

## United Methodists & Healthcare: A Fact Sheet

On Sunday, March 21, 2010, the United States House of Representatives passed legislation related to health care reform. In a speech prior to the vote, Speaker Nancy Pelosi [referred](#) to organizations expressing support for “this legislation.” The United Methodist Church was among the list of organizations mentioned by Speaker Pelosi.

United Methodists may have questions regarding the United Methodist Church stance regarding health care in the U.S. The following factual information is offered as a resource:

1. Only the [General Conference](#) of the United Methodist Church can speak for the United Methodist Church. The General Conference is composed of nearly 1,000 lay and clergy representing the various annual conferences across our global church. The Alabama – West Florida Annual Conference had 7 lay and 7 clergy delegates to the previous General Conference (2008). Our delegates are elected by our Annual Conference and sent as our representatives to the General Conference. Since General Conference has not met since May 2008, it is clear that the General Conference did not endorse this *specific* piece of legislation.
2. General Conference does vote on a large number of resolutions regarding social issues like health care. These statements are carefully crafted and discussed in detail by legislative committees comprised of a portion of the lay and clergy representatives from all across the global church. Alabama – West Florida had representation on this legislative committee. The entire General Conference body then votes on recommendations from the legislative committees. The approved statements are published in either the [“Social Principles”](#) found in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, or in the [Book of Resolutions](#) of the *United Methodist Church*. While these statements describe our position on far-ranging and complex social issues, these statements do not address a specific piece of governmental legislation. The UMC does not write governmental legislation.
3. It is important to note that the Church's statements on social issues represent the effort of the General Conference to speak to human issues in the contemporary world from a sound Biblical and theological foundation. They are intended to be instructive and persuasive, but they are not church law and are not binding on members. There is no requirement for members to agree with the Church's view.
4. The United Methodist Church has designated [The General Board of Church and Society](#) as its agency to promote education around the “Social Principles” and to advocate for social change that will bring our communities into greater alignment with the values of God's Kingdom. One way the Board of Church and Society carries out its work is within the legislative arena. In fact, the Board is designated within our *Book of Discipline* as the agency responsible to advocate for any other United Methodist general agency in the legislative process. As such, the Board of Church and Society is the “witness of the church” within the legislative arena. The “witness” expressed in this advocacy should be in harmony with the General Conference approved positions found within the “Social Principles” or *Book of Resolutions*. The General Board has a 63-member board of directors composed of laity and clergy from all across the world on a proportional basis compared to church membership. The General Secretary (CEO) of the board is accountable to this board of directors.
5. Much of this advocacy around social change occurs between sessions of the General Conference. United Methodist individuals and groups refer to our documents to guide their advocacy around a variety of social issues. [The General Board of Church and Society](#) is the agency of the UMC that monitors and advocates around these issues. The General Board of Church and Society often

speaks for or against legislation based on the approved statements in the “Social Principles” and *Book of Resolutions*. The Board speaks as an advocacy group and not for the United Methodist Church. The General Board of Church and Society is often identified as the body expressing support or dissent on particular social issues. On Speaker Pelosi’s webpage, under a link listing “supporting organizations” for health care reform, *The United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society* is listed.

6. It is fairly common for people to mistake an endorsement from the General Board of Church and Society, or individual Bishops, as speaking for the entire United Methodist Church.

7. No General Agency of the UMC makes political financial contributions of any kind to legislators. No connectional giving dollars (apportionments) are used for political purposes because that would jeopardize our non-profit status.

8. The United Methodist Church has been involved in the health care reform conversation based on the work of eight successive General Conferences (equally 32 years). Therefore, the United Methodist conversations on health care occurred before this current debate in Congress ever began. The United Methodist Church has taken no stand on the current *specific* legislation; however, the church has been a strong advocate for “health care for all” for many years.

9. Relevant material from the General Conference that may be helpful as a basis for the engagement of the UMC in this important conversation may be found in the following locations:

- [Paragraph 162.V](#) in the 2008 *Book of Discipline* (pp.117-118);
- The 2008 General Conference approved [Resolution 3201](#), entitled *Health Care for All in the United States*.

10. According to a United Methodist News Service [press release](#), dated Feb. 26, 2010: “Bishop Gregory Palmer, president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, and the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, along with five United Methodist-related organizations, endorsed a [letter](#) to President Obama and members of Congress before the (health care) summit urging them ‘to take heart and move meaningful health care reform forward.’”

11. A helpful article on what the UMC believes regarding health care may be found [here](#) .

This document is intended to communicate basic facts about the structure and processes of the United Methodist Church as adopted by the General Conference every four years. We respect the differences of opinion various United Methodists may have around the *specific* health reform legislation recently adopted by the U. S. Congress.