

# **Alignment Recommendation for the Ministry of Endorsement**

## **A Structural Discernment Report**

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## **Alignment Recommendation for the Ministry of Endorsement A Structural Discernment Report**

The United Methodist Church is entering a period of organizational transition as the U.S. Region takes shape and connectional structures evolve. In this moment of change, certain ministries require renewed attention to ensure that their work remains aligned with the church's supervisory commitments, ecclesial identity, and public witness. Among these is the ministry of endorsement, whose responsibilities span the covenant between clergy and bishop while engaging institutions that depend upon the church's clarity and credibility.

This decision paper builds upon two earlier works:

- the 2025 UMEA Assessment, which identified supervisory, institutional, operational, and statutory challenges shaping the ministry today; and
- the Endorsement White Paper, which explored the ecclesial and theological dimensions of endorsed ministry within the connectional system.

Concise summaries of both the Assessment and the White Paper are provided in the appendices for readers who have not reviewed the full documents.

Drawing on this foundation, the present document evaluates several potential structural alignments for the United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA) and offers a recommendation for the configuration best suited to support episcopal oversight, institutional partnership, and operational effectiveness.

The analysis that follows is intentionally focused. Rather than surveying the entire connectional landscape, it applies relevant insights to a practical question: Where should the ministry of endorsement be located so that it can faithfully serve the church and the institutions that rely upon it?

You are invited into this discernment not as passive readers but as partners in shaping the future home of a ministry that serves both church and world in vital ways.

### **PART I – PURPOSE OF THE ALIGNMENT EVALUATION**

The United Methodist Endorsing Agency provides a clear and practical context for evaluating how the ministry of endorsement may be most faithfully aligned within an evolving connectional structure. Increasingly, that structure is being shaped by collaborative, cross-agency approaches to shared responsibility. Because its responsibilities intersect supervisory, administrative, and institutional dimensions of denominational life, endorsement offers a particularly suitable case for examining how structural placement can support a ministry whose work spans multiple forms of accountability. Endorsement developed in response to institutional requirements for verifying clergy suitability in specialized settings—requirements defined by federal agencies, national clinical organizations, correctional systems, and other entities whose credentialing structures emerged within the United States. As these systems matured, endorsement became the church's representative voice within them, ensuring clarity for bishops, consistency for clergy, and

accountability to the settings in which they serve. In this context, thoughtful consideration of UMEA's structural placement is essential for sustaining effective ministry and faithful connectional oversight.

### **Scope of the Evaluation**

This evaluation aims to discern how the ministry of endorsement can most effectively inhabit the United Methodist Church's connectional structure. The intent is neither to critique current practice nor to assume a preferred outcome, but to explore where endorsement's supervisory, administrative, and institutional responsibilities can be best supported. Three guiding questions shape this discernment:

1. Where can UMEA's responsibilities be most clearly supervised and sustained?
2. Which alignment best supports the processes and partnerships central to endorsement?
3. Which placement most effectively upholds the church's mission, identity, and institutional credibility?

To address these questions, four plausible alignment pathways are examined. Each represents a distinct configuration of governance, placement, and operational identity.

### **PART II - STRUCTURAL ALIGNMENT PATHWAYS**

Before evaluating specific configurations, it is necessary to identify the structural pathways available to the Church for locating the ministry of endorsement. The pathways outlined in this section represent four concrete approaches that are consistent with established patterns of connectional governance and current Disciplinary provisions. While other configurations could be imagined, these pathways reflect the most plausible and practicable forms available within the Church's present structural framework. Each represents a distinct way of aligning governance, supervision, administrative support, and institutional representation, and together they provide a sufficient basis for disciplined comparison and discernment.

Recent developments within the general church suggest that structural alignment is being pursued not only through formal reorganization, but also through collaborative efforts across multiple connectional bodies. This pattern—visible in areas such as episcopal oversight, financial sustainability, and administrative coordination—indicates that functional responsibilities are increasingly being addressed through shared governance rather than fixed institutional boundaries. While the pathways described below are rooted in identifiable institutional arrangements, their evaluation must now take into account the possibility that those arrangements may evolve, consolidate, or be reconfigured in the near term.

The purpose of this section is to describe the pathways themselves. Their comparative strengths, limitations, and long-term adaptability are examined in Part IV.

Throughout the descriptions that follow, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) is referenced as the current administrative context in which the ministry of endorsement is situated. At the same time, recent developments within the general church suggest the possibility that existing agencies may be reconfigured, unified, or otherwise restructured. Where GBHEM is

named, it should therefore be understood as referring to its present role or to any successor or unified entity that may assume its functions. This usage provides a consistent point of reference for comparison while acknowledging that the Church's structural "final state" may differ from its current configuration.

#### **A. Continuity Model: Office within GBHEM**

In this model, the ministry of endorsement continues in its present form as an office within the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Governance, administrative support, and institutional relationships remain embedded within GBHEM's existing organizational structure, and the ministry continues to operate under the authority and oversight currently exercised through that agency.

This pathway offers continuity, stability, and minimal disruption. It preserves existing relationships, processes, and institutional recognition, allowing the ministry to continue functioning without the need for structural transition. It also benefits from established administrative systems and connectional familiarity.

At the same time, this model assumes the continued availability and stability of GBHEM as the organizational setting for endorsement. In a context where general agency structures may be subject to consolidation or redefinition, this assumption introduces a degree of uncertainty. Should GBHEM's role, scope, or organizational form change significantly, the long-term viability of this pathway would depend upon how endorsement functions are carried forward within any successor or reconfigured structure.

