

The Arkansas Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church
Guidelines for Reviewing Requests from Local Church to Enter the Disaffiliation Process

The “Principles Regarding Local Church Requests for Disaffiliation,” ratified by the Arkansas Annual Conference on June 4, 2021, require the bishop, appointive cabinet and conference chancellor to conduct a review process when local churches seek to enter the discernment process provided by ¶2553 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*.

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.

While these principles require a review, they do not specify what criteria will be used to make this determination. The bishop, members of the appointive cabinet and conference chancellor, therefore, have the discretion and authority to determine the scope and nature of the review. They have agreed that for their review, they will accept as truthful the church’s stated reasons for requesting disaffiliation. Further, so long as at least one of the stated reasons for disaffiliation includes those set out in Para. 2553.1, they will understand that the reasons of conscience are related to those stated in Para. 2553.1. If additional reasons are stated, they will not be considered as a basis for disaffiliation. Finally, the Principles do not require that specific language be used to describe a church’s rationale for disaffiliation. Therefore, so long as the church’s rationale can be ascertained, no specific language is required. They have agreed, however, that the following or similar language will suffice to explain a church’s intent to disaffiliate for reasons set out in paragraph 2553.1:

a. “...reasons of conscience ¶2553.1 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...” and/or

b. “...the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.”

If it is not clear whether the rationale for pursuing disaffiliation is related to ¶2553.1 the district superintendent will ask the church leadership body for additional clarification concerning the reasons for the request as may be required.