



JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
 CONSEIL JUDICIAIRE DE L'ÉGLISE METHODISTE UNIE  
 RECHTSHOF DER EVANGELISCH-METHODISTISCHEN KIRCHE  
 CONSELHO JUDICIAL DA IGREJA METODISTA UNIDA  
 CONSEJO DE LA JUDICATURA DE LA IGLESIA METODISTA UNIDA



### Petition for Declaratory Decision

This form is to be used by the Secretary of the body authorized to petition the Judicial Council for a ruling in the nature of a declaratory decision as to the constitutionality, meaning, application, or effect of (please check one):

- The Book of Discipline 2016* or any portion thereof (§ 2610.1)
- any act or legislation of a General Conference (§ 2610.1)
- any proposed legislation (§ 2609.2)



Name of body authorized to make a Petition (§ 2610.2): The Council of Bishops

Date of session: 05/12/2022 (month/day/year) Location: Washington, D.C., USA

Name of Secretary: Bishop Jonathan Holston

Address: 100 Maryland Avenue City: Washington

State/Province: D.C. ZIP/Postal Code 20002 Country: USA

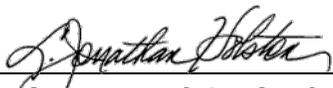
Phone: 202-547-6270 Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: bishop@umcsc.org

To be reviewed (indicate paragraph number, title of legislation and/or act where applicable):

Book of Discipline: 6, 206-213, 431, 1504.23, 2547, 2548.2, 2549, 2553

Legislation: \_\_\_\_\_

Act of General Conference: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:   
**Secretary of the Conference/Body**

Date: 05/20/2022  
 (month/day/year)

**The following must be attached:**

- Text of the written Petition for Declaratory Decision as originally presented
- Minutes of proceedings
- List of names and addresses of interested parties, including eu mail
- Other relevant materials (e.g. conference rules, resolutions, policies, reports)

➤ Send electronic copy of this form and all materials in PDF and Microsoft Word format to: **secretary@umcjudicialcouncil.org**

➤ Mail thirteen (13) sets of hard copies to:  
**UMC Judicial Council, c/o LaNella Smith, Assistant to the J.C. Secretary,  
 1215 Shady Lane, Durham, NC 27712**

**IN THE JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**IN THE MATTER OF QUESTIONS RELATED TO**  
**PARAGRAPH 2548.2 OF THE 2016 BOOK OF DISCIPLINE**

**REQUEST FOR DECLARATORY DECISION**

The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church ("COB") submits this request for declaratory decision on the following questions related to the 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church ("the Discipline"):

- (1) What bodies within the United Methodist Church are "duly qualified and authorized representatives of both parties concerned" who must sign and approve a comity agreement under ¶ 2548.2?
- (2) What bodies within the United Methodist Church are required to determine and approve whether an entity is "another evangelical denomination" within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2?
- (3) What is required under the 2016 Book of Discipline to determine what is a "denomination" within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2?
- (4) Does the provision of ¶ 2548.2 that "the annual conference may instruct and direct the board of trustees of a local church to deed property to one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination" violate the constitutional authority of an annual conference under ¶ 33 with respect to local church property, including the "constitutionally embedded separation of executive and legislative powers" noted as "settled principles of church law and polity" acknowledged in Judicial Council Decision 1257?
- (5) If ¶ 2548.2 is constitutional, may ¶ 2548.2's authority to direct the local church to deed its property in accordance with that paragraph be exercised separately from any other process that results in the merger of the local church pursuant to ¶ 2547, disaffiliation pursuant to ¶ 2553, closure pursuant to ¶ 2549, or some other disposition of the local church deeding the property that results in termination of the local church as a unit of the United Methodist Church?
- (6) Must "an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement" within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2 comply with the connectional polity of the United Methodist

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Church as set forth in the 2016 Book of Discipline, including ¶¶ 206 – 213 of the Discipline?

(7) May a comity agreement within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2 include provisions not authorized or prohibited by the 2016 Book of Discipline?

(8) What vote is required for an annual conference to “instruct and direct the board of trustees of a local church to deed property” under the authority of ¶ 2548.2?

The Council of Bishops authorized the filing of this request for declaratory decision by vote at its meeting on May 12, 2022. A copy of the certification of the vote is attached to this request as Exhibit A.

### *Jurisdiction*

The Judicial Council has jurisdiction in this matter pursuant to ¶ 2610.2b.

### *Interested Parties*

No particular interested parties have been identified. The questions addressed in this request for declaratory decision are matters of general interest across the UMC.

### *Rationale*

Paragraph 2548.2 of the 2016 Book of Discipline provides as follows:

With the consent of the presiding bishop and of a majority of the district superintendents and of the district board of church location and building and at the request of the charge conference or of a meeting of the membership of the local church, where required by law, and in accordance with said law, the annual conference may instruct and direct the board of trustees of a local church to deed church property to one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination under an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement, provided that such agreement shall have been committed to writing and signed and approved by the duly qualified and authorized representatives of both parties concerned.

This paragraph of the Discipline was originally adopted by the General Conference in 1948. See excerpts of the Journal of the 1948 General Conference of The Methodist Church and ¶ 256 of the

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1948 Book of Discipline of The Methodist Church attached as exhibits to the Authentication by Custodian of Records (Exhibit B hereto). The historical context of the church law concepts of fraternity and comity and the legislative history of ¶ 2548.2 are important to the consideration of the questions presented by this request. Lawrence E. Hillis has researched these concepts and the history of ¶ 2548.2 in the records of the General Commission on Archives & History of the UMC. A summary of his research and his analysis of the same is set forth in the Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis attached hereto as Exhibit C.

Various annual conferences have pending resolutions related to ¶ 2548.2. Examples of these annual conference resolutions are attached hereto collectively as Exhibit D. All of the resolutions seem to characterize ¶ 2548.2 as a means of disaffiliation or separation of a local church from the UMC. However, ¶ 2548.2 does not expressly pertain to, or authorize, the disaffiliation or separation of a local church. Instead, that paragraph appears limited to the deeding of property without any reference to what may happen to the local church after the property is deeded. Paragraph 2547.6, which is related to interdenominational local church mergers, provides that “[w]hen property is involved, the provisions of ¶2548 obtain.” That paragraph appears to confirm that ¶ 2548.2 addresses only issues of property and not a process for disaffiliation or separation.

In addition, chancellors, bishops and others reviewing both ¶ 2548.2 and the proposed resolutions attached hereto as Exhibit D have raised, in one form or another, the questions included within this request for declaratory decision. The historical context and lack of previous judicial interpretation of ¶ 2548.2, coupled with the undefined terms and ambiguous language in that paragraph, make this request significant and material in this season of the Church. Following the order and discipline of the UMC regarding any such separation is imperative, and a declaratory

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decision by the Judicial Council on these questions is necessary to provide uniform interpretation and implementation of the Discipline.

Reserving further discussion and argument for its opening brief, the COB makes these brief comments concerning each of the proffered questions:

(1) What bodies within the United Methodist Church are “duly qualified and authorized representatives of both parties concerned” who must sign and approve a comity agreement under ¶ 2548.2?

The quoted language from ¶ 2548.2 does not define who is authorized to sign and approve a comity agreement and refers to “both parties concerned.” This reference is ambiguous without historical context, particularly as that paragraph is viewed in the context of the proposed resolutions attached to this request as Exhibit D. With that historical context as provided in the Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis (e.g., ¶ 5e), the phrase “both parties concerned” likely means the two denominations that have previously entered into a denominational comity agreement. If the historical context were ignored, the phrase “both parties concerned” would still be unclear because the draft resolutions attached hereto as Exhibit D seem to suggest that there are at least three parties involved in a comity agreement as contemplated by the resolutions. That is, the annual conference must instruct, the local church must request, and the other denomination must also join. However, even that reading of ¶ 2548.2 ignores that the right of any party to use ¶ 2548.2 is subject to approval of “the presiding bishop and of a majority of the district superintendents and of the district board of church location and building.” Therefore, the use of the phrase “both parties concerned” is ambiguous in light of the other provisions of ¶ 2548.2 and the Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis and requires clarification through a declaratory decision by the Judicial Council.

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(2) What bodies within the United Methodist Church are required to determine and approve whether an entity is “another evangelical denomination” within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2?