#### **Characteristics**

- **Placement:** Office within GBHEM (or successor administrative structure)
- **Governance:** Exercised through existing agency leadership
- **Oversight:** Indirectly aligned with episcopal supervision through agency structures
- **Resourcing:** Supported through established agency budgets and staff systems
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Integrated within broader agency priorities; endorsement functions maintained within existing operational framework

#### **B. Restored Division Model: Division within GBHEM**

In this model, the ministry of endorsement is reconstituted as a formal division within GBHEM, restoring a clearer organizational identity and elevating its visibility within the agency's internal structure. Governance remains within GBHEM, but the ministry is granted a more defined locus of responsibility, leadership, and operational focus.

This pathway strengthens the distinctiveness of endorsement while retaining the administrative and connectional benefits of remaining within an established general agency. It may provide improved clarity of mission, enhanced coordination, and a more recognizable presence both within the Church and among institutional partners.

However, like the Continuity Model, this pathway is dependent upon the continued structural integrity and organizational priorities of GBHEM. If the agency's structure is altered through

consolidation or realignment, the divisional status of endorsement may not be preserved in its current form. The effectiveness of this model therefore depends not only on internal reorganization, but also on the stability of the broader institutional framework in which it resides.

### **Characteristics**

- **Placement:** Formal division within GBHEM (or successor structure)
- **Governance:** Defined divisional leadership within agency governance framework
- **Oversight:** More clearly aligned with episcopal functions but still mediated through agency structure
- **Resourcing:** Dedicated but agency-dependent staffing and budget
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Distinct functional identity with enhanced visibility and coordination within the larger organization

### **C. Affiliated Commission Model: COB-Governed Commission, Administratively Housed in GBHEM**

In this model, the ministry of endorsement is organized as a commission governed in relationship to the Council of Bishops, while its administrative functions are housed within GBHEM. Governance is more directly aligned with episcopal oversight, reflecting the role of bishops in the appointment, supervision, and accountability of endorsed clergy. Administrative support, including staffing and operational infrastructure, continues to be provided through an established general agency.

This pathway creates a clearer distinction between governance and administration, allowing endorsement to function with greater ecclesial clarity while maintaining operational continuity. It strengthens the ministry's alignment with episcopal responsibility and enhances its standing in institutional settings where clear lines of authority and representation are essential.

At the same time, this model assumes that administrative support will continue to be available through GBHEM or a comparable general church structure. In a period of potential agency consolidation or reconfiguration, this administrative relationship may need to be reconsidered. The underlying strength of this model, however, lies in its capacity to separate governance from administration, allowing those functions to be sustained even if their institutional locations evolve.

### **Characteristics**

- **Placement:** Commission governed in relationship to the Council of Bishops; administratively supported through a general church body
- **Governance:** Direct alignment with episcopal leadership
- **Oversight:** Clearly integrated with episcopal appointment, supervision, and accountability structures
- **Resourcing:** Administrative support provided through existing connectional systems (currently GBHEM, though adaptable)
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Distinct functional authority for endorsement, institutional liaison, and clergy support, with clear ecclesial and institutional representation

#### **D. Independent Commission Model: Standalone Commission**

In this model, the ministry of endorsement is established as an independent commission with its own governance structure, administrative systems, and operational authority. It functions as a standalone entity within the Church's connectional framework, responsible for all aspects of endorsement, supervision support, and institutional engagement.

This pathway offers the greatest degree of structural clarity and independence. It provides a clearly defined locus of authority and responsibility, enabling the ministry to operate with focus and consistency across all aspects of its work. It may also strengthen the Church's visibility and credibility in institutional contexts by presenting endorsement as a distinct and fully resourced function.

However, this model requires the development and maintenance of comprehensive administrative infrastructure, including staffing, financial systems, and governance processes. In a context where the Church is actively exploring greater coordination and efficiency across its structures, the creation of a fully independent entity may present challenges related to sustainability, duplication of effort, and alignment with broader connectional priorities.

#### **Characteristics**

- **Placement:** Independent commission within the connectional structure
- **Governance:** Self-contained governing body
- **Oversight:** Direct but structurally separate relationship to episcopal leadership
- **Resourcing:** Fully independent administrative and financial infrastructure required
- **Roles & Responsibilities:** Comprehensive responsibility for endorsement, supervision support, and institutional engagement as a standalone entity

#### **Closing Orientation**

These four pathways represent concrete structural approaches grounded in the Church's existing and historically recognizable organizational forms. While each assumes a degree of institutional continuity, all must now be considered in light of a broader context in which general agency structures, governance relationships, and administrative systems may be undergoing significant change.

The task of discernment, therefore, is not simply to identify a preferred pathway under current conditions, but to evaluate which of these pathways can most faithfully sustain the ministry of endorsement as those conditions continue to evolve.

### **PART III — EVALUATION FRAMEWORK AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

The alignment pathways outlined in the previous section represent distinct ways of locating the ministry of endorsement within the Church's connectional structure. To evaluate these options responsibly, a set of criteria is needed that reflects the supervisory, administrative, institutional, and ecclesial dimensions of endorsed ministry. These criteria provide a measured framework for comparison, ensuring that each pathway is examined with consistency and fairness.

At the same time, the ministry of endorsement is not merely a technical function but a lived expression of the Church's mission and covenantal relationships. As such, the pathways cannot be evaluated solely through discrete criteria. Their strengths and limitations must also be considered in narrative form, taking into account the practical consequences, lived experiences, institutional expectations, and theological commitments that shape endorsement in real settings.

