the jurisdictions in the U.S. and does not affect the central conferences.

GLOBAL BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

Pet 60277 Page 466 General Book of Discipline – Draft No Position

This petition authorizes a churchwide feedback process to help shape a proposed *General Book of Discipline* that would apply equally to all annual conferences and not be subject to adaptation by the central conferences. The new draft would have to take into account all the changes in the *Discipline* made at the 2016 General Conference. The final draft of the *General Discipline* would then be proposed and voted on (with whatever amendments) at the 2020 General Conference. This petition does not commit the General Conference to a final version of the Global Book.

JUDICIAL COUNCIL

Pet 60514 Page 415 General Conference Override Judicial Council Declaration Oppose

Since the Judicial Council is the primary interpreter of church law, the integrity of the judicial process must be protected. This petition provides that the General Conference could override a Judicial Council decision by a supermajority vote. As frustrating to the body as Judicial Council decisions sometimes are, this move would violate the principle of separation of powers. A better way to overturn unpopular judicial decisions is with legislative action to change the Constitution, which could end up yielding greater clarity in the long run than a simple override.

JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Pet 60058 Page 436 Flexibility in Number of Jurisdictions Support

This petition allows General Conference to change jurisdictional number and boundaries without the need for a constitutional amendment. This provision would give greater flexibility in structuring the church for effective ministry. It would not burden thousands of annual conference members who would have to vote on a boundary change that did not affect them.

Pet 60202 Page 437 Jurisdictional Realignment and Name Change No Position

This petition would eliminate the Western Jurisdiction and redistribute its annual conferences among the North Central and South Central Jurisdictions, moving a few other annual conferences to create greater balance. The impetus behind this move, to create more balanced jurisdictions based on membership, is a good one. We have not taken a position on whether this is the best solution.

Pet 60549 Page 437 Change Jurisdictional Boundaries Oppose

This petition would shift four annual conferences into the Western Jurisdiction. Again, the impetus to create more balanced jurisdictions is a good one. However, it would seem that this proposal would create greater imbalance. While helping the Western Jurisdiction, it would decrease the North Central and South Central and create a greater imbalance between those two and the two eastern jurisdictions.

Pet 60941 Page 438 British Columbia in Western Jurisdiction No Position

This petition expands the Western Jurisdiction to include British Columbia in order to incorporate a few congregations located there. We have not taken a position on the wisdom of this proposal, but think it bears watching.

Pet 60059 Page 465 Jurisdictional Study Committee Support

This petition would create a study committee to examine the jurisdictional boundaries and bring a report to the 2020 General Conference. This proposal makes sense as a way to gather more information and allow annual conferences to have input into any recommended change of jurisdictional boundaries.

LOCAL PASTOR ELIGIBILITY

Pet 60538 Page 435 Local Pastor – Voting Rights and Election to Delegation Support

This petition would allow local pastors who have completed educational requirements, provisional, associate, and affiliate clergy members to vote on constitutional amendments and the election of clergy delegates to General Conference, as well as serve as clergy delegates. As local pastors become a larger share of clergy in our denomination, it makes sense that they should serve as delegates, bringing their unique voice and perspective to the General Conference deliberations.

PLAN OF SEPARATION

In the highly polarized climate of current United Methodism, many believe it is difficult to see how we can continue to live together in one body. Many progressives see the "full inclusion" of GLBTQ persons in the life of the church, including same-sex marriage and ordination, as the civil rights issue of our time. They will not rest until same-sex marriage and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not only allowed but encouraged in the entire church (particularly in the U.S.). At the same time, many traditionalists see this question as a test of biblical authority, which is clearly stated in our doctrinal standards. They would not be able to continue in a denomination that allows or even mandates the performing of same-sex marriage and the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals because they see it as contrary to Scripture. Congregations have been leaving the denomination at an increased pace over the last several years. In light of potentially heightened disobedience or if the position of the church changed, that exodus could grow. Rather than see congregations depart piecemeal, leading to a splintering of the denomination, these petitions provide an organized way of allowing congregations and pastors who could no longer live together to separate with grace and respect. While not universally supported by either progressives or traditionalists, we believe that if separation is to occur, it is better to try to construct new viable denominations out of the separating parties and avoid potential litigation costing millions of dollars. As the Renewal and Reform Coalition, we do not have consensus on these petitions and so are not endorsing them, but simply urging careful, honest consideration of all relevant challenges. We understand that these petitions represent very deep concerns of faithful, valued fellow

United Methodists, and would be more faithful than petitions to authorize same-sex weddings in our church.

Pet 60993 Page 471 Plan of Separation Consider

This petition lays out a comprehensive process for fairly providing for a separation of the denomination into two or more new entities. By making the annual conference the primary locus of decision-making, it would seek to minimize the impact on local churches that are in agreement with their annual conference position. It would allow an orderly process that would culminate in the organizing of new entities in May 2020, with the appropriate division of assets thereafter. It envisions the entire process being completed by 2022. This petition requires a constitutional amendment, which creates a high bar to passage.

Pet 60994 Page 474 Commission on Separation Consider

This petition would set up a commission to develop a plan of separation that would be presented to a special called session of the General Conference in 2018. It takes the same approach as Petition 60993, but leaves the details to be worked out by the commission, rather than incorporating them into this petition. It would allow greater input from all sectors of the church to consider issues that would need to be resolved in order for the separation to go forward. It has the same goals as Petition 60993: to end the conflict in a fair way without litigation, allowing the church in its new entities to focus on the primary mission of discipleship. This petition requires only a majority vote, which is much easier to obtain than a constitutional amendment.

TRANSLATION

Pet 60723 Page 453 Translation of DCA Support

This petition would mandate translation of the daily DCA during General Conference into the official languages of the conference. Without such translation, central conference delegates not fluent in English are at a disadvantage, often not even knowing what is being voted upon or discussed. This is an issue of fairness as we live into the reality of being a global church. Because the document can be distributed electronically, it becomes more possible for timely translation to take place.

Further information on these and other issues facing the 2016 General Conference may be found on the RRC website: www.methodistcrossroads.org