As the historical context provided by the Hillis Declaration sets forth, the words “another evangelical denomination” were generally understood to refer to particular bodies when the predecessor paragraph (¶ 256) was adopted in 1948. The COB does not propose that the understanding in 1948 must remain static and not subject to expansion. However, the issue that has arisen in the proposed resolutions (*e.g.*, Proposed Resolution of Indiana Annual Conference attached within Exhibit D)<sup>1</sup> is whether the annual conference or some other body or bodies within the UMC must make that determination. According to Mr. Hillis’s analysis of the historical context, the annual conference has no such authority to determine that another body is “another evangelical denomination” and it is the General Conference that must make that determination. *See, e.g.*, Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis, ¶¶ 6d – 6i. A declaratory decision is clearly indicated as to this question before annual conferences consider such resolutions based on ¶ 2548.2 and perhaps make varying decisions on whether a particular ecclesial body is “another evangelical denomination” or raise questions of law related to that issue that are decided differently by bishops. The Judicial Council’s declaratory decision is needed in order to provide a uniform determination that can be applied across the denomination.

(3) What is required under the 2016 Book of Discipline to determine what is a “denomination” within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2?

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<sup>1</sup> The resolution provides as follows in relevant part: “For the avoidance of doubt, the list of churches considered to be an evangelical church for the purposes of Paragraph 2548.2 shall include the Global Methodist Church.”

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This question involves similar considerations as the previous question but raises the additional issue of whether a self-proclaimed denomination qualifies or whether a body must meet certain basic requirements in order to qualify as a denomination within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2. The proposed legislation known as the *Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation* contains requirements for a denomination and stands in contrast to the complete dearth of any guidance in the Discipline on that issue. One important consideration that may apply to the Global Methodist Church is whether it has a formal existence yet and if not, when will that formal existence be subject to recognition as a denomination. Nevertheless, as indicated by the Hillis Declaration, the historical context and current language of the Discipline indicate that this authority to recognize another denomination is vested only in the General Conference.

(4) Does the provision of ¶ 2548.2 that “the annual conference may instruct and direct the board of trustees of a local church to deed property to one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination” violate the constitutional authority of an annual conference under ¶ 33 with respect to local church property, including the “constitutionally embedded separation of executive and legislative powers” noted as “settled principles of church law and polity” acknowledged in Judicial Council Decision 1257?

Although the rationale for asking this question is self-evident, the issue is connected to the other questions in a unique connectional way. That is, a preliminary review of the Discipline suggests that, other than ¶ 2548.2, an annual conference only has authority to instruct a local church to deed its property or to otherwise cause a transfer of local church property when the church has been abandoned and is being closed pursuant to ¶ 2549. As indicated below in relation to Question 5, the ¶ 2549 process, and the processes associated with mergers under ¶ 2547 and disaffiliations under ¶ 2553, address the termination of the local church’s affiliation with the UMC either through closure, merger or disaffiliation, but ¶ 2548.2 does not. Something is missing that would support

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the constitutionality of the annual conference to take action as provided in ¶ 2548.2 without violating the separation of powers doctrine. The COB will address that issue in its opening brief.

(5) If ¶ 2548.2 is constitutional, may ¶ 2548.2's authority to direct the local church to deed its property in accordance with that paragraph be exercised separately from any other process that results in the merger of the local church pursuant to ¶ 2547, disaffiliation pursuant to ¶ 2553, closure pursuant to ¶ 2549, or some other disposition of the local church deeding the property that results in termination of the local church as a unit of the United Methodist Church?

This question is related to Question 4 as indicated above, but it illustrates the separate issue regarding the limitation of the language of ¶ 2548.2 to the deeding of property only. It is important to annual conferences, local churches, and resident bishops to know whether the authority in ¶ 2548.2 may be exercised without regard to local church closure, merger or disaffiliation or whether it can only be used in the context of one of those processes as defined by the Discipline. To allow it to be used independently of the processes for closure, merger or disaffiliation requires some finding of implicit authority related to the termination of the local church as a unit of the United Methodist Church that does not appear to be supported by the Discipline. In addition, as with the other questions presented in this request, the analysis in the Hillis Declaration indicates that ¶ 2548.2 cannot be implemented or used in isolation and must be consistent with various paragraphs that the COB will address in its opening brief, but particularly ¶ 209. *See* Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis, ¶ 7j.

(6) Must “an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement” within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2 comply with the connectional polity of the United Methodist Church as set forth in the 2016 Book of Discipline, including ¶¶ 206 – 213 of the Discipline?

As indicated in the Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis attached hereto as Exhibit C, the precursor of ¶ 2548.2 (¶ 256 of the 1948 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church) was

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enacted alongside other provisions that provided context for that paragraph. *See, e.g.*, Declaration of Lawrence E. Hillis, ¶¶ 7f-7j. Paragraphs 206-213 of the 2016 Book of Discipline are understood by the COB to be primary provisions enacted in association with ¶ 2548.2's predecessor that remain. The requirements of those paragraphs are both expressly connected in the 2016 Book of Discipline to ¶ 2548.2 and other provisions by ¶ 209 and implicitly as a part of the connectional polity of the UMC. The answer to this question is significant to a uniform understanding of ¶ 2548.2 and an orderly and proper implementation of its provisions if the paragraph is constitutional.

(7) May a comity agreement within the meaning of ¶ 2548.2 include provisions not authorized or prohibited by the 2016 Book of Discipline?

The answer to this question seems self-apparent on its face, but it is important to help annual conferences interpret and implement the provisions of ¶ 2548.2. For example, if a local church has pension obligations that must be honored for disaffiliation under ¶¶ 2553 and 1504.23, can a comity agreement nullify those requirements of the Discipline? The COB does not believe pension obligations can be nullified or ignored. There are other examples that the COB will identify in its opening brief, but the resolution of this question is also a matter of orderly and uniform interpretation and implementation of ¶ 2548.2.

(8) What vote is required for an annual conference to “instruct and direct the board of trustees of a local church to deed property” under the authority of ¶ 2548.2?

The final question is one that has been raised primarily due to proposed resolutions that characterize ¶ 2548.2 as another means of disaffiliation by a local church. As indicated above, the COB believes ¶ 2548.2 relates only the disposition of local church property and not to disaffiliation of a local church from the UMC. Paragraph 2553 sets forth the 2/3 vote threshold for a local

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church, and Decision 1379 ruled that a simple majority vote is required by the annual conference for such disaffiliations. It appears to the COB that a simple majority vote by the annual conference is also the voting threshold for the annual conference voting on a request under ¶ 2548.2. However, the question is important to annual conferences and resident bishops in order to avoid doubt.

In conclusion, the COB respectfully submits this request for declaratory decision to the Judicial Council. The Judicial Council is an important part of our connectional order and polity, and the council's decision on these important questions will maintain that order and polity and the rule of church law.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jonathan Holston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

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BISHOP JONATHAN HOLSTON  
SECRETARY  
COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

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**EXHIBIT A**

**Excerpt of Minutes of Council of Bishops Meeting on May 12, 2022**

On May 12, 2022, the following motion was presented and adopted by the Council of Bishops:

*Request for Declaratory Decision Related to Paragraph 2548.2:*

Bishop Malone moved, Bishop Trimble seconded, that the COB request a Declaratory Decision on 8 questions related to Paragraph 2548.2. **Motion carried with no negative votes and two abstentions.**

CERTIFIED this 20th day of May 2022.



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BISHOP JONATHAN HOLSTON  
SECRETARY  
COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

## DECLARATION OF LAWRENCE E. HILLIS

I, Lawrence E. Hillis, hereby make this declaration in connection with the request for a declaratory decision of the Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church (“COB”) regarding Paragraph 2548.2 of the 2016 Book of Discipline.

1. I am an independent research consultant engaged by the General Commission of Archives & History of the United Methodist Church.

2. I have personally conducted research into the historical contexts of fraternity and comity to assist the UMC in understanding Paragraph 2548.2 of the 2016 Book of Discipline. I have also researched the enactment of the predecessor paragraphs of Paragraph 2548.2 and how that paragraph relates to other paragraphs in the Discipline, including the current 2016 Book of Discipline. Primary and secondary sources reviewed in my research and supporting my analysis in this declaration are attached to Dr. Ashley Boggan Dreff’s Authentication by Custodian of Records.

3. The following represents my research based on the records of the General Commission of Archives & History and other relevant sources.

#### 4. Fraternity Defined:

a. In the ecumenical context, “fraternity” designates the principles and practices through which different ecclesial bodies formally recognize one another and establish a mutually acknowledged mode of relationship. In its simplest form, fraternity involves the cessation of political and ecclesial hostilities, such as those longstanding military and para-military conflicts between Protestants and Catholics. Moving beyond the mere cessation of violence, fraternity can extend to a shared recognition of a common “familial” inheritance or through joint membership in a larger ecumenical body. In either case, the establishment of fraternity does not necessitate further cooperative action.

b. Throughout the history of Methodism, the recognition of fraternity between ecclesial bodies has traditionally been expressed through the exchange of fraternal delegations to the General Conference. While not holding any voting power, these delegates have customarily been invited to offer remarks reaffirming good relations between the two bodies. In this context, there is significant historical precedence to suggest that the General Conference reserves the power to establish fraternal relations through the vesting of authority to fraternal delegations whose actions require ratification at a subsequent General Conference. So too, there have been occasions in which the General Conference has rejected fraternal delegations sent by another ecclesial body, thereby establishing or reaffirming a condition of “no relation,” if not outright hostility.