Emerging structural conversations within the Church also suggest an increasing emphasis on global coordination and shared administrative systems. Governance, administrative, and coordination functions are increasingly being carried through collaborative relationships across multiple connectional bodies rather than through singular institutional structures. The ministry of endorsement, however, is not global. It operates entirely within the institutional and legal environment of the United States. This distinction does not create conflict, but it does raise important questions about how globally oriented structures will sustain ministries whose responsibilities are regionally and contextually specific.

Therefore, what follows is a two-part analysis.

First, the evaluative criteria are identified.

Second, a fuller narrative comparison explores how each pathway functions when viewed through the lens of the Church's supervisory responsibilities, operational realities, institutional partnerships, and emerging connectional structures. This narrative approach allows the discernment to reflect both the measurable and the relational dimensions of the ministry, leading toward a clear and well-grounded recommendation. (A full description of the evaluative criteria appears in Appendix C.)

For purposes of the evaluation that follows, references to "GBHEM" continue to denote the ministry's current administrative context, while also acknowledging that these functions may be carried forward within a reconfigured or successor general church structure.

## **A. Evaluative Criteria**

### **1. Supervisory Clarity and Episcopal Accountability**

The structure must enable bishops to provide clear oversight for clergy serving in endorsed settings, with governance aligned to supervisory responsibility.

### **2. Administrative Function and Operational Capacity**

The alignment must support credentialing, recordkeeping, institutional reporting, pastoral care, and compliance functions without placing unsustainable demands on staff or systems. Effective administrative support may also depend on the ability to leverage shared systems and services across the general church, rather than relying solely on stand-alone institutional capacity.

### **3. Public Witness and External Representation**

External partners—federal, clinical, correctional, and other institutional bodies—require a clear denominational point of contact and recognizable authority.

4. **Connectional Identity and Theological Coherence**

The ministry's placement should reflect its nature as an appointed, ecclesial function of the Church, consistent with the Discipline and the bishop's role in deployment.

5. **Regionalization Alignment and Adaptability**

As the U.S. Region develops, endorsement must remain structurally stable across transitions and adaptable to emerging regional forms.

6. **Governance and Accountability Structures**

The pathway should offer transparent, mission-appropriate governance that supports episcopal oversight, administrative partnership, and sustainable collaboration. In the current environment, governance must also be understood as increasingly collaborative, requiring structures that can operate effectively across multiple connectional bodies rather than within a single institutional container.

7. **Institutional Risk and Compliance Posture**

Endorsement interfaces with institutions that carry legal, regulatory, and credentialing requirements; the structure must minimize risk and ensure continuity.

8. **Symbolic and Ecclesial Signaling**

Structural placement communicates the Church's priorities. Alignment should reflect the significance of endorsed ministry within the life and mission of the denomination.

**B. Comparative Application of Criteria**

**1. Supervisory Clarity and Episcopal Accountability**

**Continuity Model**

Endorsement remains supervised through multiple layers—the Division of Ordained Ministry, the General Secretary, and a subcommittee of the GBHEM Board—before episcopal engagement is ever reached. This structure preserves longstanding ambiguity about who holds functional authority for clergy serving in endorsed settings. Bishops continue to rely on UMEA for specialized counsel, yet the agency's placement does not draw that work into direct episcopal alignment. The model maintains stability, but it does not strengthen the supervisory coherence intrinsic to institutional ministry.

**Restored Division Model**

Restoring Division status elevates endorsement within GBHEM and offers clearer visibility, but the supervisory pathway still moves through an agency layer rather than directly through the episcopacy. The Division may carry increased authority and capacity, yet it remains programmatically mediated. This results in improved internal clarity but only marginal improvement in supervisory alignment.

**Affiliated Commission Model**

This model significantly enhances supervisory clarity. With a board constituted by the Council of Bishops, the supervisory relationship between the episcopacy and endorsed clergy becomes more direct and more transparent. While administrative housing remains in GBHEM, the governance location shifts in a way that clarifies episcopal accountability and supports the theological commitments underlying appointment to ministries beyond the local church.

## **Independent Commission Model**

Provides the clearest and most unified supervisory structure. Episcopal oversight is direct through a COB-appointed board, and the operational structure reinforces that relationship. The result is a coherent, singular locus of supervisory accountability—one that aligns with longstanding Wesleyan understandings of pastoral appointment, clergy trust, and ecclesial oversight.

## **2. Administrative Function and Operational Capacity**

### **Continuity Model**

Administrative support remains reliable but is limited by the capacity of existing GBHEM structures, which must support a wide portfolio of responsibilities. While improvements are possible, they would occur within the present framework and may not sufficiently address the increasing complexity of institutional credentialing, documentation, and compliance. This model preserves stability but offers limited potential for structural enhancement.

### **Restored Division Model**

Restoring Division status provides a stronger internal platform for operational work—allowing dedicated staffing, enhanced coordination, and clearer functional identity. This model improves the agency’s ability to process credentials, maintain institutional partnerships, and support bishops and clergy. Operational agility improves, though its dependence on GBHEM’s broader administrative systems remains.

### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Combines Commission-level functional autonomy with GBHEM’s established administrative infrastructure. This hybrid approach offers improved responsiveness and concentrated expertise while avoiding the cost and complexity of creating standalone administrative systems. It does, however, require careful coordination to ensure administrative processes align with the Commission’s governance and strategic priorities.

### **Independent Commission Model**

Offers maximum autonomy and the ability to design administrative systems specifically suited to endorsement. This can support efficiency and specialized competence, though it requires developing and sustaining systems that currently exist within GBHEM. Administrative independence enhances control but increases organizational burden.

