

Frequently Asked Questions on the proposed affiliation of the Peninsula-Delaware and Baltimore-Washington conferences

Plans are currently being considered by Northeastern Jurisdictional leaders to affiliate the Peninsula-Delaware and Baltimore-Washington Conferences annual conferences of The United Methodist Church. With the affiliation, the two conferences would share a bishop.

1. What is an annual conference?

The annual (sometimes referred to as “regional”) conference is described by the church's Constitution and (other parts of the) Book of Discipline as the “basic unit” of the church. Supervised by a bishop, the annual conference has a central office and professional staff that coordinate and conduct ministry and the business of the conference. It likely has a director of connectional ministries, treasurer, directors of program areas (such as camping), communications director, and other staff as deemed appropriate for the annual conference and as required by the Book of Discipline. Clergy and laity also serve on conference boards, commissions, and committees. The clergy and an equal number of laity gather each year for an Annual Conference Session, presided over by the bishop appointed to lead that conference.

2. What comprises the Peninsula-Delaware Conference?

The Peninsula-Delaware Conference of The United Methodist Church has 416 churches, with approximately 81,100 members in Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Its office is in Dover, Del. Its episcopal leader is Bishop Peggy Johnson, who also leads the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, and was elected bishop out of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. [She announced on Feb. 13](#) that she will be retiring at the end of the next [Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference](#), tentatively scheduled to meet in a special session in July 2021. The Peninsula-Delaware Conference's vision statement is “Connected Christians offering the hope of Jesus Christ in today's world.” Learn more on its website at www.pen-del.org.

3. What comprises the Baltimore-Washington Conference?

The Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church has 615 churches with approximately 150,000 members in Washington, D.C., parts of Maryland, the western panhandle of West Virginia, and Bermuda. [Bishop LaTrelle Easterling](#) is the episcopal leader. She was elected a bishop in July 2016 and began serving the BWC Sept. 1, 2016. Its mission statement is “Inspiring and equipping local faith communities to develop disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Learn more on its website at www.bwcumc.org.

4. What is being proposed?

A lack of funds in the denomination's Episcopal Fund is expected to leave the [Northeastern Jurisdiction](#) with six bishops to supervise 10 annual conferences. To ensure each conference has episcopal leadership, the NEJ Episcopacy Committee and the College of Bishops have suggested several options, including affiliating the Peninsula-Delaware and Baltimore-Washington Conferences, so that one bishop would oversee both of these conferences.

Frequently Asked Questions

5. Why are such measures necessary?

The General Council of Finance and Administration has reported that the denomination's Episcopal Fund would run out of money by 2024. Giving is not keeping pace with the fund's obligations and the fund is depleting its reserves, the [United Methodist News Service reported](#). "If we want to reduce the Episcopal Fund, the most significant way — and probably the only place to do so — is by reducing personnel, reducing the number of bishops," said Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, president of the Council of Bishops. The cost for each U.S. bishop is about \$285,000 a year, including salary and benefits, and their housing allowance and office staff.

To address this financial challenge, the Council of Bishops is asking that no new bishops be elected this quadrennium, when 16 of the 46 active bishops retire. Jurisdictions would then explore new ways of handling episcopal oversight.

6. How many bishops are expected to retire in the Northeastern Jurisdiction?

Three. They include Bishops Jeremiah J Park of Susquehanna Conference, Sudarshana Devadhar of the New England Conference, and Peggy Johnson, who leads the Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware annual conferences.

This would leave six active bishops to lead 10 annual conferences. They are: Bishops LaTrelle Easterling of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, John Schol of the Greater New Jersey Conference, Cynthia Moore Koikoi of the Western Pennsylvania Conference, Thomas Bickerton of the New York Conference; Mark Webb of the Upper New York Annual Conference, and Sandra Steiner Ball of the West Virginia Conference.

7. What are the other ideas being considered to provide episcopal supervision?

It has been reported that there is a plan to have two bishops, perhaps Bishops Cynthia Moore Koikoi of the Western Pennsylvania Conference, and Sandra Steiner Ball of the West Virginia Conference, partner together in a new configuration to lead three annual conferences. There has also been discussion about retired bishops returning to serve and provide supervision on an interim basis.

8. Is what is being proposed for the Peninsula-Delaware and Baltimore-Washington conferences a merger?

No. Leaders in both conferences and the jurisdiction have stressed that both the Peninsula-Delaware and Baltimore-Washington conferences will maintain their distinct identities – in polity, financially, and culturally.

Frequently Asked Questions

9. **The two conferences were part of the same episcopal area and shared a bishop in the past. How will that experience inform this affiliation?**

Conference and jurisdictional leaders are taking great care to ensure that this affiliation is a new thing, not bound by any tradition or historic expectations. The newness with which the affiliation is being approached is expected to lead to innovative thinking and creative approaches to ministry and stewardship.

10. **What can local churches expect?**

With the affiliation, very little of the day-to-day operations of the local church will change. However, leaders from both conferences have begun to meet to determine how they might best share programs and resources to better equip local churches in their discipleship. Initially, some of the areas in which both conferences have strengths – like young people's ministries and antiracism ministries -- might begin to work together. In addition, training opportunities on a number of topics might be opened up and offered to members of both conferences.

11. **How and when will this become official?**

A special session of the Northeastern Jurisdiction Conference is expected to be held in July 2021. The proposed affiliation might happen right after that, in the fall of 2021, or in January 2022. Plans are still fluid. The bishops and Extended Cabinets from both conferences have begun conversations.

12. **Who will the bishop of the two conferences be?**

It is hoped and expected that Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will return to the Baltimore-Washington Conference and take over the leadership of the Peninsula-Delaware Conference from Bishop Peggy Johnson, who has announced plans to retire.

13. **How can I voice my thoughts about the affiliation?**

The Baltimore-Washington Conference has 24 delegates to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Their [names and contact information are online](#). The Peninsula-Delaware Conference has [eight delegates](#) who will vote on the affiliation.