#### 5. The Joint Commission on Fraternal Relations: MEC Schism 1844 to 1880:

a. In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) entered schism over slavery. Just a year prior, numerous reformers and abolitionists had separated to form the Wesleyan Methodist denomination in what was, up to that point, the most significant separation in the denomination’s history. That departure spurred the remaining abolitionists with the MEC to take a stronger stance at the 1844 General Conference. The conflict found its spark in Bishop James O. Andrew, who had recently inherited enslaved people. While slavery had been a significant issue over the decades, at no point had the issue risen to the level of the episcopacy. As a result of the heated debates that followed,



a committee of nine was formed to assess the situation. The recommendation they brought back to the body involved the establishment of a second General Conference to be held in Louisville, Kentucky, two years later. It was affirmed and adopted that all annual conferences and local churches that supported slavery would attend that conference, and affiliate there as the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) (The Methodist Experience in America [MEA], 185-191).

b. In the following years, something akin to a 'cold war' raged between the two General Conferences, with circuit riders from both bodies intruding upon the other's territory. So too, major conflicts over church property and land deeds emerged that rose as far as the supreme court. Multiple families brought suits against the MECS, arguing that land on which church property rested had been deeded exclusively to the Methodist Episcopal Church, and post-schism, the new church had violated the deed and forfeited their claim to it (MEA, 192-194).

c. In an effort to reconcile, the MECS commissioned the Rev. Dr. Lovick Pierce to carry a formal letter to the 1848 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church as a delegate. Pierce's letter was read to the body on May 3, 1848, and subsequently referred to the Committee on the State of the Church (MEC Journal of the General Conference 1848 [MEC, JGC 1848], 16). Two days later, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, after careful deliberation, the Committee recommended that the General Conference adopt the following preamble and resolution:

Whereas, a letter from Rev. L. Pierce, D. D., delegate of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *South*, proposing fraternal relations between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, *South*, has been presented to this conference, and whereas, there are serious questions and difficulties existing between the two bodies, therefore,

*Resolved*, That while we tender to the Rev. Dr. Pierce all personal courtesies, and invite him to attend our sessions, This General Conference does not consider it proper, at present, to enter into fraternal relations with the Methodist Episcopal Church, *South* (MEC, JGC 1848, 21).

The report was passed unanimously, and the extent of the schism between the two ecclesial bodies was confirmed. It would be more than twenty years and a Civil War before the two Churches would reconsider the state of their relationship (MEA, 251-257).

d. In the wake of the war and the emancipation of enslaved persons, a growing sentiment emerged that it might be possible to reunite the various schisms of the MEC now that the ostensible reason for their division had been resolved. However, before any conversation about cooperation or reunification could proceed, the General Conference of the MEC would need to reestablish formal fraternity with the MECS. However, this would not be a simple process, as the General Conference had not yet established a formal protocol. They resolved the problem over several subsequent General Conferences according to the following timeline:

**1868:** The MEC formed "The Committee of Introduction" to examine the credentials of delegates from other ecclesial bodies prior to reception and presentation (MEC, JGC 1868, 356-357).

**1872:** The General Conference of the MEC adopted a report from the Committee on the State of the Church, "That the General Conference will appoint a delegation, consisting of two ministers and

one layman, to convey our fraternal greetings to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at the next ensuing session” (FFPGC, 19).

**1874:** The MEC delegation arrived in Louisville and was recognized and accepted by the General Conference of the MECS. After extensive remarks, the subject of the communication from the Fraternal Delegates was referred to a committee of nine who affirmed and reciprocated their goodwill (FFPGC, 34-35). The General Conference of the MECS subsequently appointed a Commission “to meet a similar Commission authorized by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and to adjust all existing difficulties” (FFPGC, 40).

**1876:** The General Conference of the MEC received a delegation from the MECS, having been approved by the Committee on the Reception of Fraternal Delegates (formerly the Committee of Introduction). A series of remarks were presented, including a letter from Dr. L. Pierce, the original delegate from 1848, after which the General Conference of the MEC unanimously adopted a resolution recognizing “their coming as the harbinger of a more intimate union between the two chief branches of Methodism” (FFPGC, 57). Subsequently, the MEC resolved to appoint a Commission “to meet a similar Commission authorized by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and to adjust all existing difficulties” (FFPGC, 58).

On August 16, 1876, the Commissioners appointed by the MEC and the MECS met in Cape May, New Jersey, in order to “remove all obstacles to formal fraternity” (FFPGC, 59). To do so, the Joint Commission needed to establish several principles and rules whereby all remaining conflicts between the two bodies could be resolved – as opposed to continuing to litigate them on an individual basis. The predominant issue at stake was revealed in the “Order of Business:”

- I. To agree upon a formal declaration of the basis as to relations confessedly “closer than those that usually bind Churches together” now existing between the two Churches.
- II. To establish rules under which the difficulties as to property shall be adjusted.
- III. To investigate or provide for the investigation and adjustment of the specific cases of adverse property claims before the Joint Commission (FFPGC, 66).

Subsequent rules for adjusting contested claims to church property were drafted and adopted (FFPGC, 69-70). After these rules were adopted, numerous cases were addressed by the Joint Commission, and rulings were dispensed as to which denomination would receive the deed (FFPGC, 72-75). Having settled these cases, the Joint Commission drafted a report detailing the entirety of the proceedings and forwarded them to the Board of Bishops of the MEC and the College of Bishops of the MECS.

The content of this report can be found in the *Formal Fraternity Proceedings of the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church and of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1872, 1874, and 1876, and of the Joint Commission of the Two Church on Fraternal Relations, at Cape May, New Jersey, August 16-23, 1876*, from which I have been citing, on pages 77 through 83 (as FFPGC).

**1880:** The General Conference of the MEC, having received the report from the Joint Commission on Fraternal Relations, adopted the resolution as final. Importantly, Bishop Simpson presented the

decision as a point of order, stating, "It is the judgement of the Chair that, while he believes the action was designed to be final, yet he thinks the General Conference must decide the question for itself" (MEC, JGC 1880, 160)

e. This historical analysis of the Joint Commission on Fraternal Relations between 1848 and 1880 speaks directly to Questions 1, 2, and 3 as presented by the Council of Bishops to the Judicial Council. Reviewing the precedent suggests that the power to recognize another ecclesial body as a fraternal denomination is strictly reserved to the General Conference. In various situations, this power has been temporarily vested in the Committee on the State of the Church, an appointed Commission on Fraternal Affairs, or the episcopacy. At present, the General Conference continues to reserve the power to recognize another ecclesial body as a fraternal "denomination," as well as any subsequent categorization as an "evangelical denomination." The authority to begin relevant negotiations has been vested in the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops in between General Conferences. However, all activities of the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops pertaining to the negotiation of denominational level agreements or membership in ecumenical organizations require ratification by the subsequent General Conference before becoming actionable, per ¶ 431.1 of the 2016 Book of Discipline. (See following statements on the vested comity powers of the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops in the following section on comity.) At present, in conjunction with the Council of Bishops, the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops is authorized to conduct negotiations with any ecclesial body they desire, but no action resulting from such activities can be taken until a fraternal and ecumenical relationship between the two bodies is affirmed and ratified by the General Conference.

f. Having established fraternity through the cessation of hostilities and the adjudication of the numerous contested property claims, by 1924, the MEC and MECS were moving towards the establishment of a denominational comity agreement. According to the 1924 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 581, "Comity and Cooperation with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," it was resolved,

That we heartily reciprocate the desire of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to facilitate such adjustments or exchanges of territory, as may be practicable, with a view to the best economy of our resources and to the highest degree of comity and cooperation between our two branches of Methodism in their mutual purpose and work for the kingdom of God.

g. At the following General Conference in 1928, the *Book of Discipline* adopted a paragraph pertaining to home missions and comity, which reads,

¶ 491.6 These societies may, wherever it is desirable, create a Comity Commission, composed of the District Superintendent, and of Ministers and Laymen in equal numbers, for the purpose of meeting and conferring with like Commissions, or bodies, of other evangelical denominations, to make such arrangements and agreements as may be necessary either to vacate, or take over, or exchange Charges or properties, in order to promote the religious care and welfare of such communities. Such arrangements and agreements shall be made with due regard for the denominational investments and interests involved in such properties, and shall be subject to the approval of the Annual Conference.

Based on the preceding discussion of the historical context of the concept of fraternity and establishing its connection to comity, we now address the concept of comity.