## **3. Public Witness and External Representation**

### **Continuity Model**

UMEA’s identity remains nested within GBHEM. Institutional partners familiar with existing structures may not perceive significant changes, but the model does little to clarify ecclesial authority or strengthen denominational presence. This can suffice in stable environments but may not match the clarity expected by institutions accustomed to distinct, dedicated endorsing bodies.

### **Restored Division Model**

Division status improves visibility and communicates the gravity and scope of endorsement more clearly. Institutional partners may interpret this as a stronger internal commitment and more

defined organizational stature, which can enhance confidence in the denomination's endorsement processes.

#### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Shifting governance to a COB-constituted Commission strengthens episcopal alignment and clarifies the church's representative voice to institutional partners. While administrative housing remains within GBHEM, the Commission's governance structure provides clearer authority, a more focused identity, and enhanced ecclesial credibility. This model supports consistent communication with external institutions and reinforces the denomination's commitment to the specialized ministry settings in which endorsed clergy serve.

#### **Independent Commission Model**

Provides the highest degree of representational clarity. A standalone Commission with episcopal governance and a singular organizational identity is easily recognized by institutional partners as authoritative, stable, and dedicated. This model aligns closely with external expectations for how denominational endorsing bodies typically appear.

### **4. Connectional Identity and Theological Coherence**

#### **Continuity Model**

Maintains the current connectional logic but also preserves longstanding ambiguities between episcopal supervision and agency-based oversight. The model reflects UMEA's history but not necessarily the theological commitments embedded in the supervisory role of bishops for ministries beyond the local church.

#### **Restored Division Model**

Strengthens internal identity by restoring the structural significance of the 1996 framework. Yet the fundamental supervisory pathway still runs through an agency layer, thereby maintaining a structural separation between the theological foundation of appointed ministry and the governance of endorsement.

#### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Better aligns endorsement with the church's theology of appointment, episcopal oversight, and covenantal ministry. Episcopal governance supports clarity of vocation, ecclesial identity, and clergy accountability. This model integrates programmatic support (GBHEM) with the theological grounding of episcopal supervision.

#### **Independent Commission Model**

Most fully expresses the theological and ecclesial commitments underlying institutional ministry. Supervision, identity, and accountability rest clearly within the church's primary supervisory structure: the episcopacy. This alignment resonates with the church's understanding of appointed ministry as both relational and connectional.

## **5. Regionalization Alignment and Adaptability**

### **Continuity Model**

Can function within an emerging U.S. Region, but flexibility is constrained by GBHEM's existing structure and broader mandate. As regional governance evolves, the model may preserve structural tensions rather than resolve them.

### **Restored Division Model**

Better positioned than the Continuity Model due to enhanced identity and capacity within GBHEM, but adaptability remains tied to GBHEM's integration within a regionalized structure. Responsiveness may improve, but constraints persist.

### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Highly adaptable. Episcopal governance aligns naturally with regional structures, while administrative housing within GBHEM ensures continuity during organizational transitions. This model allows endorsement to remain stable as regional structures evolve.

### **Independent Commission Model**

Likewise adaptable, with the benefit of full autonomy. Regional shifts would not require major redesign, though the Commission must sustain its own administrative and financial systems to remain responsive.

## **6. Governance and Accountability Structures**

### **Continuity Model**

Governance is distributed among the GBHEM Board, Division leadership, and the episcopacy, contributing to diffuse accountability. While functional, it does not provide focused governance aligned with endorsement's specialized responsibilities.

### **Restored Division Model**

Enhances visibility within GBHEM but does not alter fundamental governance patterns. Accountability remains distributed, and decision-making remains within a board whose mandate spans a wide array of responsibilities unrelated to endorsement.

### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Concentrates governance within a COB-constituted board dedicated to endorsement. This improves clarity, focus, and alignment between supervision and decision-making. Administrative accountability remains within GBHEM, which requires coordination but offers stability.

### **Independent Commission Model**

Provides the most defined governance structure: a Commission whose sole mandate is endorsement, overseen directly by the episcopacy and accountable to the General Conference. Governance clarity is at its strongest in this model.

## **7. Legal and Institutional Risk Posture**

### **Continuity Model**

Maintains the current posture but preserves areas of ambiguity regarding who speaks for the church in risk-bearing institutional partnerships. Institutional partners may continue to rely on informal clarity rather than structural definition.

### **Restored Division Model**

Improves internal clarity within GBHEM and strengthens internal oversight, but does not materially change how external institutions perceive denominational authority.

### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Strengthens the denomination's institutional authority by aligning representational responsibility with episcopal governance. Institutional partners receive clearer signals about who holds responsibility for credentialing, standards, and institutional compliance.

### **Independent Commission Model**

Provides the clearest structural authority for risk posture. A standalone Commission with episcopal governance and a singular public identity matches the expectations of federal agencies, hospital systems, correctional organizations, and other institutional partners.

## **8. Symbolic and Ecclesial Signaling**

### **Continuity Model**

Signals continuity and care for institutional ministry, but its location within a multifaceted agency may not fully convey the ecclesial priority or strategic significance of endorsement. Clergy may perceive endorsement as valued but not distinct.

### **Restored Division Model**

Signals elevated significance within GBHEM and affirms the maturity of endorsement as a specialized ministry. Visibility and stature improve, though signaling remains within the context of a programmatic agency.

### **Affiliated Commission Model**

Signals a more explicit ecclesial commitment to institutional ministries. Episcopal governance communicates pastoral responsibility, while Commission status conveys focused identity. This model combines symbolic strength with practical clarity.

### **Independent Commission Model**

Provides the strongest ecclesial signal: endorsement is understood as a ministry requiring dedicated governance, unique institutional relationships, and clear ecclesial authority. This model visibly elevates the church's commitment to institutional ministry and the clergy who serve in these settings.

