

## ***2026 Upper New York Annual Conference Resolution for Clergy Wellness and Expanded Health Benefit Coverage***

**Title:** Exploring Health Benefit Expansion for LLPs, provisional and ordained Deacons and Elders appointed less than full time to local churches and advocating for universal healthcare for all.

WHEREAS The United Methodist Church recognizes that within the church community, there are persons whose gifts, evidence of God’s grace, and promise of future usefulness are affirmed by the community, and who respond to God’s call by offering themselves in leadership as set-apart ministers, ordained and licensed (§ 302).

WHEREAS The United Methodist Church recognizes and advocates for the right to health care in its Social Principles: “We affirm health care as a basic human right and vow to work toward expanded access to all forms of medical treatment, including preventative, therapeutic, and palliative care... We urge United Methodists to join efforts aimed at creating systems that provide comprehensive health protections for all.” (*Book of Discipline 2020/2024*, ¶140a); and

WHEREAS “The United Methodist Church is committed to health care for all in the United States, and therefore advocates for a comprehensive health-care delivery system that includes access for all, quality care, and effective management of costs” (2020/2024 BOR, pg. 529), and “call upon all agencies, commissions, and annual conferences of The United Methodist Church in the United States to adopt principles and support policies that are consistent with this resolution [4201. Health Care for All in the United States]” (*Book of Resolutions 2020/2024*, p. 533); and

WHEREAS The United Methodist Church “call[s] upon United Methodists around the world to accept responsibility for modeling health in all its dimensions” and to do so “we call upon specific entities within our United Methodist connection to take steps toward health and wholeness” and “encourage annual conferences to: . . . undertake specific actions to promote clergy health, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual” (*Book of Resolutions 2020/2024*, pp. 538–41); and

WHEREAS Local Licensed Pastors, Deacons and Elders appointed less than full-time in Upper New York local churches are not eligible for health benefits; and

WHEREAS Local Licensed Pastors (LLPs), Deacons, Elders are often appointed by the bishop to extension ministry settings, which may or may not provide health care benefits; and

WHEREAS *The Book of Discipline 2020/2024* ¶ 331.6c – *Support for Deacons and Provisional Deacons Appointed by a Bishop* states that “Deacons and provisional deacons shall participate in the denominational pension and benefit plans and programs ...of the annual conference subject to the provisions and standards of those programs as established by the annual conference when health benefit coverage is not provided from another source”; and

WHEREAS God calls persons to different contexts and locales for the work of set-apart leadership, the calls of part-time clergy and those in extension ministries are to be considered of equal worth and value in service to that of full-time clergy, for they are called of God. While the Upper NY Annual Conference currently offers health care benefits to full time clergy appointed to local churches, the changing reality of its workforce is increasingly bi-vocational and/or across multiple extension ministry appointments. Examples of these appointments would be those who serve in chaplaincy across multi-site clinical settings as contractors, not employees; those who combine two part-time extension ministry settings into one full time appointment, and those who serve part-time in a professional practice such as attorneys and CPAs along with a part-time appointment to a local church or another extension ministry. Clergy serving in such part-time and extension ministry settings are often left without coverage or with very expensive, high deductible, self-paid coverage.

WHEREAS God calls for righteousness and just systems, the Upper New York Annual Conference should be actively working towards the day when all people have equal access to safe and affordable healthcare., for all are Beloveds of God. In the interim, Upper New York Annual Conference’s healthcare benefits should be equitable in eligibility criteria for clergy as it is for lay employees of Conference and local churches.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that United Methodists of Upper New York support the passing and implementing the New York Health Act ([S3425/A1466](#)), the only bill currently in the New York state legislature that would guarantee comprehensive, high quality healthcare for every New Yorker. It’s implementation would ensure that every New Yorker receives primary care, specialty care, vision, dental, hearing, mental health, reproductive care, substance abuse, maternal care, prescription drugs and long term care, without expensive health insurance premiums, co-pays, deductibles, or prescription costs.

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that United Methodists of Upper New York are strongly encouraged to reach out to their assembly members, senators, and governor to express their support for the New York Health Act;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Upper New York Annual Conference shall be directed to send letter to Governor Hochul:

Dear Governor Hochul, In accordance with the attached resolution, adopted at our 2026 Annual Conference, the Upper New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church support the passing and implementing the New York Health Act ([S3425/A1466](#)), the only bill currently in the New York state legislature that would guarantee comprehensive, high quality healthcare for every New Yorker and strongly encourage you to support it. Thank you for all you are doing to care for the most vulnerable among us , and for considering taking this step.

This letter shall be sent, no later than August 1, 2026, to: The Honorable Kathy Hochul Governor of New York State NYS Capitol Building Albany, NY 12224

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Upper NY Annual Conference establish a task force to explore the feasibility of expanding Upper New York Annual Conference health care benefits to all clergy (and their families) who serve under appointment of three-quarters time or more by the Bishop, as staff to annual conference or a local church,

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this task force be convened by the UNY Conference Board of Pensions and Health Benefits and include at least the following additional personnel:

- at least one LLP
- at least one deacon
- at least one elder appointed at less than full-time
- a member of the appointive cabinet
- the Upper NY Annual Conference Benefits Manager
- a member of the Commission on Equitable Compensation

And that this task force consults with the UNY Conference Chief Financial Officer, Committee on Finance and Administration, Wespath, and others whose expertise may inform the work of this task force;

THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this task force conduct appropriate research to address the following questions over the course of one calendar year with a report back to Annual Conference in 2027:

- Who are the individuals under appointments who need access to the health benefit plans and programs of the UNY Annual Conference, and what circumstances prevent them from accessing these benefits?
- How can the Upper NY Annual Conference address these barriers to access?

- What constraints related to participation by the health insurance carrier (Healthflex/OptumRX administered by Wespath) are present?
- What are the cost implications to local churches, to Conference and to participants? How many appointments of three-quarter time exist? How many Deacons are appointed full time to local churches and who are not serving in the lead pastor role?
- What are the potential negative impacts to extending coverage? Who will be affected by these impacts?
- What would be the cost to the Upper NY Annual Conference to provide access?

Submitted by:

Rev. Becky Naber, Chair of Order of Deacons

Pastor Beth Malone, Chair of Fellowship of LLPs and Associate Members

Rev. Anna Blinn Cole, Chair of Order of Elders

References:

*Book of Discipline 2020/2024*, Part V: Social Principles, pp. 105–47

*Book of Discipline 2020/2024*, ¶ 331.6c and ¶ 1913.

“4201. Health Care for All in the United States” (*Book of Resolutions 2020/2024*, pp. 524–33)

“4202. Health and Wholeness” (*Book of Resolutions 2020/2024*, pp. 533–43)