## 6. Comity Defined:

a. At the intersection of religion, politics, and economics, “comity” designates the principles and practices through which different ecclesial bodies (and the government) formally work together to respond to social issues despite differences in doctrine, polity, and policy. Comity cannot exist without a preceding recognition of fraternity, either directly through fraternal delegations or mutual membership in an ecumenical organization. In plain speech, while Protestants have always been very good at schism and competition, comity agreements are how we cooperate toward a common, equitable, and mutually beneficial good.

b. Between 1941 and 1949, the acclaimed sociologist of religion H. Paul Douglass was commissioned to undertake a rigorous analysis of comity practices by member denominations of the FCC, after which he presented “The Comity Report,” published in 1950. There, offering his own understanding of the principles of comity, Douglass affirmed a resolution by a joint session of the Executive Committees of the Federal Home Missions Councils:

...comity should be interpreted constructively as involving the formulation of a comprehensive strategy of church extension and maintenance for regions and communities, applying equally to the self-supporting and to mission-aided churches, for the primary purpose of ensuring a well-rounded Christian ministry according to our highest standards and ideals to the entire population.

Reflecting on that definition, Douglass noted that “this version is in deliberate contrast with older concepts defining comity narrowly as ‘mutual cooperation, respect, and goodwill’” (Draft Comity Report [DCR], 4). Further on, he affirmed that comity should “not be the legalistic adjudication of controverted cases one at a time, but the blueprinting of a master plan within which all specific situations may be happily provided for,” citing “*General Principles of Comity*, Council of Churches of Greater Cincinnati, 1948” (DCR, 5).

c. In addition to clarifying the principles of comity, “The Comity Report” offered an analysis of their implementation between 1941 and 1949. Regarding these comity practices, particular attention should be paid to section 8 of the report, “Working Philosophy” (DCR, 13-17), and section 11, “Comity as Planning and Adjustment” (DCR, 27-29). The former offers a practical definition and assessment of the “allocation” of territorial fields for church extension, noting that “the adequate development of all churches involves their access to a sufficient supporting constituency, reasonably available to them and relatively homogenous” (DCR, 15). Going beyond the establishment of new churches, the latter section details the further necessity of the “adjustment” of already existing churches, which “will involve the abandonment and removal of churches, their merger, and the adoption of radically new types of activity” (DCR, 28). As such, in practice, comity should be understood to include not simply cooperation in the allocation of protected territories for church extension so as to avoid competition but the ongoing relocation, abandonment, merger, or federation of existing churches that no longer adequately serve the community in which they reside. Furthermore, the draft of the 1949 Comity Report was found in the records of the General Board of Global Ministries, from 1949, at the repository of GCAH. The published “Comity Report” of 1950 (cited here as CR) contains the same philosophies of comity but includes additional case studies and recommendations. It is evident from a comparison of these two documents (the draft versus the published) that Douglass was in direct contact with the five mainline Protestant denominations and worked as a consultant for The Methodist Church. During this period, multiple member denominations of the FCC introduced paragraphs to their respective law books regarding comity

agreements. The 1948 *Book of Discipline's* ¶ 256 (predecessor to ¶ 2548) appears alongside these other case studies in the final publication of the 1950 “Comity Report.” Importantly, as will be addressed later, Douglass explicitly links ¶ 256 to ¶ 276 in that case study, thereby reaffirming the intent of the paragraph by contextualizing it within the ecumenical comity principles of the era.

d. According to the 2016 Book of Discipline, the powers to adopt comity principles, establish comity agreements, and ratify membership in an ecumenical comity organization are reserved to the General Conference. Those comity principles, comity agreements, and ecumenical comity organizations currently embraced by the United Methodist Church are enumerated in Part VI, “Organization and Administration,” Chapter Three, Section IX “Ecumenical Relationships,” ¶ 431 – ¶ 442.

e. According to the 2016 Book of Discipline, per ¶ 431.2, the General Conference vests the authority to maintain and oversee existing comity agreements in the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops. So too, per ¶ 431.4, the General Conference vests the power to select, and thereby duly authorize, all representatives to ecumenical organizations in the Council of Bishops. When a proxy is needed, the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops retains sole authority to name such proxies.

f. According to the 2016 Book of Discipline, per ¶ 431.1, the authority to enter into ecumenical negotiations with an ecclesial body not yet recognized as being in a fraternal or comity relationship with the United Methodist Church is vested in the Council of Bishops. However, as a reserved power of the General Conference, all proposed denominational level agreements and permanent membership in ecumenical organizations must be approved and ratified by the General Conference before coming into effect.

g. According to the 2016 Book of Discipline, the *responsibility for the practical implementation* of those comity principles and comity agreements ratified and established by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church is vested in the Annual Conference, to be directed under the supervision of the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops or a proxy as determined by the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops. The Annual Conference holds no power, vested or reserved, to enter into fraternal or comity agreements of its own volition. Nor does the Annual Conference hold power, vested or reserved, to secede from a fraternal relationship, comity agreement, or membership in an ecumenical body that has been ratified and established by the General Conference. The particular comity practices that the Annual Conference is authorized to implement are enumerated in Part VI, Chapter One, Sections II-IV, “Cooperative Parish,” “Ecumenical Shared Ministries,” and “Churches in Transitional Communities,” ¶ 206 – ¶ 213.

h. According to the 2016 Book of Discipline, the transfer of church property via ¶ 2548.2 “under an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement” can only be invoked by the Annual Conference under the specific powers vested to it by the General Conference and detailed in ¶ 209. In turn, any such action must conform to the comity principles and comity agreements already established and ratified by the General Conference, under the supervision of the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops, a duly authorized representative selected by the Council of Bishops, or a proxy selected by the Ecumenical officer of the Council of Bishops.

i. For a record of the evolution of this vested power of the General Conference, see the History Note of the Records of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious

Concerns (GCCUIC), produced by GCAH in 2001. See also “The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns Summary Report to the 2012 General Conference,” in which “the board members of GCCUIC unanimously agreed and took action to propose legislation to incorporate GCCUIC into the Council of Bishops” (Advance Daily Christian Advocate [ADCA] 2012, Vol. 2., 1215). Interestingly, in line with other analyses that suggest that “evangelical denomination” should be appropriately interpreted along the lines of “ecumenical partner,” that report also states, “To be ecumenical is to be evangelical.” (ADCA 2012, Vol. 2., 1214). Along these lines, see also the “Report of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America” (Quadrennial Report to the General Conference [QRGC] 1948, 649-651).

## **7. The 1948 General Conference: Comity, Ecumenicism, & Segregation:**

a. The original version of ¶ 2548.2 was adopted at the 1948 General Conference as ¶ 256.2.

b. The 1948 General Conference was notable for many reasons, but one was certainly the influence of Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam. At that time, he was the preeminent champion of the ecumenical movement, was appointed secretary of the Council of Bishops, and served as President of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America (FCC), which, at the time, was the largest ecumenical council in existence (MEA, 380). He would later be elected president of the World Council of Churches (WCC), established later that year (MEA, 423). In 1948, Bishop Oxnam was tasked to present the episcopal address at the General Conference. There he spoke expansively of the principles of comity and especially of the practical organization of ecumenical cooperation, declaring,

Methodism shared in the organization of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and from the day of its charter membership to the present has been one of the co-operating churches in this the most significant interdenominational endeavor in the nation. We rejoice in the ever-widening service of the Federal Council which means the increasing co-operation of the churches. We urge our people everywhere to participate fully in the local and state councils, and particularly in the [FCC]. (MC, 1948 Daily Christian Advocate [DCA], 36)

Beyond the episcopal address, several resolutions of the 1948 General Conference also stridently reaffirmed The Methodist Church’s membership in the FCC and WCC (1948 Book of Discipline [BOD], 607). Throughout the 1948 General Conference minutes, references to the episcopal address regarding ecumenicism, church union, and “unity in diversity” abound. Several factors prompted these calls for unity and ecumenical cooperation, but most notable among them was the growing conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union (MEA, 419-423). Bishop Oxnam strongly believed that atheism was a slippery slope to communism, and therefore, it was in the best interest of the Church and the Nation to cooperate with ecumenical partners for the salvation of souls, regardless of their resulting denominational affiliation (MEA, 423-428).

c. Working towards this goal, the reorganization of home missions and church extension in urban areas emerged as one of the conference’s dominant themes. Throughout the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era, major demographic shifts had been taking place throughout industrial cities as people of color mass migrated north in an effort to escape Jim Crow laws and the threat of lynching (QRGC 1948, 169-171). So too, the 1940s saw an explosion of intentionally organized and mass-manufactured suburbs, such as those pioneered by William Levitt. By 1951, his company, Levitt & Sons, was the largest homebuilder in America and is remembered for the popularization of red-lining, discrimination against people of color, and conspiracy with the Federal Housing Administration to deny home loans to people of color. As noted in the quadrennial report of the “Division of Home

Missions and Church Extension,” “Section of Home Mission,” presented to the 1948 General Conference,

Since 1940, the population of the United States has been in the most fluid state in the nation’s history. [...] All of this movement was considered temporary and much of it was centered in cities. However, with the end of the war, this great percentage of the population did not return to prewar locations. The great housing projects which sprang up overnight adjacent to many of our larger cities have become, or are becoming, permanent (QRGC 1948, 169).