## **C. Conclusion**

This expanded analysis highlights the meaningful distinctions among the four alignment pathways. Each model offers viable strengths and carries identifiable constraints. Taken together, these

evaluations prepare the ground for a principled and transparent recommendation. The goal is not merely to identify a preferred structure, but to discern the alignment that most faithfully supports the ministry of endorsement in its supervisory, institutional, and ecclesial dimensions.

#### **PART IV – RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

This section gathers the structural, theological, and operational insights of the preceding analysis and interprets them collectively in order to discern which alignment pathway most faithfully supports the ministry of endorsement. This discernment draws on the Church’s connectional identity, its supervisory commitments, and the practical realities that shape endorsed ministry today. (A consolidated visual comparison of all four models is provided in Appendix C.)

##### **A. Synthesis of Structural and Ecclesial Insight**

The preceding analysis has traced the supervisory, structural, and institutional realities that shape the ministry of endorsement within the United Methodist Church. It has described a connectional system characterized by covenantal relationships, distributed responsibilities, and a rich interplay between ecclesial oversight and programmatic support. It has also shown how endorsement—situated at the intersection of clergy supervision and public institutional trust—requires a structural home that honors the commitments of both worlds.

This section draws together those insights to consider which alignment pathway best supports endorsement as the Church enters a season of regionalization and continued organizational evolution. The aim is not to elevate one model at the expense of others, but to identify where the ministry can most faithfully and effectively inhabit the connectional system described in the preceding analysis.

##### **B. Theological and Ecclesial Considerations**

The ministry of endorsement is fundamentally ecclesial. It emerges from the Church’s covenant with its clergy, the bishop’s responsibility to guard appointments, and the communal expectation that ordained persons serving beyond the local church remain accountable to the connection. Any structural alignment must therefore reinforce:

1. The bishop’s role as chief pastor and supervisor of the clergy, especially when clergy serve in settings that require specialized preparation, public trust, and institutional accountability.
2. The Church’s commitment to mission beyond its walls, including ministries in healthcare, the military, correctional systems, clinical chaplaincy, and other contexts where presence, compassion, advocacy, and sacramental ministry are extended into civic and institutional life.
3. The integrity of the appointment system, which depends on clarity regarding where supervision resides and how the Church discerns the suitability of clergy for specialized forms of service.

From an ecclesial perspective, the structure entrusted with endorsement must reverberate with these commitments—not only administratively, but symbolically and theologically. Alignment should reflect the Church’s understanding of ordained ministry as a sent, supervised, connectionally grounded vocation.

### **C. Structural and Operational Considerations**

Endorsement also functions within a network of operational and institutional expectations that require clarity, consistency, and stability. These realities include:

- Credentialing standards governed by federal, state, and national professional bodies;
- Institutional relationships that rely on clear denominational representation;
- Pastoral care and oversight for clergy serving in high-demand, high-stress environments;
- Administrative systems for tracking certifications, appointments, renewals, and transitions;
- Compliance obligations tied to personnel, privacy, and institutional reporting.

A sustainable structural alignment must therefore support not only ecclesial identity but also the administrative, operational, and relational processes through which endorsement fulfills its commitments. Structures that diffuse responsibility, obscure lines of authority, or compromise institutional trust place endorsed clergy—and the Church—at risk.

Operational coherence matters as much as theological integrity.

### **D. Discernment Leading to Recommendation**

Each alignment pathway reflects a different set of priorities and carries genuine strengths.

- The Continuity Model offers stability and familiarity but preserves longstanding ambiguities in supervisory authority and institutional representation, particularly in a context where structural relationships may continue to evolve.
- The Restored Division Model strengthens internal identity within GBHEM yet continues to mediate supervisory responsibility through an agency layer whose form and scope may be subject to broader organizational change.
- The Independent Commission Model provides the clearest ecclesial and supervisory alignment but introduces significant challenges related to administrative capacity, financial resourcing, and legislative feasibility, particularly in an environment that is exploring greater coordination across connectional structures.

The Affiliated Commission Model, however, brings together the strengths of these approaches while mitigating their limitations. Its episcopal governance clarifies supervisory responsibility; its commission identity strengthens public witness; and its administrative support, currently situated within GBHEM, allows for continuity, scalability, and operational stability while remaining adaptable to future structural arrangements.

This adaptability is particularly significant. As the Church continues to explore collaborative approaches to governance, administration, and coordination across connectional bodies, the capacity to sustain clear functional alignment without dependence on a single fixed institutional form becomes increasingly important. The Affiliated Commission Model provides that balance—offering both clarity of responsibility and flexibility of structure.

This combination of clarity, credibility, operational coherence, and adaptive resilience positions the Affiliated Commission Model as the configuration best suited to support the ministry of endorsement in the present moment and the years ahead.

## **E. Recommendation**

Taken together, the evidence points with increasing clarity toward the Affiliated Commission Model as the alignment most capable of sustaining endorsement in a form that is both ecclesially coherent and institutionally credible. It provides a clear locus of episcopal oversight, supports the Church's representative voice in institutional settings, and preserves the administrative continuity necessary for stable and effective operation.

It also offers the flexibility required in a period of structural transition, allowing governance, administrative support, and institutional engagement to remain coherent even as the Church's broader organizational arrangements continue to evolve. In this way, it honors both the Church's commitments to its clergy and its responsibilities to the institutions that rely on endorsed ministry.

