

# InterEthnic Strategy Development Group



Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR)  
Metodistas Asociados Representando la Causa de los Hispano-  
Americanos (MARCHA)  
Native American International Caucus (NAIC)  
New Federation of Asian American United Methodists (NFAAUM)  
Pacific Islanders National Caucus United Methodist (PINCUM)

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 18, 2026**

### **An Open Letter to the Commission on the General Conference of The United Methodist Church**

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

We, the InterEthnic Strategy Development Group (IESDG) and its allies write with deep respect for the faithful work of the Commission on the General Conference, which bears the responsibility of preparing the sessions of the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, the highest legislative body of The United Methodist Church. Through this gathering, delegates from around the world come together to discern the direction of our shared ministry and witness.

As we look toward the 2028 General Conference currently scheduled to take place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, we write to express profound concern regarding the safety and accessibility of the gathering for delegates traveling to the United States.

In recent years, the cost of visa applications and related travel requirements for many countries has increased significantly, placing an additional financial burden on delegates and ultimately general conference budget to fulfill its mandate to seek full participation of all duly elected delegates to general conference. Given these new visa and bond fees, it is estimated that an additional 2 to 3 million dollars of expense will be added to the already stretched general conference budget. For example, in 2025, the current administration has issued an increase of anywhere from \$250 for a Visa Integrity Fee to bond fees of \$5,000 to \$15,000 depending on the country of origin. This without the guarantee that the visa request will be granted.

At the same time, the United States continues to maintain restrictions or travel limitations affecting certain countries, meaning that some individuals may face heightened scrutiny, delays, or outright inability to enter the country. These realities raise serious concerns about whether all duly elected delegates will be able to participate fully in the deliberations of General Conference.

Additionally, in the present context of heightened immigration enforcement within the United States, the possibility of delegates being questioned, detained, delayed, disappeared or denied entry raises serious concerns for the church's global witness and for the safety and dignity of those who travel to represent their conferences within the United States. As we have seen for ourselves both in the news and through the witness of those in our most vulnerable congregations, citizenship does not guarantee safety anymore. People have been summarily detained, disappeared and even killed in the name of immigration law enforcement. With the current number of ICE and CBP agents still at over 2000 in Minnesota, the risk continues to be alarming. Delegates traveling domestically within the United States may also face risks related to identification checks, immigration enforcement operations, or racial profiling, something the city of Minneapolis continues to try to heal from since the tragic and racist murder of George Floyd.

Because General Conference must be a space where all delegates can deliberate freely and safely, we respectfully ask the Commission to consider the following actions.

**1. Develop a Comprehensive Safety Plan in Partnership with Church Leaders**

We urge the Commission to work collaboratively with key denominational partners to develop a comprehensive safety protocol for the duration of General Conference. To develop a process of training for Commission members, staff and volunteers to respond adequately should the need arise. We specifically recommend collaboration with:

- The United Methodist Interagency Immigration Task Force
- The United Methodist Church Chancellor's Association
- GCFA Legal Department Gen. Council

Together, these groups can help develop clear procedures for situations in which delegates are:

- Stopped or questioned by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or
- Detained or questioned by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

A comprehensive plan should include:

- Immediate legal support for delegates.

- Communication protocols with conference leadership and the Commission.
- A designated safe space within the convention center where delegates can receive assistance.
- Coordination with local authorities, including consultation with the Chief of Police of Minneapolis, to clarify expectations and protections for delegates during the conference.
- Adequate training and development of Commission members, staff and volunteers around immigration

## 2. **Consider an Alternative Location Outside the United States**

Given the global nature of the church, we urge the Commission to prayerfully consider holding the 2028 General Conference in a location outside the United States. We believe that even if we hold our contract with Minneapolis convention center, we could still consider using that contract for a regional conference for the United States. Meeting outside the United States would:

- Reduce risks associated with immigration enforcement or visa restrictions.
- Demonstrate the denomination's commitment to its global identity.
- Ensure more equitable access for delegates from across the connection.
- Be a public witness of solidarity with our siblings in Minneapolis that demonstrate a commitment to not doing business as usual for the sake of the least of these.

As a worldwide church, it is appropriate that our highest decision-making body occasionally convene in contexts beyond the United States.

## 3. **Consider Postponement of the 2028 General Conference**

We also request that the Commission consider postponing the 2028 General Conference

Paragraph 512. 3 D determines that the Commission has the authority to select the site and the date of general conference and that it has the responsibility to take all the necessary measures to ensure full participation of all general delegates and this includes ensure safe accommodations.

The church has demonstrated in recent years that extraordinary circumstances—such as visa delays, global crises, and travel restrictions—can necessitate adjustments to the General Conference timeline when the participation of delegates is at stake.

#### **4. Provide An Updated GC Financial Budget That Includes These Steps**

We urge the Commission to prepare an updated financial budget that includes necessary budget adjustments for the provisions requested above. We are aware that at the time when General Conference was decided upon some of these extraneous immigration realities did not factor in. Therefore, it would behoove all of us to consider the financial implications of the current decision to proceed with General Conference as stands. Given this new reality, we should have as clear as possible financial projections for these and other expenses that may continue to arise given the current climate.

#### **A Matter of Faithful Stewardship and Solidarity with the Most Vulnerable**

General Conference is not simply a legislative gathering; it is a sacred moment in the life of the church where the global connection discerns God's call together. Every delegate must be able to travel, worship, deliberate, and vote without fear. No delegate should ever have to worry about whether they will be placing themselves at considerable risk to participate in a Church gathering. The fact that in a country that purports to hold fast to the value of the freedom of religion, the inability to secure that for every person is deeply troubling and less than God demands of the church. We must place the needs of the most vulnerable among us before our need to meet as a Church. Our request is rooted not in political preference but in our shared commitment to hospitality, justice, and the full participation of the global body of Christ. We are grateful for the Commission's faithful service and for the immense responsibility you carry in preparing the next General Conference. We trust that you will prayerfully consider these concerns and work toward solutions that uphold the safety, dignity, and participation of every delegate. We are committed to walking alongside you in partnership and discernment as you consider these and perhaps other options. May the Holy Spirit guide your deliberations as you seek the well-being of the whole church.

Faithfully,

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### **Sign On To This Letter**

We invite all who are in accord with this statement to sign on to this letter in solidarity and in commitment to seeking solutions that ensure full inclusion of our delegates.

Sign on online at <http://bit.ly/4bztmiH>

### **About the InterEthnic Strategy Development Group (IESDG)**

*The InterEthnic Strategy Development Group (IESDG) represents the five official racial ethnic caucuses of The United Methodist Church. The group exists to build solidarity among racial-ethnic minority groups in The United Methodist Church; to provide the vision and strategy for inter-ethnic cooperative efforts; to discuss, interact, and reach for ethnic concerns and consensus as a group for empowerment and ministry of all racial ethnic groups in the Church, to develop strategies for empowerment of racial/ethnic minority persons, to advocate for racial/ethnic staff in all levels of the Church structure, to strategize toward the renewal of The United Methodist Church in recognition of the gifts of racial/ethnic minority persons, and to advocate for justice ministries within the Church and the world. In addition to the caucuses, members include representatives from the ethnic comprehensive plans, general agency staff, the Connectional Table, and jurisdiction agencies.*

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Chairwoman

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