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***Principles Regarding Local Church Requests for Disaffiliation
Ratified by the Arkansas Annual Conference
June 4, 2021***

In response to actions taken by the 2019 called General Conference, it is possible that local churches will seek to leave The United Methodist Church through the process of Disaffiliation. The Arkansas Annual Conference hereby clarifies the principles governing its review process of any such request. We believe these to be fair to all.

As of this date, ¶2553 of the *Book of Discipline* governs procedures by which a local church can be granted permission to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and depart with its property and other assets. We are aware that ¶2553 may be revised by future General Conferences and that other proposals may supersede these Disciplinary paragraphs in the future.

Paragraph 2553 of the *Book of Discipline* requires approval of the annual conference for a church to disaffiliate. While other approvals may be necessary as well, the following sets out the basic steps and requirements established by the Arkansas Conference Board of Trustees for the annual conference to approve disaffiliation:

1. When a request to disaffiliate is first received by a district superintendent, the request shall be forwarded to the Bishop, members of the appointive cabinet and the conference chancellor for review to determine if the request is based on at least one of the limited requirements found in ¶2553.1, namely:
 - a. *"...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
 - b. *"...the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow."*

The review will determine if the reasons of conscience are related to specific changes in the Book of Discipline as identified in ¶2553.1. Similarly, "actions or inactions of the annual conference" must also clearly relate to the specific changes in the Book of Discipline as identified in ¶2553.1.

2. If it is determined that the request for disaffiliation is not founded on at least one of these requirements the request will not be considered further, and written notice of the decision with explanation shall be given to the church pastor and Trustees Chair by the District Superintendent.
3. If the request for disaffiliation is found to be based on ¶2553.1 criteria, the pastor and appropriate church leadership team shall be instructed to lead a process of discernment open to all members of the local church over a period no less than three months. Approval of the discernment process must be made by the Appointive Cabinet upon recommendation by the church's District Superintendent. As part of the discernment process the church seeking disaffiliation must:

- a. distribute and review information from the Center for Administrative Services concerning tithe, unfunded pension liability, and other costs related to standard terms as defined in Step 6 below.
 - b. hold at least three "listening sessions," advertised and open to all members of the local church to solicit their input, with at least the first being facilitated by the District Superintendent or designee. Attendance shall be taken at each session. Findings of the sessions are to be prepared in a report including the attendance roll.
 - c. prepare a statement articulating its theological and missional foundations in seeking to disaffiliate for reasons of conscience related to "human sexuality."
4. Upon completion of the discernment process, the two written reports will be delivered to the church's District Superintendent. Upon certification by the superintendent that the process of discernment has been completed and that a majority of the local church professing members are in favor of the request for disaffiliation, the DS shall authorize a church conference following the provisions of ¶246.8, ¶248 and ¶2553.3.
 5. If disaffiliation is affirmed by a two-thirds majority of the professing members of the local church present at the duly called church conference (¶2553.3) the process may move forward. An official written attendance report shall be included with the minutes. If the two-thirds majority is not reached, this process leading to disaffiliation ends.
 6. The Conference Board of Trustees, in conjunction with the cabinet, annual conference treasurer, annual conference benefits officer, director of connectional ministries, and conference chancellor, will work with designated church leaders to prepare a Disaffiliation Agreement between the Arkansas Conference and the local church trustees in accordance with all provisions of ¶2553.4. The Disaffiliation Agreement shall contain at least:
 - a. All provisions of ¶2553 including:
 - i. A clear effective date of disaffiliation,
 - ii. A recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶2501 (the Trust Clause,) notwithstanding the release of property therefrom,
 - iii. Acknowledgement that the local church shall pay any unpaid conference tithe for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of conference tithe,
 - iv. Acknowledgement that the disaffiliating local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property,
 - v. Agreement that all costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church,
 - vi. A stipulation that the local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference as determined by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, (¶2553.4.g)
 - vii. A statement that the local church shall either satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation, (¶2553.4.e)
 - viii. Agreement that all payment shall occur prior to the effective date of departure, and (¶2553.4.f)

- ix. Acknowledgement that all transfers of property shall be made prior to the effective date of departure.
- b. Additionally, the following standard terms will be applied:
 - i. Repayment of district, annual conference or general church grants made in the past ten years, excluding benevolence grants, and
 - ii. Remaining salary support for the current appointive year (if applicable.)
- 7. Upon acceptance of the disaffiliation agreement by the local church, the Conference Trustees will request a vote of approval for disaffiliation at the next Annual Conference. A simple majority of Annual Conference members present and voting shall ratify the motion for disaffiliation, contingent upon all provisions of the agreement being fulfilled before release of claim can occur (§2529.1(b)(3); see JCD 1379).
- 8. Upon an affirmative vote of approval by the annual conference, the Arkansas Conference shall release any claims that it may have under §2501 and other paragraphs of *The Book of Discipline*, or under the agreement, provided that:
 - a. The disaffiliating local church has reimbursed the annual conference for all funds due under the agreement,
 - b. There are no other outstanding liabilities or claims against The United Methodist Church as a result of the disaffiliation, and
 - c. All other provisions of the agreement have been fulfilled.