## **PART V. TRANSITION CONSIDERATIONS**

### **A. Context for Transition**

The recommendation offered in Part IV arises at a moment when the Church's connectional structures are entering a period of significant reconfiguration. The formation of the U.S. Region, the evolving responsibilities of general agencies, and the supervisory needs of endorsed clergy together create conditions in which structural clarity for endorsement is becoming increasingly important. At the same time, recent developments demonstrate that structural alignment is already being pursued through collaborative processes involving multiple connectional bodies.

This convergence suggests that future structural decisions are unlikely to emerge from a single point of authority, but through shared discernment across the Church's governing and administrative systems. Any consideration of endorsement's placement will therefore need to proceed within this broader pattern of collaboration.

While the pathway and timing of any decision belong to the appropriate bodies of the Church, the present moment invites honest recognition that inaction is itself a decision with real consequences for clergy, bishops, and institutional partners. Should the bodies ordinarily responsible for such discernment choose not to engage this question, the need for clarity does not recede. In such cases, the wider connectional life of the Church will inevitably seek alternative means of providing stability and supervision for endorsed ministry. This is not a prescriptive claim, but a practical acknowledgment that the ministry itself cannot remain indefinitely without a settled structural home.

Should the Church choose to take up this recommendation, several areas of work would naturally follow: clarifying governance and supervisory relationships, reviewing administrative and reporting structures, assessing legislative requirements, and preparing communication that supports continuity and confidence. These are not directives, but indicators of the practical terrain that accompanies any alignment of this significance.

### **B. Transition Considerations**

What can be offered at this stage are not procedural directives but guiding principles—markers that may assist the Church whenever and wherever formal consideration occurs. These principles are

intended to ensure that discernment, when it becomes decision, moves forward with clarity, care, and a commitment to uninterrupted ministry.

- **Continuity of Ministry:** Endorsed clergy, bishops, and institutional partners should experience no disruption in services. The trust and relationships built through endorsement must remain stable throughout any transition. This is not only a matter of internal clarity for the Church. Institutional partners—including military, healthcare, correctional, and federal systems—depend on a stable and authoritative endorsing presence. Prolonged ambiguity risks eroding confidence in the Church’s capacity to stand behind its clergy in these settings.
- **Collaborative Development:** Any entity involved in the discernment—whether GBHEM, GCFA, the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table, or other connectional bodies—should participate in clarifying governance and administrative responsibilities. This work should reflect the shared stewardship already evident in emerging patterns of cross-agency collaboration.
- **Phased Realignment:** Should the Church choose to adopt the Affiliated Commission Model, governance may transition first, with administrative adjustments implemented over time. This approach allows continuity of staffing, systems, and institutional relationships while structural alignment is clarified.
- **Transparent Communication:** Clear and consistent communication within the Church, and with institutional partners, will be essential to sustaining confidence and continuity throughout any transition process.

These principles reflect the reality that endorsement cannot remain indefinitely in a holding pattern. The work of endorsement is too important—and too exposed institutionally—to be left vulnerable to hesitation or prolonged ambiguity. Whatever pathway the Church chooses, it will require steadiness, follow-through, and a willingness to move with purpose for the sake of those who carry this ministry now.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Executive Summary: UMEA Assessment Report**

#### **Purpose of the Assessment**

The United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA) serves a vital function on behalf of the Church by evaluating clergy suitability for service in specialized institutional settings such as the military, healthcare, corrections, and other environments where professional standards and public trust intersect with ecclesial responsibility. Because these settings rely on clear denominational representation and because bishops depend on endorsement processes to support appointment decisions, the Church commissioned this assessment to examine whether UMEA's current structural placement, supervisory relationships, and administrative capacity adequately support the work entrusted to it.

The purpose of the assessment was not to critique individual performance, but to evaluate the conditions shaping endorsement work today, identify areas where clarity and support may be lacking, and assist the Church in determining what structural configuration might best sustain this function in the years ahead.

#### **Key Findings**

The assessment identified several interrelated themes that influence UMEA's effectiveness and the Church's overall support for endorsed clergy.

#### **Organizational Identity and Visibility**

- Over several decades, UMEA's organizational placement has shifted from a Commission to a Division, then to a Section, and most recently to an Office within a program unit.
- Each transition narrowed the agency's visibility and symbolic standing within the general church structure, making its role less clearly understood across the connection.
- These shifts were often well-intended administrative consolidations, yet cumulatively they softened the agency's institutional presence and contributed to uncertainty about its scope and authority.

#### **Supervisory Clarity**

- Supervisory responsibility for endorsement work is distributed across multiple layers within GBHEM before reaching the episcopal level, where appointment authority ultimately resides.

- This multi-layered pattern can create ambiguity about where functional authority is most clearly located, and about who speaks with ecclesial weight in institutional conversations.
- While informal practices have allowed the work to continue, the lack of clearly defined supervisory lines can complicate communication with bishops, endorsed clergy, and external partners.

### **Statutory and Disciplinary Foundations**

- UMEA's work is grounded in longstanding practice rather than explicit Disciplinary articulation.
- The absence of clear statutory language leaves the agency functioning on the strength of tradition, expectation, and necessity rather than defined mandate.
- This creates vulnerability as the Church's governance structures evolve and as the U.S. Region begins to take shape.

### **Operational Capacity and Administrative Systems**

- UMEA has continued to serve endorsed clergy with dedication, yet limited staffing and constrained resources have affected its administrative systems.
- Documentation practices, communication rhythms, and process consistency have sometimes varied—not due to negligence, but because the agency operates with fewer support structures than comparable functional offices.
- These limitations can place strain on endorsed clergy, bishops, and institutional partners who rely on timely, consistent communication and clear documentation.