This mass movement of white folk out of the cities and into the newly established suburbs is known as “white flight.” Importantly, as the report continues, the Board of Missions and Church Extension recognized that “Few who occupy the new housing units will go to the center of the city for worship; and, after the first generation, this minority will almost disappear. Now is the time for us to follow our folk with a vigorous program to challenge the multitudes who otherwise will be lost to God and His Church. Cities change, people come and go, but the basic religious needs of folk are the same regardless of race, color or creed” (QRGC 1948, 171).

d. However, segregation within The Methodist Church made it nearly impossible to fulfill this aspiration. The continued existence of racial discrimination and the Central Jurisdiction made it incredibly difficult to respond to the demographic fluidity apparent in urban contexts (MEA, 391-398). As a further report from the “Commission to Consider the Relations of All Races” noted,

Because of the shifting of the Negro population to metropolitan centers, the whole Church must accept the responsibility of helping to provide adequate church facilities for our Negro people. Where Negro population has increased in centers with no Negro Methodist Church to serve it, we note the reluctance of Negro Methodists to become members of White congregations and also the reluctance of White congregations to accept Negro members, with a consequent loss (QRGC 1948, 626).

Because of conflicts over race and segregation, The Methodist Church was not properly positioned or equipped to revitalize its metropolitan congregations. Efforts to adopt the “Christian Church Race Report” addressing racial discrimination in The Methodist Church faced staunch criticism from the floor directed at legitimizing segregation and ensuring that the jurisdictional system would not be disrupted (MC, DCA 1948, 442-443). Yet, the Commission to Consider the Relations of All Races denotes that the Central Jurisdiction was a core cause of the problem, as well as “the apparent confusion regarding the establishment of Methodist churches for Negroes outside of the Central Jurisdiction” (QRGC 1948, 627). This may help explain why the Commission called upon “the whole Church,” through cooperative ecumenical efforts, to meet the various religious, political, and economic needs of people of color in the city.

e. As these dynamic social processes continued and amplified, the changes in urban social demographics significantly impacted the economic condition of cities and the churches contained within. As noted in the quadrennial report of the Division of Home Missions and Church Extension, presented to the 1948 General Conference,

In the establishment and erection of new churches in or near our large cities, we have a real challenge. The Methodist Church has no desire to compete with the other denominations. [...] In our cities many churches stand amidst “polyglot” communities. Former members have moved to the suburbs, thus creating a challenge there. But people still live near the old buildings, and Church Extension has a responsibility. These old urban churches must be maintained and many of them remodeled in order to carry on a vital program throughout the

week which will attract and minister to the throngs who dwell “where cross the crowded ways” (QRGC 1948, 164).

Throughout metropolitan areas, Methodist churches that had predominantly served white communities for hundreds of years declined precipitously in membership, resources, and the condition of their property. By 1948, many of these churches were in need of relocation, remediation, or significant renovation. Something needed to be done.

f. This is where we begin to see, at the 1948 General Conference, a sweeping ecumenical plan presented by the Board of Home Mission and Church Extension in partnership with the Committee on Lay Activities and Temporal Economy. That slate of calendar items – which contained the introduction of ¶ 256 (presently ¶ 2548) opened with a striking statement, Report No. 1, “Conserving the Property of the Methodist Church”:

We recommend that where congregations are moving out of communities where members of other races and nationalities are moving in, that these congregations, in cooperation with the Division of Home Missions and Church Extension, open negotiations with the constituents and leaders of other races and nationalities of The Methodist Church, for the purpose of conserving the property of the Methodist Church” (MC, DCA 1948, 73).

The intent of the statement seemed clear at the time, as defended by the Chairman of the Subcommittee Fred B. Noble on the occasion of its uncontested adoption, “I don’t think this needs any discussion. It is merely permissive legislation and explains itself” (MC, DCA 1948, 180). Where congregations were moving out of the city and thereby leaving behind abandoned or near abandoned church property, priority would be given to the opening of negotiations with peoples of color such that the property could continue to be used for the advancement of the shared ecumenical goals of the church.

g. To advance this broad legislative agenda, roughly ten new paragraphs were adopted and introduced into the 1948 *Book of Discipline* that addressed both comity and demographic fluidity. As a package, they prioritized ecumenical cooperation through the FCC to be conducted under the supervision of the relevant state council of churches and provided new procedures through which:

1. Underutilized church property could be discontinued, declared abandoned, and liquidated (¶ 255).
2. Or such property could be deeded to a federated church (¶ 256.1).
3. Or such property could be deeded to another “evangelical denomination under an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement, provided such agreement has been in writing and signed and approved by the duly qualified and authorized representatives of the evangelical denomination to which the deed is made” (¶ 256.2).
4. And that “the legislation of this whole section shall not apply to the territory of Central Conferences or Provisional Central Conferences” (¶ 257).

Taken together in their context, these provisions appear to represent a series of descending priorities wherein preference should be given to the reestablishment of a previously white Methodist church as a “Negro Methodist Church,” followed by the establishment of a Federated Church, and only then, if these more preferable situations seemed untenable, the transfer of the abandoned church property to one of The Methodist Church’s affiliated ecumenical partners under an allocation, exchange of

property, or comity agreement. In this last case, the history and language are clear that some form of reciprocity was expected as a component of such an exchange.

h. The particular language of “allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement,” found in ¶ 256.2 (which has since evolved into its present iteration as ¶ 2548.2 in the 2016 *Book of Discipline*) was further clarified by the introduction of a new section, Chapter XIII, “Church and Community Co-operation.” These new paragraphs, ¶ 275 through ¶ 279, codified the principles of comity and ecumenical cooperation outlined by Bishop Oxnam in his episcopal address. Of particular interest to contextualizing the intent of this legislative package, ¶ 276 stated:

An effective denominational church serving every rural community is our primary objective. Federated and union churches have afforded expedient temporary service as acceptable alternatives in some fields but should obtain denominational entity as soon as possible. Mutual exchange, denominational withdrawal, and affiliated membership are among the methods most helpful. Denominational overlapping and excessive competition in overchurched areas should be adjusted. We support allocation of denominational responsibility in new fields of work to obviate the need for each church to feel it must establish a project to take care of its own constituency, naming the state council of churches, wherever possible, as the agency through which allocation agreed upon can be consummated.

While this paragraph is addressed to the rural context – which was also experiencing significant demographic change – the comity principles outlined in ¶ 276 would have applied equally to comity practices in urban contexts. Note again that the final publication of the H. Paul Douglass “Comity Report” also connects these two paragraphs in a case study. As such, it should be understood that these paragraphs provided important context to ¶ 256 and that their contemporary iterations should continue to contextualize ¶ 2548.2.

i. In the 1948 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 256 had initially been grouped with ¶ 275 through ¶ 279 in the concluding sections of Part II, “The Local Church.” These sections have since been separated in the *Discipline* during the intervening time. In the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, the contemporary versions of the 1948 section “Church and Community Co-operation” have remained in Part VI, Chapter One, “The Local Church,” as ¶ 206 through ¶ 213, blocked out in three sections as “Cooperative Parish,” “Ecumenical Shared Ministries,” and “Churches in Transitional Communities.” In contrast, ¶ 2548 has been relocated to Part VI, Chapter 6, “Church Property.” Per these paragraphs’ historical origin and evolution, the connectional principles outlined in the 2016 *Book of Discipline*’s ¶ 206 through ¶ 213 should be understood to expressly structure the meaning of ¶ 2548.2. Perhaps more importantly, at present, ¶ 209 appears to be the only paragraph that details the circumstances under which ¶ 2547 and ¶ 2548 obtain.

j. This historical analysis of the 1948 General Conference speaks directly to Questions 5 and 6 as presented by the Council of Bishops to Judicial Council, in that ¶ 2548.2 came into existence as part of the same legislative slate in which ¶ 206 through ¶ 213 find their provenance. Both then and now, ¶ 2548.2 is not intended to be deployed in isolation from the ecumenical and connectional principles of the General Conference. At present, a principled reading of ¶ 2548.2 suggests that it only gains binding force when invoked under the express stipulations of ¶ 209:

1. “In an interdenominational local church merger, ¶¶ 2547 and 2548 shall be followed. In the case of federated and union churches, ¶ 2548 shall be followed” (152).
2. When exploring an interdenominational local church merger under ¶ 2547, ¶ 2547.6 stipulates that “where property is involved, the provisions of ¶ 2548 obtain” (769).

