

Press Release

NCJCOE Episcopal Recommendation August 8, 2022

NCJ Committee on Episcopacy Recommends Episcopal Election

The North Central Jurisdiction (NCJ) will convene in Fort Wayne, Indiana, November 2-5, 2022 with the theme *We Press On*. This Jurisdictional Conference will gather delegates (lay and clergy) from across Illinois (Northern Illinois, Illinois Great Rivers), Indiana, Iowa, Ohio (East Ohio and West Ohio), Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin for a momentous time filled with worship and collective discernment regarding the election of episcopal leadership and receiving episcopal assignments.

During the Special Called NCJ Conference in 2021, the delegates affirmed the recommendation from the Committee on Episcopacy to reduce the number of active bishops in the North Central Jurisdiction from nine to eight ([Called Special Session November 2021 | NCJ United Methodist Church](#)). This recommendation came from the NCJ Committee on Episcopacy, who, with the NCJ College of Bishops, had determined the prudence of anticipating a GCFA-announced reduction ahead of the 2020 General Conference. The recommendation was made prayerfully and proactively, using the data and information we had at that time. [2020 NCJ Recommendation Press Release](#)

However, as the NCJ has attempted to live out the experiment of reduced episcopal leadership, with Bishop Laurie Haller and Bishop Bard assuming oversight of additional annual conferences for what has become a 24-month “interim,” multiple medical leaves among our bishops, the uncertainty triggered by the pre-GC launch of the Global Methodist Church, etc., we are finding such a reduction impractical at the present moment. We acknowledge that such a reduction will likely be both necessary and inevitable following the transitions facing the UMC in 2024. But for the present moment of transition and uncertainty, we believe this approved reduction will not now help our jurisdiction “press on” into the future.

We have been offered flexibility by the recent Judicial Council ruling and GCFA affirmation: *“Absent General Conference action, the formula and number of bishops for each jurisdiction approved by the 2016 General Conference remain legally binding and effective until replaced by a new formula.”* [ResourceUMC | Judicial Council Memorandum Number 1446](#)

Therefore, the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy, after consultation with the NCJ College of Bishops, proposes the following:

- 1) The North Central Jurisdiction will reverse the decision of NCJ 2021, thereby returning the total number to nine active bishops, beginning January 1, 2023, until the next General Conference declares otherwise.**
- 2) Additionally, the NCJ will be asked to reaffirm the Dakotas and Minnesota returning to a single episcopal area, being served by one (1) bishop.**

These proposals are presented for the short-term, in order to help us navigate the uncertainty of the present time. We anticipate that the Jurisdictional Conference Session of 2024 may bring new developments and circumstances, including several mandatory episcopal retirements. We anticipate that a return to nine active bishops for the interim will provide greater “breathing room” to help prepare for those decisions at that time.

More information will be found after September 1 in the Advance. We encourage delegations to begin conversation regarding this important legislative recommendation. We encourage all United Methodists across the North Central Jurisdiction to begin praying for the conference, the delegates, and the important decisions that will be made in November.

Questions regarding the recommendation can be directed to Rev. Sara Isbell, Chairperson-NCJ Committee on Episcopacy: Sisbell2@gmail.com and Bishop David Bard, NCJ College of Bishops President: bishop@michiganumc.org.