### **Institutional Representation**

- Endorsement requires the denomination to maintain steady relationships with federal agencies, national certification bodies, and institutional systems.
- The assessment found that UMEA's current organizational location provides uneven support for this representational work, making it harder at times for the agency to speak with the clarity or visibility external partners expect.

### **Implications for an Evolving Denomination**

- As the U.S. Region develops and general church structures are reassessed, the assessment concludes that the present configuration of UMEA may not reliably support long-term stability or supervisory clarity.
- The findings highlight areas where additional structural definition and support would strengthen the Church's capacity to fulfill its commitments to endorsed clergy and the institutions they serve.

## **Patterns and Implications**

When considered together, these findings reveal a system in which endorsement work carries responsibilities that exceed the clarity and support of its current structural location. The work is ecclesial in its coordination with bishops, institutional in its partnerships with agencies and credentialing bodies, and administrative in its need for steady processes. Yet the present configuration spreads these responsibilities across multiple layers, making it difficult to sustain consistency or to project the denominational presence external partners expect.

The long-term pattern of organizational downgrading, while rooted in good faith administrative decisions, has reduced UMEA's visibility at the same time that endorsement expectations have grown more complex. Limited administrative support has further constrained the agency's ability to maintain consistent communication and documentation practices. In a period when many denominations are strengthening their endorsement structures to meet evolving institutional requirements, the UMC's current configuration leaves the work vulnerable to misunderstanding, delay, or fragmentation.

These dynamics do not diminish the commitment of those who have carried the work faithfully. Rather, they underscore how the structural environment around endorsement has changed more rapidly than the Church's configuration for supporting it.

## **Forward-Looking Considerations**

The assessment does not prescribe a structural solution or anticipate a particular outcome. Its purpose is to clarify the conditions under which endorsement work currently operates and to illuminate the factors that shape its effectiveness. As the Church engages in broader conversations about governance and regional configuration, these findings provide context for understanding how endorsement fits within the larger connectional landscape. They invite continued attention to the clarity, support, and visibility this work requires, without predetermining how the Church may choose to respond. Whatever future conversations may emerge, the assessment affirms that endorsement remains an important responsibility of the Church, deserving of thoughtful reflection and steady support.

## APPENDIX B

### Executive Summary: Endorsement White Paper

**Endorsed ministry** is one of the clearest places where the Church's missional identity, episcopal responsibility, and Connectional accountability converge. In a season of regionalization, this convergence deserves careful attention.

This summary presents the core insights of a comprehensive rationale for evaluating the future support and placement of the ministry of endorsement, currently embodied in the **United Methodist Endorsing Agency (UMEA)**—not as a proposal for immediate action, but as a framework the Church may find useful as it enters a multi-year process of structural discernment.

#### **1. Endorsed Ministry Is Appointed Ministry, Not Ancillary Work**

Clergy serving in military, VA, health-care, correctional, counseling, industrial, and governmental settings are:

- appointed by bishops;
- accountable to the annual conference;
- governed by the Discipline; and
- entrusted with denominational representation in civic institutions.

Their ministry is not an exception to the Connectional system—it delivers the Connection into the world's institutional life.

#### **2. Endorsement Is a Functional Responsibility the Church Must Carry Out**

The ministry requires the Church to perform tasks that cannot be delegated to external bodies or diffused across annual conferences:

- ecclesial endorsement;
- institutional liaison;
- credentialing and professional navigation;
- advisory support to bishops and cabinets;
- continuity of denominational presence in civic institutions.

These are not optional. They are constitutional, ecclesial, and public responsibilities.

#### **3. Regionalization Creates a Window for Clarifying What Has Long Been True**

The episcopal system already provides the theological and constitutional grounding for endorsed ministry. Regionalization simply makes this more visible.

The paper contends (carefully and non-prescriptively) that:

- endorsed ministry is inherently connected to the bishop's general superintendency;
- the Church has historically supported it through dedicated functional structures;
- the U.S. Region will eventually need to determine how to align such ministries;
- and any future structure must sustain episcopal responsibility while enabling institutional competence.

#### **4. Timing Matters**

The Church enters a long arc of regional development:

- No structural decisions can occur before GC 2028.
- The first U.S. Regional Conference will be legislative, not administrative.
- Jurisdictions continue their role until constitutional processes change that.
- Administrative structures of the Region will emerge gradually.

Functional ministries—like endorsement—require stability while the Region develops, but their long-term placement must be discerned by the Region itself.

This is not advocacy. It is timing awareness.

#### **5. A Functional Ministry Needs a Functional Home**

Functional ministries differ from programmatic ministries. They require:

- consistency across the U.S. context;
- institutional and professional literacy;
- continuity of ecclesial representation;
- protection of episcopal accountability;
- and careful integration with the annual conference's supervisory system.

Wherever endorsed ministry resides—temporarily or permanently—it must be placed where these core responsibilities can be carried out faithfully.

#### **6. Historical Trajectory Matters, But Does Not Dictate the Future**

The Church's long experience supporting endorsed ministry—whether through independent commissions, general boards, or hybrid models—reveals a consistent pattern:

- The Church has always needed a dedicated structure to carry out endorsement
- This structure has always worked in partnership with the episcopacy
- Administrative homes have changed, but the functional need has not

The new regional reality allows the Church to articulate these patterns clearly.

## **7. Frontier Ministry Offers Strategic Insight for the Region**

Endorsed ministry regularly addresses:

- institutional ethics,
- multi-disciplinary cultures,
- public authority,
- trauma and crisis,
- and civic trust.

This gives the Church a unique vantage point as it builds regional frameworks: functional clarity, institutional literacy, and episcopal alignment are essential for flourishing ministry across diverse contexts.

