

Paragraph 717

Frequently Asked Questions

Wespath is engaging with leads and members across The United Methodist Church (UMC) as part of its review of Paragraph 717 of *The Book of Discipline*. The following FAQs provide information about Paragraph 717, Wespath's role in the process and opportunities for engagement.

What is Paragraph 717?

Paragraph 717 of The Book of Discipline (Discipline) serves as the UMC's primary governing text for sustainable and socially responsible investing. It offers crucial guidance to United Methodist general boards, agencies and institutions, including Wespeth, that seek to invest in alignment with Church values.

Over the years, Paragraph 717 has been the source of numerous debates and legislative contests at General Conferences, especially regarding divestment petitions related to fossil fuels and issues concerning Israel and Palestine.

*Paragraph 717 calls on Wespath to
“make a conscious effort to invest...
with the goals outlined in the Social Principles.”*

How is Wespath responding to the referred Paragraph 717 petition?

At General Conference 2024, a petition concerning Paragraph 717 was referred to the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) for further review and consideration. Following General Conference, the GCFA Board referred the petition to Wespeth, recognizing Wespeth's long history working on sustainable investing and our capacity to support in-depth discussions across the denomination.

Wespath has developed a thorough process to consider updating Paragraph 717. As an initial step, Wespath organized a two-day gathering in September 2025 dedicated to discussion around Paragraph 717. The intent of the gathering was not to make decisions about Paragraph 717. Rather, the gathering served as a focus group to better understand the various perspectives related to updating Paragraph 717. During the gathering, Kate Ott, a professor of Christian social ethics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, led participants through guided exercises and small-group discussions.

Wespath wants to hear from multiple, diverse perspectives. Wespath is using lessons learned and questions posed from this gathering to inform conversations with the wider Church and is exploring options for its participants and institutional investors to provide feedback digitally.

Who was invited to the September 2025 gathering?

Many of the individuals and organizations invited to this initial gathering had previously engaged with Wespath about Paragraph 717, socially responsible investment or divestment. A list of attendees can be found [here](#). Groups represented at this initial gathering included:

- Clergy (both active and retired)
- Bishops
- Philippines and Southern Africa non-U.S. Regional Conferences
- Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
- General Agencies
- UMC Groups Advocating for Broader Use of Divestment
- Other advocacy groups within the Church
- Annual Conferences
- UMC Foundations

Wespath recognizes that this is not a complete list of those with relevant perspectives to share on Paragraph 717 and acknowledge in particular the need for broader global representation. We are exploring ways to ensure future discussions on these topics reflect the full diversity of our Church, including focused efforts to gather the important perspectives of United Methodists in the non-U.S. Regional Conferences

Why were September gathering invitations not extended to the public?

For the initial gathering, Wespeth wanted to create a space where people with different views could talk openly, build relationships and discover shared understanding. In conversation with facilitator Kate Ott, Wespeth staff decided the best way to foster open and respectful dialogue—especially around these often sensitive and complex topics—was to gather representatives from groups that have previously demonstrated interest in Paragraph 717. There will be additional forums to share individual perspectives with Wespeth.

Wespath representatives at the gathering included senior leaders and members of Wespath's Board of Directors. A majority of the board members who attended the gathering serve on Wespath's UMC Principles Committee, which provides the full Board with guidance and recommendations on the interpretation of the Social Principles and other directives of the General Conference.



Video Recaps

Coté Soerens, an external contributor specializing in visual facilitation, created the above illustration to help summarize a group discussion on the first day of the gathering. A full written recap, and a link to Soerens' second illustration, is available [here](#).



Day 1

Wespath General Secretary and CEO
Andy Hendren and Wespath board
member Deaconess Irene DeMaris
recap Day 1 of the Paragraph 717
Gathering.



Day 2

Wespath Managing Director of Sustainable Investment Strategies Jake Barnett, Wespath board member Ian Urriola and facilitator Kate Ott recap Day 2 of the Paragraph 717 Gathering.