Moreover, as detailed in a later section addressing the 1988 General Conference, the later addition of “Pan-Methodist Commission,” and its positioning in the paragraph so as to precede “or another evangelical denomination,” reinforces the historical interpretation that ¶ 256 of the 1948 Book of Discipline and its subsequent iterations were always intended to prioritize the redistribution of underutilized church property to Methodists of color in order to address demographic change, and, per the constitution of the Pan-Methodist Commission itself, to “work towards mutual cooperation and understanding given past historical grievances.”

#### 8. The 1952 General Conference: The Addition of ¶ 189.3:

a. All of the above was reiterated at the 1952 General Conference, during which ¶ 256 was moved to ¶ 189, and a third subparagraph was added. This additional subparagraph reinforced the power of the Annual Conference, vested in the itinerate bishop, to force a local church to deed its property in the interest of ecumenical comity. In the event that the trustees of a local church refused to follow the instructions of the Annual Conference, as directed by the proper use of ¶ 189.2, ¶ 189.3 empowered the Board of Trustees of the Annual Conference to appropriate the powers of the local board of trustees and conduct the transfer of property. Evidence for the prior and ongoing usage of the paragraph in this manner appeared in Bishop Kent’s Episcopal Address to the 1952 General Conference. While discussing the growing ecumenism of the Cold War era, and the successes of the prior quadrennial plan, Bishop Kent commented on the state of Home Missions and Church Extension, declaring,

*The Yearbook of American Churches* reports a total number of local churches in this country in 1940 of 244,319. In 1950, this number had grown to 281, 511. [...] The question immediately arises how many local churches Methodism contributed to this net increase of 37, 192. According to the *General Minutes*, Methodism lost a total of 2,104 local congregations between 1940 and 1950. *While we frankly recognize that the process of local unification and the abandonment or merging of many churches stranded in depleted or shifting population areas may account for this uninspiring record, there is another side to it. We have not grasped our opportunities to deploy our forces and claim new territory into which large numbers of families have moved. We have begun to grapple with this suburban situation but it is often “too little and too late”* (emphasis added, MC, DCA, 1952, 72).

b. As such, it is apparent that the comity strategies developed by H. Paul Douglass that influenced the creation of ¶ 256, and the addition of ¶ 256.2 in 1948, had been heavily used throughout the 1940s, leading to the closure, merger, or denominational transfer of more than two thousand churches as a response to churches being “stranded in depleted or shifting population areas.” In this historical context, the evidence suggests that the purpose of comity agreements as expressed through ecumenical cooperation, the introduction of ¶ 256.2 and its filial paragraphs in the church law of the other Protestant denominations, and the historical use of ¶ 2548.2 between 1948 and the present day, expressly addressed properties that were (nearly) abandoned due to population shifts.

#### 9. The 1988 General Conference: The Introduction of Pan-Methodist Commission:

a. The third sub-paragraph introduced in 1952 was removed in 1956. No significant textual changes were made to the paragraph between 1956 and 1988, though it was frequently relocated in the *Book of Discipline*, especially during the formation of the United Methodist Church in 1968. However, at the 1988 General Conference, the General Board of Global Ministries authored a petition to amend, then ¶ 2547.2, to specifically reference the Pan Methodism Commission, itself a comity agreement, having been recently formed in 1986. Accentuating the original historical context in which ¶ 256 (1948) was intended to address racial demographic shifts and indicating that the use of the paragraph in such contexts should prioritize the United Methodist Church's ecumenical relationships with Black Methodist denominations (African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, etc.), the phrase "to one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission" was added before the phrase "another evangelical denomination." This should be understood to denote the specific intent of the paragraph and designate priority in the allocation of properties. The reasoning for this has been substantiated in the above historical assessment of the origin of the paragraph. It also explicitly extends the 1924 Discipline's ¶ 581 comity agreement between the MEC and MECS (referenced earlier) to the historically Black denominations by naming them directly in ¶ 2547.2 of the 1988 *Discipline* (now ¶ 2548.2).

*Lawrence Hillis*  
LAWRENCE E. HILLIS

## R-3 "PROVIDING CLARITY FOR CONGREGATIONS DISAFFILIATING IN THE INDIANA ANNUAL CONFERENCE" (Womack)

### Resolution:

WHEREAS, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church contains two options for disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church: 1) Paragraph 2548.2 relating to release of the trust clause to join a church "represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another evangelical denomination;" or 2) Paragraph 2553 which grants the limited right, until December 31, 2023, for United Methodist congregations to disaffiliate for reasons of conscience over the practice of ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals; and

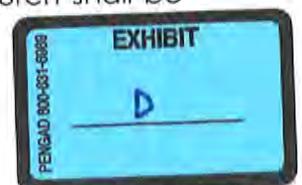
WHEREAS, the *Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation* offers a proposal to restructure the United Methodist Church by separation as a means to resolve our differences, and allow each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect for every person; and

WHEREAS, prolonged delay of General Conference, and uncertainty whether the Protocol will be enacted, as well as limited understanding of the requirements in the Indiana Annual Conference for congregations desiring to disaffiliate continues to create anxiety and distraction in United Methodist congregations; and

WHEREAS, clarity and transparency about disaffiliation process and requirements will reduce anxiety and empower local churches to make informed decisions;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2022 Session of the Indiana Annual Conference directs the Board of Trustees of the Indiana Conference and all officials of the Annual Conference to be governed by the following principles, policies and processes in engaging congregations desiring to disaffiliate to join "one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination (Paragraph 2548.2), or to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church "for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provision 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 which follow" (Paragraph 2553).

1. Congregations joining one of the denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another evangelical church may, at their sole discretion, choose to disaffiliate under the provisions of Paragraph 2548.2. For the avoidance of doubt, the list of churches considered to be an evangelical church for the purposes of Paragraph 2548.2 shall include the Global Methodist Church.
2. Only congregations disaffiliating to an independent status shall be required to use the provisions of Paragraph 2553. All churches, regardless of their theological position, should be permitted to disaffiliate pursuant to Paragraph 2553 so long as they meet the requirements of Paragraph 2553.
3. Any required payments for unfunded pension liability shall be based on Wespith calculations of the aggregate unfunded liability of the Annual Conference. Allocation of a proportional share of that liability to the local church shall be



1 determined using the ratio of the church's total annual appointed clergy  
2 compensation (salary + housing) to the Indiana Conference's total appointed  
3 clergy compensation for all clergy. Actuarial reports and financial statements  
4 supporting the proportional share formula shall be provided upon request.

5 4. The Indiana Conference Trustees and officials shall adhere to the following policies  
6 in administering Paragraph 2548.2:

7 a. Any allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement shall include only  
8 the following requirements.

9 i. In addition to releasing the local church's property in accordance with the  
10 policies of the receiving denomination, the local church retains all its other  
11 assets and liabilities.

12 ii. The local church shall repay previously documented loans from the Annual  
13 Conference.

14 iii. The local church shall either remain under Wespeth and carry its unfunded  
15 liability forward with it or repay the Indiana Conference for the local  
16 church's proportional share of the unfunded liability. The liability shall  
17 include unfunded obligations related to The United Methodist Church's  
18 pre-1982 pension plan, the Ministerial Pension Plan, and/or the Clergy  
19 Retirement Security Program. Actuarial reports and financial statements  
20 from Wespeth affirming the unfunded liability shall be provided to  
21 departing churches.

22 iv. No additional sums will be required to obtain release of all the  
23 congregation's property and assets from the trust clause.

24 b. The local church shall make the decision to disaffiliate at a church conference  
25 duly called according to the provisions of The Book of Discipline. The Church  
26 Council (or its equivalent) shall determine whether a simple majority or a two-  
27 thirds super majority shall be required for approval of the motion to disaffiliate.  
28 The district superintendent shall approve the request of the Church Council  
29 and shall preside or choose another elder to preside at a church conference  
30 to take place no later than sixty days after the request is made.

31 FURTHERMORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that having approved the principles, policies, and  
32 processes contained in this resolution, the Indiana annual conference members thereby  
33 give their consent to the disaffiliation of any local church meeting the requirements of  
34 this resolution and no further vote of approval of the Indiana Annual Conference  
35 members shall be required.

