



Proceedings

of the Special Session of the Arkansas Conference

November 19, 2022

Bishop Gary E. Mueller, Presiding

Rev. Dr. Candace Barron, Secretary



SATURDAY MORNING

The morning worship included song, prayer and a devotional from Psalm 130, given by Bishop Gary Mueller.

THE SPECIAL CALLED SESSION

The morning business session was called to order by Bishop Gary Mueller. He said the session will consider the following issue: *The consideration of recommendations from the Conference Board of Trustees requesting ratification of Disaffiliation Agreements with various congregations of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church, in accordance with 2553 of The 2016 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, and the Principles adopted at the 2021 Arkansas Annual Conference Session and Judicial Council Decision 1379.*

Bishop Mueller introduced Bishop Jimmy Nunn of the Oklahoma Area Conference to be a second Bishop in attendance in case the presiding Bishop cannot preside due to medical or personal emergencies. Bishop Mueller called for “holy conferencing” in this session. He explained that according to Judicial Council rulings, the vote would be to ratify or not ratify the disaffiliation agreements the Board of Trustees have brought forward and nothing can be amended. No other business can be taken according to the call of the Special Session according to the *Book of Discipline* which is the ruling document for this Session rather than only Robert’s Rules of Order.

Bishop Mueller introduced the Conference Secretary, Rev. Dr. Candace Barron. He gave a thank you to former Conference Secretary Clark Atkins for getting Rev. Dr. Barron ready to go for this special session.

Rev. Dr. Barron explained the Organization of the Conference, giving information about the Special Session, the Adoption of the Session Rules, the Designation of the Bar of the Conference and the Introduction of the Tellers. Each vote requires a simple majority of eligible members.

Rev. Scott Stewart, Mena FUMC, asked to amend the Session Rules in Amendment C, Sentence 1, to say “agreements” (plural). He also made a motion to amend the Session Rules Amendment C, Sentence 5, to vote on all the disaffiliation recommendations as a block vote.

One speech was made against the motion, one speech was made in favor of the motion.

Rev. Nathan Kilbourne, Jacksonville FUMC, made an amendment to Rev. Stewart’s motion, asking to vote on churches that have a 90 percent threshold or above to be voted on as a block. Those under the 90 percent threshold would be voted on individually.

Four speeches were given in favor and four speeches were given against the Kilbourne amendment.

Before any votes were taken, Todd Burris, Director and Treasurer of the Center for Administrative Services, gave the Voting Instructions. Due to wireless internet issues, the first votes were taken by hand. (Later, when the internet was available, votes were counted by electronic ballot.)

The Kilbourne Amendment to the Stewart Amendment was **APPROVED** by a clear majority by a count of hands.

Calling the question of debating the Kilbourne Amendment was called. The vote was **APPROVED** by a two-thirds vote by a count of hands.

The amended Session Rules were now under consideration. The question to vote on the Session Rules as amended with the 90 percent threshold was **APPROVED** by a two-thirds vote by a count of hands.

The Sessions Rules as amended were **ADOPTED** by a majority vote by a count of hands.

A review of the Disaffiliation Process was given by Ms. Michelle Ator, Conference Chancellor; Rev. Dr. Blake Bradford, Dean of the Appointive Cabinet; and Rev. Dr. Tony Griffin, Chair of the Conference Board of Trustees. The guidelines for the Discernment Process are available on the Arkansas Conference website at www.arumc.org.

The major steps in the Disaffiliation Process per Paragraph 2553 were reviewed and included, among other things, participation in a time of discernment (an initial disaffiliation request, listening sessions, a straw poll); Local Church Decision (a church conference conducted pursuant to the requirements of *The Discipline* with $\frac{2}{3}$ majority); the completion of an agreed proposed

Disaffiliation Agreement with the Conference Board of Trustees, Ratification of the Disaffiliation Agreement by the Conference (by a simple majority vote; and the Completion of Disaffiliation, (completing all of the steps outlined in the agreement). Ms. Ator offered prayer for wisdom, love and peace to prevail during the process. Rev. Dr. Bradford said the Appointive Cabinet adopted the leadership principles in this season of disaffiliation and discernment that included allowing churches to land where they may thrive in their disciple-making mission while protecting appropriate interests of the UMC, and bathing the process in prayer. He said the role of the District Superintendent is to steward the process with fairness, integrity and grace. Rev. Dr. Tony Griffin, chairman of the Conference Board of Trustees, added to this by explaining the role of the Trustees in this season of disaffiliation and discernment, which did not include a recommendation about how the Conference should vote, but included gathering information needed to complete or discontinue requests by disaffiliating churches based on the information presented by the churches, which has been and will continue to be an ongoing process until the final Disaffiliation Date. Weekly meetings have been held by the Board of Trustees to review folders of information received from churches in the disaffiliation and discernment process.