## **8. What This Work Does *Not* Claim**

- It does not recommend specific structural placement.
- It does not assume GC 2028 will act.
- It does not claim to represent the entire endorsed community.
- It does not assert episcopal authority where the Discipline does not grant it.
- It does not predict future regional structures.

It offers a framework—not a proposal.

## **Conclusion for Episcopal and Agency Leaders**

The Church now has an opportunity to state clearly what its practice has long implied: endorsed ministry is a fully appointed, episcopally-rooted, Connectional expression of the Church's mission within the institutions of public life.

Regionalization will require years of collaborative discernment.

This white paper is offered to assist you in that work—

to help the Connection carry forward a ministry that has served Church and world with integrity for more than a century.

## APPENDIX C

### C.1 Executive Summary: Summary of Differences

#### SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES ACROSS MODELS

	CRITERIA / MODEL	CONTINUITY	RESTORED DIVISION	AFFILIATED COMMISSION	INDEPENDENT COMMISSION
1	Supervisory Clarity & Episcopal Accountability	Indirect oversight; multi-layer mediation between UMEA and bishops	Clear supervisory tie; still mediated through GBHEM	Direct episcopal oversight through COB-constituted board	Direct episcopal oversight; highest alignment with appointment authority
2	Administrative Function & Operational Capacity	Limited capacity; dependent on program unit staffing	Increased administrative support thru GBHEM; moderate scalability	Strong capacity thru admin partnership w/GBHEM while strengthening specialized operations	Build-from-scratch systems; resource intensive; harder to sustain
3	Public Witness & External Representation	Low visibility; no distinct identity	Moderate visibility; still tied to agency layer	Strong denomination presence; clear external point of contact	Strongest public identity; clearest public witness
4	Connectional Identity & Theological Coherence	Weak signaling of ecclesial commitments	Identity strengthened through restored status	Strong alignment with clergy deployment and episcopal role	Strong ecclesial identity; risks symbolic overreach
5	Regionalization Alignment & Adaptability	Low: limited end-state stability, high transition strain	Moderate: improved stability, agency layer strains transition	High: strong end-state stability, scalable in transition	Moderate-High: strong end-state stability, complex transition
6	Governance & Accountability Structures	Low: sub-committee governance; limited transparency	GBHEM board governance with strengthened visibility	Dedicated commission board aligned to supervisory mission	Fully independent commission governance; highest autonomy
7	Institutional Risk and Compliance Posture	Higher risk due to inconsistent processes	Some improvement in process consistency and documentation	Strong compliance posture; clear processes and visibility	Strong compliance if resources allow; vulnerable if under-built
8	Symbolic & Ecclesial Signaling	Low symbolic status; status of minor office within GBHEM	Moderate symbolic strength; restored dignity of role	Strong symbolic placement; signals denominational commitment to mission	Highest symbolic distinction; may exceed practical need

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## APPENDIX C

### C.2 Decision Matrix

#### DECISION MATRIX

	CRITERIA / MODEL	CONTINUITY	RESTORED DIVISION	AFFILIATED COMMISSION	INDEPENDENT COMMISSION
1	Supervisory Clarity & Episcopal Accountability	Low	Moderate	High	High
2	Administrative Function & Operational Capacity	Moderate	Moderate-High	High	Low-Moderate
3	Public Witness & External Representation	High	Moderate	High	Very High
4	Connectional Identity & Theological Coherence	Low	Moderate	High	High
5	Regionalization Alignment & Adaptability	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate-High
6	Governance & Accountability Structures	Low	Moderate	High	High
7	Institutional Risk and Compliance Posture	Low-Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
8	Symbolic & Ecclesial Signaling	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
	<b>Overall Balance</b>	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate-High

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## APPENDIX C

### C.3 Evaluative Criteria – Contextual Introduction

The following criteria provide the analytic foundation used in Parts II and III of this document to distinguish among the four structural alignment pathways. While the tables in Sections C.1 and C.2 offer visual summaries of comparative performance, the descriptions below articulate the substance behind each criterion. Together, these materials supply the interpretive framework that guided the evaluation and support the recommendation presented in Part IV.

#### Evaluative Criteria

- 1. Supervisory Clarity and Episcopal Accountability**  
The structure must enable bishops to provide clear oversight for clergy serving in endorsed settings, with governance aligned to supervisory responsibility.
- 2. Administrative Function and Operational Capacity**  
The alignment must support credentialing, recordkeeping, institutional reporting, pastoral care, and compliance functions without placing unsustainable demands on staff or systems.
- 3. Public Witness and External Representation**  
External partners—federal, clinical, correctional, and other institutional bodies—require a clear denominational point of contact and recognizable authority.
- 4. Connectional Identity and Theological Coherence**  
The ministry’s placement should reflect its nature as an appointed, ecclesial function of the Church, consistent with the Discipline and the bishop’s role in deployment.
- 5. Regionalization Alignment and Adaptability**  
As the U.S. Region develops, endorsement must remain structurally stable across transitions and adaptable to emerging regional forms.
- 6. Governance and Accountability Structures**  
The pathway should offer transparent, mission-appropriate governance that supports episcopal oversight, administrative partnership, and sustainable collaboration.
- 7. Institutional Risk and Compliance Posture**  
Endorsement interfaces with institutions that carry legal, regulatory, and credentialing requirements; the structure must minimize risk and ensure continuity.
- 8. Symbolic and Ecclesial Signaling**  
Structural placement communicates the Church’s priorities. Alignment should reflect the significance of endorsed ministry within the life and mission of the denomination.