



Global

METHODIST CHURCH

Global Episcopacy Committee

2026 Episcopal Election Process Overview

TO: GMC Bishops, Connectional Council Members, and Conference Superintendents.

FROM: Chris Ritter, Chair of the Global Episcopacy Committee

DATE: June 3, 2025

RE: Overview of 2026 Episcopal Election Process

Greetings in the strong name of Jesus.

For the first time, the Global Methodist Church will elect a regular, full-time slate of bishops at its 2026 General Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa (Aug. 30-Sept. 5). In overseeing the process of episcopal elections, your Global Episcopacy Committee is governed by our *Book of Doctrines and Discipline (BDD)*, particularly ¶604. This process is **brand new**, departing from past practice in significant ways. This general overview provides information and key dates you may want to share with other leaders as we develop public releases of this information.

The Global Episcopacy Committee (GEC) was created and elected at the 2024 convening General Conference to promote a healthy episcopacy. Composed equally of laity and clergy from around the world, the GEC is charged with determining the number of bishops to be elected, with a guideline of one bishop per 6 to 8 annual conferences (Par. 604.3). The GEC will announce the number of episcopal areas by early 2026.

Nominations to the episcopacy will come from the General Conference delegations in our annual (regional) conferences. Also, our current GMC bishops are eligible to seek re-election. The GEC will poll the bishops to determine those interested in continuing service and these will be automatically considered nominees. But there is a limitation. According to the *BDD*, up to three of the six interim bishops elected at GC2024 may be elected for continued service. My understanding of the rationale for this decision was to provide space for additional annual conferences to join us before holding standard elections in 2026. More details on this facet of our election process can be found below.

FORMING AND FILLING EPISCOPAL AREAS

As general superintendents of our entire church, each bishop will be elected to serve a specific episcopal area. (This is new. During our season of initial formation, the bishops formed their own episcopal areas. Following GC2024, the GEC formed the episcopal areas

and assigned the bishops.) Starting in 2026, representatives from the annual conferences will both set the episcopal areas and rank the episcopal nominees.

Comprised of several annual conferences each, episcopal areas may be (as now) non-contiguous and international in composition. The shape of the episcopal areas is to be revisited every six years. Episcopal areas have no area-specific structures apart from a bishop and an area committee on episcopacy. Here is flow of decisions that guide the bottom-up process of forming episcopal areas and providing each with a bishop:

1. **Conference delegations nominate to the episcopacy.** General Conference delegations elected in each annual conference may nominate up to one elder from their own conference and up to one elder from outside their conference. These nominations are to be submitted to the GEC by May 15, 2026, but we would prefer to receive these by March 15. Those nominated will be invited to submit a standard profile that can be translated into various languages. (We will likely use JotForm for this.) A full list of the nominees, along with their biographical information, will be published by June 1, 2026. While not specifically prohibited, nominations by individuals are not encouraged.
2. **Conference delegations provide input into the shape of the episcopal areas.** Each annual conference delegation is requested to submit a ranked list of the ten annual conferences with whom they might productively share a bishop. These ranked lists are to be sent to the GEC by March 15, 2026, and may be accompanied by a statement of rationale.
3. **Conference delegations select representatives to their area committee on episcopacy.** Each annual conference delegation is to elect one lay and one clergy person to serve on their area committee on episcopacy. Those nominated to the episcopacy may not serve on an area committee. May 15, 2026, is the deadline for sending the names of those elected. But we prefer to have them by March 15. The full job description for the area committees on episcopacy will be submitted as legislation to GC2026. (The BDD currently mentions this structure but does not fully describe its responsibilities.)
4. **A plenary body of all area committees will define the episcopal areas.** All those elected to an area committee on episcopacy will be invited to a plenary gathering held online in June 2026. The GEC will bring a proposal for episcopal areas to this meeting for approval. Pursuant to the *BDD*, the chair of the GEC serves as chairperson for this meeting. Active bishops and GEC members may participate with voice but not vote.
5. **Area committees on episcopacy interview and rank the nominees.** The individual area committees on episcopacy will meet, elect their own officers, and organize to

interview any of the episcopal nominees (including active bishops) they desire. The GEC will provide someone to oversee the election of officers at the first meeting of each area episcopacy committee. Each area committee on episcopacy is to submit a ranked list of the top five episcopal nominees they would recommend to serve their specific area as they also superintend the whole church. These rankings, likely to be very influential in the ultimate election process, are due by July 20, 2026.

General Conference delegates will have them by July 31, 2026. If more than one area committee on episcopacy chooses the same nominee as their top choice, the GEC will issue a statement of guidance to the delegates. Those episcopal nominees who appear on one of the ranked lists may be invited to sit for a video interview to help delegates get to know them.

6. **Bishops are elected by the General Conference to each episcopal area.** General Conference delegates will elect bishops to specific episcopal areas. Delegates may not vote the same person for more than one episcopal area on the same ballot. (We may utilize paper ballots as needed). Sixty percent support by the plenary body of General Conference is needed for election. Those elected as bishops will be consecrated at General Conference and begin serving sixty days following the close of General Conference. We plan to honor and show gratitude to bishops in Johannesburg who are concluding their episcopal service.

WHY THE NEW PROCESS?

Why does the *BDD* provide a new system that is significantly more complex than previous practice? This process for the election of bishops:

- provides each annual conference with significant input into both the episcopal area they will help constitute and who will serve that area as bishop.
- provides enhanced vetting of episcopal nominees in a format like a job interview.
- guards against any single voting bloc “running the tables” on episcopal elections.
- ensures the bishops elected will provide the leadership needed across our diverse global church.

QUALIFYING BALLOT FOR INTERIM BISHOPS

As stated above, the *BDD* limits to three the number of interim bishops that may be elected to a full six-year term at GC2026. Interim bishops are those six bishops elected to interim service at General Conference 2024 (Bishops Auta, Kimba, Greenway, Gregory, Levingston,

and Moore.) In the early days of General Conference in Johannesburg, a qualifying ballot will determine which, if any, of the interim bishops will be included on the main ballot. Delegates may vote for as many interim bishops as they wish on this qualifying ballot. To be approved, an interim bishop must reach a three-fourths threshold of approval. If more than three bishops surpass this threshold, the three with the most support will advance.

REVIEW OF KEY DATES

Here is a summary of the key dates mentioned above:

- **March 15, 2026:** Delegations will please submit the names of any persons they are nominating to the episcopacy. The actual deadline is May 15, 2026.
- **March 15, 2026:** Delegations will please submit a ranked list of ten conferences they may wish to join as an episcopal area.
- **March 15, 2026:** Delegates will please submit the names of the lay and clergy person elected to represent them on an area committee on episcopacy. The actual deadline is May 15.
- **June 2026:** The plenary gathering of the area committees on episcopacy will meet to set the episcopal areas. After this meeting, the individual area committees on episcopacy will meet, organize, and interview nominees.
- **July 20, 2026:** Each area committee on episcopacy is to submit a ranked list of their top five episcopal nominees.
- **July 31, 2026:** The ranked lists from each of the episcopal areas will be made available to General Conference delegates. Those who appear on a ranked list may be invited to sit for a video interview.
- **August 30:** General Conference 2026 convenes in South Africa.

LOOKING FORWARD

Your Global Episcopacy Committee is working with the GMC communication team, the General Conference Commission, and General Conference secretarial staff to further develop our process and provide our church with a clear, smooth, transparent, and Spirit-led election process. I invite you to join us in prayer.

Feedback and submissions to the Global Episcopacy Committee can be sent to:

globalepiscopacycomm@globalmethodist.org

Grace & peace to you all.