The Special Session was dismissed for lunch at 12:15 p.m.



SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Bishop Gary Mueller called the Afternoon Business Session to order at 1:30 p.m. with the Call to Order. Rev. Dr. Ulysses Washington, Central District Superintendent, opened the session with prayer. The consideration of the Individual Church Recommendations was started.

TRUSTEES REPORT

Churches were initially organized for presentation based on the percentage of votes in favor of disaffiliation at the Church Conferences. Per the adopted session rules, Rev. Dr. Tony Griffin, Chair of the Conference Board of Trustees, presented for a vote the disaffiliation agreements for churches 1 through 25 (those above the 90 percent threshold) on the agenda.

Churches above the 90 percent threshold: Amity, Asbury Magnolia, Bellefonte, Bethesda Campground, Bland Chapel, Bruce Memorial, Dalark, Delight, Hebron-Carlisle, Hinton, Holly Springs-Sparkman, Holly Springs-Texarkana, Kibler, Mount Zion-Lonoke, Parker's Chapel, Saint John-Hope, Saint Mark-El Dorado, Saint Paul-El Dorado, Sparkman, theJourney, Washington, Westside, Heritage-Van Buren, Mountainside, and Alma.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification of the motion for disaffiliation of the 25 churches in question.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreements between the Board of Trustees and the 25 local churches above the 90 percent threshold was **APPROVED** by a vote by a count of hands.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Grace United Methodist Church-Conway was **APPROVED** by a count of hands.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Smyrna UMC was **APPROVED** by a count of hands.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement for Mount Tabor-Cabot.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Mount Tabor-Cabot was **APPROVED** by a standing vote count of 323 in favor and 252 against.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement for Saint Paul-Searcy.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Saint Paul-Searcy was **APPROVED** by a vote by a standing vote count of 337 in favor and 245 against.

One speech was given in favor and no speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement for Heber Springs First UMC.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Heber Springs First UMC was **APPROVED** by a count of hands.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Stuttgart First UMC was **APPROVED** by a count of hands.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Piney Grove UMC was **APPROVED** by a count of hands.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement of Cabot UMC.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Cabot UMC was **NOT RATIFIED** by an electronic vote count of 296 in favor and 310 against.

The session was adjourned for a 15-minute break at 3:30 p.m. Rev. Jennie Williams of Elm Springs UMC re-opened the session at 3:50 p.m. with a prayer.

A request was made to do a standing vote for the previous motion on the disaffiliation proposal of Cabot UMC. Bishop Mueller, as chair of the session, said he is convinced of the integrity of the previous electronic vote count. A motion was made to appeal that decision of the chair. Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against the appeal to the ruling of the chair.

The motion to appeal the decision of the chair upholding the electronic vote **WAS DEFEATED** by a hand count. The electronic vote of Cabot UMC was upheld.

A motion was made that all further votes, given the availability of the internet at that time, be made electronically. The motion was **APPROVED** by a hand vote.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Siloam Springs UMC was **APPROVED** by an electronic vote, 418 in favor and 173 against.

One speech was given in favor in response to the disaffiliation agreement of Christ-Texarkana UMC.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Christ-Texarkana UMC was **APPROVED** by an electronic vote, 461 in favor and 127 against.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement of Fordyce First UMC.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Fordyce First UMC was **APPROVED** by an electronic vote, 327 in favor and 264 against.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement of Searcy First UMC.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Searcy First UMC was **NOT RATIFIED** by an electronic vote, 287 in favor and 305 against.

Three speeches were given in favor and three speeches were given against ratification in response to the disaffiliation agreement of Jonesboro First UMC.

The motion to ratify the disaffiliation agreement between the Board of Trustees and Jonesboro First UMC was **NOT RATIFIED** by an electronic vote, 254 in favor and 335 against.

Rev. Dr. Candace Barron announced that Katelyn Hiatt, executive director of Mount Eagle Retreat Center, is having surgery and asked for prayers.

The session was on a five-minute standing adjournment at 5:15 p.m. for preparation for a Service of Communion.

The Special Session was adjourned by Bishop Mueller at 6 p.m.