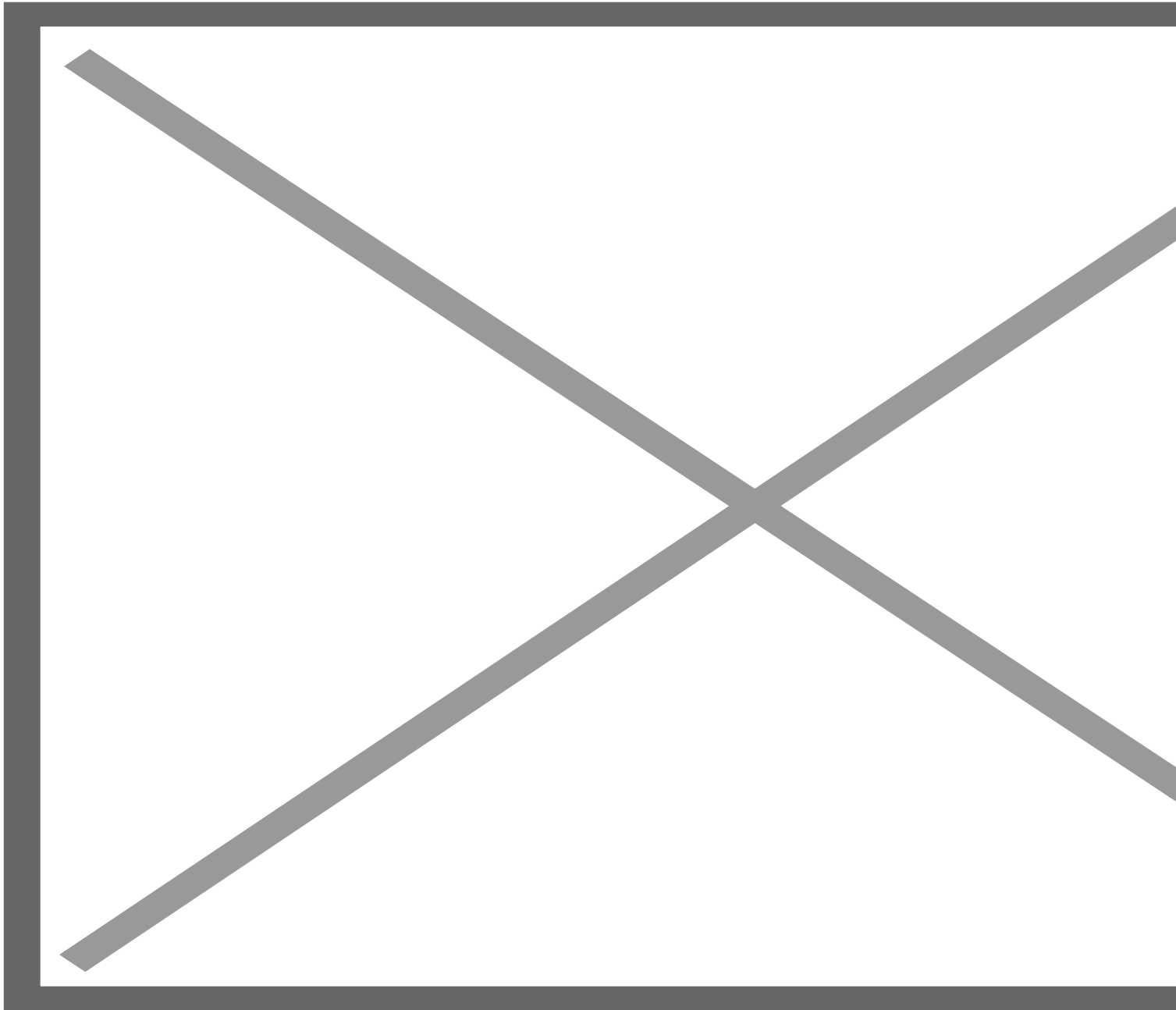


UMC top court overturns bishop funding structure

by [Heather Hahn](#)

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Retired bishop Marcus Matthews and other United Methodist bishops process into the opening worship service of the UMC's general conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, on April 23, 2024. (File photo by Paul Jeffrey, UM News)

The United Methodist Church's top court has declared unconstitutional a new funding structure for US bishops passed at the 2024 general conference.

At the same time, the Judicial Council upheld the general conference's elimination of the membership-based formula long used to determine the number of bishops in each US jurisdiction.

At issue in the decision, released April 25, were revisions the general conference made to the provision in the Book of Discipline that governs the distribution of US bishops. The Judicial Council has struck down "as unconstitutional, null, and void" additions to the provision that allowed a jurisdiction to request additional bishops beyond the minimum of five as long as it would assume full financial responsibility and prove it could fund the additional bishops for four years.

Basically, the church court concluded that in putting the onus on jurisdictions, new provision defied the way the UMC's connection is supposed to work. Under the constitution, the bishops both serve and are supported by the whole denomination, not individual regional bodies.

"The Constitution does not contemplate a unified episcopacy in name only, but one that exists in fact, structure, and access across the whole Church," the church court said in its decision.

The general conference rewrote the funding provision in a series of votes on April 30, 2024. Previously, each US jurisdiction had a guaranteed minimum of five bishops while an additional bishop could be allotted for each additional 300,000 church members or "major fraction" of that amount.

The UMC's general council on finance and administration had initially raised questions about the new provisioning, noting that it created ambiguity about the council's role in the budgeting, collection, and distribution of the Episcopal Fund that supports the work of bishops. —UM News