36  
37 **Rationale:**

38 "The news of a General Conference postponement brings a wide range of reactions  
39 from disappointment and despair, to anger and fear. ... But I pray that the story of  
40 continued strife and division will not prevail in our United Methodist churches in Indiana.  
41 First, because the message and promise of Jesus Christ is needed more today than at  
42 any time in our lifetimes. People still need hope. People in our communities still need care.  
43 Christ still needs our participation to make a difference in the world. We have a purpose  
44 that stands strong with or without a meeting of the General Conference. People need  
45 Jesus! Being the Church that offers fresh bread of love, fresh bread of hope, fresh bread  
46 of life in Jesus remains our call. People desperately need Jesus!

1 Even so, it's no secret that there are profound differences in the church about how God  
2 is calling us to be in ministry in the world. And while I remain unapologetically United  
3 Methodist and committed to the UMC, I am also working to explore and clarify the  
4 possibilities that the Book of Discipline makes available in the event that churches request  
5 the opportunity to leave the denomination. Some will speak of roadblocks, but it's  
6 important for pastors and congregations to know that your Bishop is preparing to  
7 continue to work graciously in the days ahead to open paths that may be available for  
8 those who find the thought of waiting until 2024 to be too much to bear. I will lead with  
9 respect and compassion for all.

10 This is my promise. ... I will place no Episcopal impediments upon those who prayerfully  
11 discern they must leave the Church."

12  
13 Bishop Julius C. Trimble

14 "Bishop's Response to the General Conference Postponement"

15 March 4, 2022

16  
17 "Honoring the expressed desire of some churches and church leaders to leave The United  
18 Methodist Church and participate in other denominations, we call bishops and annual  
19 conferences to use existing disciplinary authority to find grace-filled ways for these  
20 leaders and churches to follow their call now, allowing them to take their church  
21 property with them where appropriate."

22  
23 "A Call to Grace" emphasizes that "it is our intention to shift our focus from legislative  
24 solutions that are dependent upon a General Conference to supporting strategies for a  
25 gracious exit that can be enacted at the annual conference, central conference, and  
26 jurisdictional levels."

27  
28 "A Call to Grace" and "A Call to Grace Press Release"

29 <https://www.acalltograce.com/>

30 November 2, 2021

31  
32 **Financial Implications:** Yes

33 Churches withdrawing from the Indiana Conference under Paragraph 2548.2 may result  
34 in a loss of income to the Conference due to Conference tithes no longer being paid by  
35 those churches. This loss of income may be fully or partially offset by lower Conference  
36 expenses for servicing a smaller number of churches in Indiana. This resolution makes  
37 "open paths that may be available for those who find the thought of waiting until 2024  
38 to be too much to bear" (quoting Bishop Trimble) a reality and helps avoid large legal  
39 expenses for lawsuits that may otherwise result. The net impact of this resolution cannot  
40 be accurately predicted.

41  
42 **Groups to forward/affirm:**

43 All Indiana Conference staff, all Indiana appointed clergy, and the Lay Leaders of all  
44 Indiana congregations. The submitter of this resolution does not have this contact  
45 information, rather this contact information is known to the Conference administrative  
46 staff.

47  
48 Mike Womack

1 [mikewomack@comcast.net](mailto:mikewomack@comcast.net)  
2 317-501-5568

**Legislation to Adopt:  
A Standard Process Governing Requests from  
Local Congregations to Amicably Separate from the  
Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the UMC and  
Join the Global Methodist Church Under ¶ 2548.2**

The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference (“Conference”) hereby clarifies the principles governing its review process of any request from a local church seeking to amicably separate from The United Methodist Church and join another denomination. ¶2548.2 of the *2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (“Book of Discipline”) outlines procedures by which a local church may be granted permission to amicably separate from an Annual Conference of United Methodist Church and depart with its property and other assets to join “one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another Evangelical Denomination.”

Under its reserved powers, the Alabama West-Florida Annual Conference has the authority to recognize the Global Methodist Church as “another evangelical denomination,” This agreement is therefore stipulated and agreed to as a “comity agreement” within the meaning of, and authorized pursuant to, ¶2548.2, when ratified by the withdrawing local church. The authority of the Annual Conference and the Local Churches to enter into this type of agreement is bestowed pursuant to ¶¶33 and 2548.2 of the Book of Discipline. Pursuant to ¶33, the Annual Conference has such other rights as have not been delegated to the General Conference under the Constitution. The General Conference enacted ¶2548.2, which authorizes the Annual Conference to enter into comity agreements on the terms set forth in ¶2548.2.

Under its reserved powers, the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference hereby recognizes the Global Methodist Church as “another evangelical denomination” under ¶2548.2.

The Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference acknowledges that a shared Christian heritage exists where both the United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church, while distinct denominations, are constituent members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church as expressed in the Scriptures, confessed in the Church’s historic creeds, and attested to in our common doctrinal standards rooted in our shared Methodist, United Brethren in Christ, and Evangelical Association history. Each recognizes the authenticity of the other’s sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and welcomes each other’s members to partake in the Eucharist. Each recognizes the validity of each other’s respective offices of ministry, while stipulating that each has different qualifications for set-apart ministry that members of the other may or may not meet. Each is open to exploring areas of shared mission and ministry in which they might engage as

mutual partners.

No sums in addition to those stipulated in this Comity Agreement and no additional non-financial terms shall be required to obtain release of all the congregation's property and assets from the trust clause.

In accordance with and to fulfill the provisions of ¶2548.2 of the Book of Discipline, the 2022 Session of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference instructs the Board of Trustees of the Alabama-West Florida Conference and all officials, boards, and committees of the Annual Conference to utilize the following policies and processes in engaging congregations desiring to amicably separate from the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church to join the Global Methodist Church ("Amicable Separation") under this paragraph.

#### AMICABLE SEPARATION PROCESS

1. A local congregation desiring to pursue the possibility of Amicable Separation from the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church under the provisions of ¶2548.2 to join the Global Methodist Church shall by majority approval of the Church Council or equivalent body send to the District Superintendent a letter expressing the congregation's intent to pursue Amicable Separation. The request shall be forwarded to the Bishop, other members of the appointive cabinet, and the members of the appropriate District Board of Church Location and Building for consent.
2. Within three weeks of the Church Council's request to pursue amicable separation under ¶2548.2, the Conference Trustees, in conjunction with the cabinet, annual conference treasurer, annual conference benefits officer, director of connectional ministries, and conference chancellor, in consultation with designated local church leaders and the local church trustees, shall prepare an Amicable Separation Agreement based on this Comity Agreement between the Alabama-West Florida Conference and the amicably separating congregation and the Global Methodist Church as the receiving denomination. The Amicable Separation Agreement shall contain at least:
  - i. A clear effective date of Amicable Separation shall be set to occur no more than 90 days after a simple majority approval by the members voting at a regular or special session of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference.
  - ii. A statement from the Judicatory representatives of a Global Methodist Church stating its willingness and readiness to receive the local church's affiliation.

- iii. A recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶2501 (the Trust Clause,) notwithstanding the release of property therefrom.
- iv. Acknowledgement that the local church shall be current in apportionments for the period of 12 months preceding the date of Amicable Separation. Payment of unpaid amounts for the 12 months preceding the effective date of Amicable Separation shall be made prior to the effective date of Amicable Separation.
- v. Acknowledgement that the amicably separating local church shall retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property, and other cash assets.
- vi. Agreement that all costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the separating local church.
- 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 Amicable Separation.
- viii. An agreement concerning Withdrawal Liability for Unfunded Pension Liability as determined under point 3 below.
- ix. Agreement that all payments shall occur prior to the Effective Date of Amicable Separation.
- x. Acknowledgement that all transfers of property shall be made prior to the Effective Date of Amicable Separation.
- xi. Agreement that the local church shall cease all use of “United Methodist,” the Cross & Flame insignia, and any other intellectual property of the Conference and The United Methodist Church, including the removal of all signage containing the same, as soon as possible but no later than three (3) months following the Effective Date of Amicable Separation. Signage or insignia that is an integral part of a church building (e.g., when the insignia is part of a stained glass window, mosaic, or etched into the stone, brick, or woodwork of a building) shall be exempt from removal. The local church may continue to use The United Methodist Hymnal, Book of Worship, and any other United Methodist worship or study materials it has purchased consistent with the copyright obligations stated in such hymnals, books, and materials.

xii. Agreement that as of the Effective Date of Amicable Separation, the local church shall cease to use, and shall ensure that any affiliates of the local church that have been included in any group tax exemption ruling shall cease to use, any and all documentation stating that local church is included in the United Methodist Church's group tax exemption ruling administered by the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church. The local church and any of its affiliates that have been included in the group tax exemption ruling will be removed as of the Effective Date of Amicable Separation.

xiii. Agreement that as of the Effective Date of Amicable Separation, the local 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 organizing documents, as needed to effectuate its Amicable Separation from the UM Church.

