

## **DISAFFILIATION PROCESS --**

*As members in The United Methodist Church continue to hold differing views on how to address homosexuality, a process of disaffiliation has been established in [Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline](#) for churches wishing to leave the denomination. Each Annual Conference has also been instructed by the denomination to put together their process of disaffiliation.*

*On June 2, 2022, the Rev. Sheridan Allmond, chair of the BWC's Board of Trustees, reviewed the BWC Disaffiliation Terms. Below are excerpts from her report, edited for length and clarity.*

Paragraph 2553 was added to the Discipline by the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference. It provides provision by which a local church may seek a limited right to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience over issues related to human sexuality.

The provisions in Paragraph 2553 are set to expire on December 31, 2023.

This paragraph states that the terms and conditions for a local church disaffiliation shall be established by the board of trustees of the applicable annual conference.

### **When Does Para 2553 Apply?**

Paragraph 2553 stipulates that the vote to disaffiliate must be based solely for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues.

Votes to disaffiliate for reasons other than over issues related to human sexuality will be addressed under standard church closure provisions identified in Paragraph 2549, entitled Disposition of Property of a Closed Local Church.

### **The BWC Disaffiliation Process**

The steps in the disaffiliation process have essentially gone unchanged from what was formally introduced at the 2021 Annual Conference Session. The process consists of four steps that are led by the district superintendent. The Conference Trustees lead the local church through the last three steps.

The process begins by the local church contacting the district superintendent. This contact allows the district superintendent to provide the church with a package of information that contains the general terms and

conditions specific for their local church to disaffiliate. The Conference Trustees and the Board of Pensions work with the district office to provide the details involved with the terms and conditions.

Once the package of information is received, the local church will coordinate a period of discernment. At our last Annual Conference, we did not yet have an outline for how the discernment should proceed. We have now formally described an activity-based discernment process to help a congregation coordinate their process of discernment.

After the congregation completes the discernment process, they will work with their district superintendent to schedule a church conference to vote on the disaffiliation general terms and conditions.

If a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote is obtained at the church conference, then the Conference Trustees will develop the Disaffiliation Agreement. At the same time, the Trustees will work with the district office to have a Disaffiliation Resolution introduced at the next Annual Conference. With Annual Conference approval, the local Church Trustees will take the necessary actions to fulfill the terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement and make all specified payments **prior** to the church's established Date of Disaffiliation.

## **Local Church Discernment Process**

The Trustees have adopted an activity-based discernment process that will serve as a guide for helping churches through the discernment process. These activities must be completed **prior** to the Church Conference and are intended to provide a common basis by which members of a congregation can participate in a fair discussion on the disaffiliation matters.

As part of that process, congregations are asked to view the BWC webinar that was recorded in the Spring of 2022 called "[Stay or Go: Real Talk for United Methodists Exploring Their Future](#)." This webinar is a discussion with panelists from UM Next and the Wesleyan Covenant Association as they answered questions about their visions for ministry after separation.

The second activity is a four-week small group study, "[Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church](#)." Each chapter of this study includes stories from diverse viewpoints refers to the United Methodist structure and practices to guide the group's reflection and conversation.

These support materials are intended to give a common basis by which a congregation can hold an open forum where a safe space is created for

hearing questions and answers that have arisen from engaging these materials.

The fourth step in the discernment process ensures that the general terms and conditions are shared with all professing members of the congregation.

Similar to the actions taken after a church votes to close, it is the responsibility of the district superintendent to assist congregants who are interested in transferring their membership to another UMC congregation should the church conference decide to disaffiliate.

The congregation will also have access to Wespith resources that help to explain the Withdrawal Liability Payments and the impact of disaffiliation on Clergy Benefits.

Defining an activity-based discernment process, which can be used by all BWC churches, will help to alleviate the concerns within a congregation that could arise with a less structured approach. The intent of the process is to provide a fair discussion about the disaffiliation matters that is, at the same time, not too cumbersome on a congregation and their leaders.

## **BWC General Terms and Conditions**

In accordance with Para. 2553, these terms and conditions have been developed and adopted by the Conference Trustees. You will find that they have not changed from what was reported to the Annual Conference last October.

### **Specified Local Church Payments**

There will be three specified local church payments that will be included in every Disaffiliation Agreement.

- The first is a payment equal to 50 percent of the assessed value of the church property.
- The second is a payment of an additional 12 months of mission shares.
- And the third is a payment of the church's *pro rata* share of the unfunded pension obligation. This is known as the Withdrawal Liability Payment.

### **Unspecified Local Church Payments**

There are also several unspecified local church payments that may apply to a particular local church Disaffiliation Agreement with the Conference Trustees. These include:

- Payment of any unpaid mission shares from the 12 months prior to the Disaffiliation Date.
- Payment of all outstanding loans from the Conference Trustees.
- The congregation will be responsible for paying off all of its third-party debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign or transfer such obligations to its new entity created before disaffiliation. For example, a church mortgage with a bank should be paid off or transferred to the new entity before the Disaffiliation Date.
- And, the congregation will also be required to return to the donor or the donor's heirs and assignees any restricted funds or endowments.

### **Additional Terms**

The Disaffiliation Agreements will also contain the following terms:

- The disaffiliating church will cease use of the term "United Methodist" and use of the Cross and Flame insignia. The church will also be removed from the group ruling tax exemption.
- The church shall take all steps necessary to close and/or dissolve any legal entities and to settle, liquidate, or transfer all assets and obligations of such entities, or to establish any new legal entities, or to modify its current organization documents.
- The church shall be responsible for all costs associated with transferring property from The United Methodist Church to the new entity.
- Churches subject to reverter clauses in their land deeds shall be responsible for the return of said property or for filing for release.
- The congregation will be responsible for obtaining pastoral leadership and to assume all responsibilities for its pastor's salary and benefits after the date of disaffiliation.

## **Timeline for 2023 Annual Conference**

To be considered for a vote at the 2023 Annual Conference, a church will need to complete their Local Church Conference disaffiliation vote no later than April 30, 2023. By completing the vote by that date, the Trustees will be able to work with the District Offices to ensure a disaffiliation resolution is presented to the Annual Conference which starts on May 31, 2023.

After an approved vote by the Annual Conference, a disaffiliating church will have until December 31, 2023, to make all payments and complete the fulfillment of the terms specified in the Disaffiliation Agreement.

Churches that are interested in starting the disaffiliation process must contact their district superintendent to initiate the process. This can be done at any time, but it is recommended that churches start the process early enough to complete the local church conference vote by **April 30, 2023**.

See video:

<https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-views/trustees-outline-process-for-disaffiliation/>