

## UMC bishops given 3% retroactive pay hike

by [Heather Hahn](#)

May 1, 2025



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A procession of United Methodist bishops leads opening worship at the 2024 United Methodist general conference on April 23, 2024. (File photo by Mike DuBose, UM News)

In a highly unusual move, the board of the United Methodist Church's finance agency voted April 25 to give the denomination's bishops a 3 percent salary increase that will be retroactive to January this year.

The General Council on Finance and Administration board's vote, during its online spring meeting, comes after [a majority of bishops late last year asked to forgo a pay](#)

[hike amid budget cuts denomination-wide.](#)

“The GCFA Board considered several new factors that have emerged since the previous discussion,” said Sheila B. Ahler, chair of the board’s General Agency and Episcopal Matters Committee that deals with budgetary matters. “These include the increased workload for bishops, due to a decrease in their numbers and significant economic changes that have notably impacted the cost of living.”

Bishops’ salaries vary by region. Retroactive to January, US bishops each will make \$186,327. In Africa and the Philippines, the bishops will each make \$91,555. The European bishops’s salaries will range from \$69,063 to \$144,768.

The overall additional cost for the salary increase is a total of \$270,000 for the 53 active bishops worldwide. The US has 32; Europe and the Philippines each have three bishops; and the African continent will have 15 bishops by the end of July when a new episcopal area is added in mid-Africa.

The full GCFA board has final say on bishops’ compensation as part of its role overseeing the denomination’s Episcopal Fund that supports their work. Usually the board approves any changes in pay in the late summer or fall, when it finalizes spending plans for the coming year.

Initially [in mid-2024](#), the board’s General Agency and Episcopal Matters Committee considered recommending a 3.5 percent pay raise to the full board. But as discussions of the Episcopal Fund spending plan progressed, that recommendation fell by the wayside.

However, Ahler told the board that in recent months, her committee has had discussions with bishops and GCFA staff to consider revisiting the pay question.

Staff informed the committee that both the Society of Human Resource Managers and Paycsale, an industry leader in compensation management, projected a 3.5 percent average pay increase for workers this year. The bishops as well as staff of the denomination’s general agencies also are experiencing a 12.9 percent increase in health premiums this year.

Ahler told the board during its April 25 meeting that the committee expected to revisit the pay question in developing recommendations for the Episcopal Fund’s 2026 spending plan. But after her report, board member Ken Ow made a motion for

the board to go into closed session to further discuss bishops' pay.

Most of their conversation was then held in a separate online space. Discussions of personnel matters are among the exceptions to the UMC's open meetings policy in the Book of Discipline, the denomination's law book.

The two bishops on the board—Bishop David Graves, the GCFA board president, and Bishop Thomas Bickerton—recused themselves from the board's discussion and vote on the salary increase.

"The GAEM Committee respects the board's final authority and decision-making process in setting episcopal compensation and remains committed to its advisory role in supporting transparent and equitable financial practices within our church," Ahler said.

The board's decision comes as many across the UMC are adjusting to smaller budgets and larger workloads.

After the disaffiliation of about a quarter of US churches, the general conference in 2024 passed a historically low four-year budget [of between \\$353.6 million and \\$373.4 million, depending on collection rates in 2025 and 2026](#). The 2025-2028 budget represents about a 40 percent reduction of the previous denominational budget that the general conference passed in 2016.

That budget also reduced the number of bishops overall, with the number of US bishops dropping from 39 to 32 even as two more bishops are added to Africa where the denomination is growing. —UM News