3. The Withdrawal Liability for Unfunded Pension Liability provisions of the Amicable Separation Agreement discussed in 2 (viii), above, will set forth and contain the following terms:

The amount that the Conference has determined to be the amount of the withdrawal liability for each local church required by ¶1504.23 of the Book of Discipline. The withdrawal liability shall be the local church's pro rata share of the Conference's aggregate unfunded pension liability, reduced by any Conference reserves designated for or permitted to be used for pension obligations that the Conference agrees to apply toward this liability. The Conference's aggregate unfunded pension liability shall be its aggregate funding obligations calculated by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of The United Methodist Church ("Wespath"), using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider pursuant to Book of Discipline ¶1504.23. The local church or its successor shall sign a promissory note approved by the conference chancellor or another attorney retained by the Conference in the sum of the withdrawal liability, secured by the local church's assets.

Payments toward the principal sum will be due in installments (Principal Payments) payable in any year that an amortization payment is due from the Conference, or its successor, to meet its funding obligations for The United Methodist Church's pre-1982 pension plan, the Ministerial Pension Plan, or the Clergy Retirement Security Program, until such time that all the installment payments have fully repaid the principal sum. An amortization payment is precipitated by underfunding of prior years' defined benefit

obligations; it does not include normal cost contributions for current year defined benefit accruals. The amount of the Principal Payment for a year as a percentage of the original note total will be calculated using the same percentage as the Conference's amortization payment is of the aggregate market-based unfunded liability for the Conference at the time the amortization payment was determined.

The promissory note shall be valid as of the Effective Date of Withdrawal. The promissory note shall be secured by a lien recorded against the assets transferred in accordance with Section 2 (iii) above. The assets shall not be used as security for other loans or indebtedness without the permission of the Conference until the promissory note described in this paragraph has been paid in full or cancelled, which permission shall not be unreasonably withheld. All principal installment payments paid to the Conference with respect to such withdrawal liability by a local church shall be forwarded to Wespeth as part of the Conference's payment of underfunded liability. The original principal sum, adjusted as described below, will become due upon the effective date the Local Church leaves, disaffiliates from, closes, or is closed by the Global Methodist Church. Notwithstanding the foregoing, if the Conference's aggregate unfunded pension liability at any point is reduced to zero, as measured by Wespeth, the promissory note and its lien shall be cancelled. If the promissory note becomes due because the Local Church leaves, disaffiliated from, closes, and/or is closed by the Global Methodist Church, the Principal Payments paid to date will be applied toward the amount due. No interest shall be charged on the principal amount.

4. Upon sending the letter of intent to pursue Amicable Separation, the Church Council (or its equivalent) shall begin a process of discernment open to all members of the local church over a period of not less than 60 days from the date said letter was sent to the District Superintendent.

As part of the discernment process the church seeking amicable separation must:

- a. Receive and review information from the Center for Administrative Services concerning the balance of conference ministry shares (also known as tithe and apportionments), the balance of both the Annual Conference, and the Local Church's portion of the Conference unfunded liability, and any other costs related to standard terms as defined in Step 2 above. This shall be provided to the local church within three weeks of the letter to the District Superintendent and Resident Bishop.

5. Upon completion of the discernment process, the Church Council shall send written notification to its District Superintendent that the process of discernment has been completed. The District Superintendent, following the provisions of ¶246.8, ¶248 and ¶2548.2 of the Book of Discipline, shall then authorize a church conference for the purpose of considering Amicable Separation. The church conference shall be held within 30 days of the District Superintendent's receipt of the request, unless voluntarily extended by both parties.[TL1]
6. The local church shall make the decision to amicably separate at the church conference duly called as authorized in the preceding paragraph. The District Superintendent shall preside or choose another elder to preside at the church conference. Prior to the church conference, the Church Council (or its equivalent) shall determine whether a simple majority or a two-thirds majority shall be required for approval of the motion to amicably separate from the Alabama-West Florida Conference, approve the Amicable Separation agreement, and join the Global Methodist Church. If the predetermined voting threshold to approve a motion for amicable separation is not reached, the process leading to amicable separation under ¶ 2548.2 ends. However, if the predetermined voting threshold to approve is reached, amicable separation is affirmed and the process may move forward.
7. Under the provisions of ¶2548.2 of the Book of Discipline an Amicable Separation of a local congregation must be approved by the Resident Bishop of the Conference, a simple majority of the District Superintendents of the Conference, and by a simple majority of the District Board of Church Location and Building in which the local church is located. Within 30 days of the local church's approval of the Amicable Separation agreement, the Resident Bishop and District Superintendent shall provide a letter to the pastor and local church lay leadership outlining the decisions of the Resident Bishop, District Superintendents, and appropriate District Building and Location Committee.
8. Upon approval of the Amicable Separation agreement by the local church and receipt of the relevant approvals under Point 7 above, the Conference Board of Trustees will request a vote of approval for amicable separation at the next regular or special called Annual Conference. A simple majority of Annual Conference members present and voting shall ratify the motion for amicable separation, contingent upon all provisions of the agreement being fulfilled before release of claim can occur (¶2529.1(b)(3); see JCD 1379).
9. Upon the agreed effective date, the Alabama-West Florida 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 separating local church has reimbursed the annual conference for all funds due under the terms of the agreement,
  - b. There are no other outstanding liabilities or claims as a result of the amicable separation, other than the promissory note referenced in paragraph 3 above,
  - c. All other provisions of the agreement have been fulfilled.
10. No additional terms, standard or otherwise, shall be imposed by the Annual Conference on local churches amicably separating under the terms of ¶2548.2.

This legislation is respectfully submitted for consideration by the 2022 session of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference by the following clergy and lay members of the Alabama-West Florida Conference:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Clergy/Laity</u>	<u>Local Church Membership/Appointment</u>
1. Lester Spencer	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Saint James UMC
2. Jeremy Smith	Clergy	Elder, Crosspoint UMC
3. Rurel Ausley	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Crosspoint UMC
4. Lisa Ausley	Clergy	Deacon, GC Delegate, Crosspoint UMC
5. Craig Carter	Clergy	Elder, Lynn Haven UMC
6. Allen Newton	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Destin UMC
7. Steve Winton	Clergy	Elder, Troy First UMC
8. Sung Hong	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Korean Church of Prattville
9. Matt O'Reilly	Clergy	Elder, Hope Hull UMC
10. Ralph Sigler	Clergy	Elder, Harvest UMC
11. Sean Rezek	Clergy	Elder, Trinity UMC
12. Rusty Hutson	Clergy	Elder, Gulf Shores UMC
13. Harrison Bell	Clergy	Elder, Saint James UMC
14. Walter Albritton	Clergy	Retired Elder, Saint James UMC
15. Matt Albritton	Clergy	Elder, First UMC Wetumpka

**Legislation to Adopt a Standard Process Governing Requests from Local Congregations to Amicably Separate from the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the UMC and Join the Global Methodist Church Under ¶ 2548.2**

This legislation is respectfully submitted for consideration by the 2022 session of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference by the following clergy and lay members of the Alabama-West Florida Conference:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Clergy/Laity</u>	<u>Local Church Membership/Appointment</u>
16. Mike McKnight	Clergy	Retired Elder, Saint James UMC
17. Jimmy Allen	Clergy	Elder, Woodbine Church Pace FL
18. Earl Ballard	Clergy	Retired Elder, Trinity UMC
19. Jamie Flick	Clergy	Elder, Trinity UMC
20. Steve Bass	Clergy	Elder, Trinity UMC

**Legislation to Adopt a Standard Process Governing Requests from Local Congregations to Amicably Separate from the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the UMC and Join the Global Methodist Church Under ¶ 2548.2**

This legislation is respectfully submitted for consideration by the 2022 session of the Alabama West-Florida Annual Conference by the following clergy and lay members of the Alabama West-Florida Conference:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Clergy/Laity</u>	<u>Local Church Membership/Appointment</u>
1. Beverly Maddox	Laity	GC Delegate, Conference Lay Leader
2. George Mingledorff	Laity	GC Delegate, Aldersgate UMC
3. Stan Cook	Laity	Lay Delegate, Hope Hull UMC
4. Darrell Pearson	Laity	Lay Delegate, Saint James UMC
5. Barbara Fowler	Laity	Lay Delegate, Saint James UMC
6. Bobby Bond	Laity	Lay Delegate, Trinity UMC
7. Rick Wheatley	Laity	Lay Delegate, Trinity UMC
8. Houstin Avery	Laity	Lay Delegate, Trinity UMC

## **Clarity and Transparency for Congregations Disaffiliating in the Alabama West-Florida Annual Conference**

WHEREAS, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church contains two options for disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church: 1) Paragraph 2548 relating to release of the trust clause to join a church “represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another evangelical denomination;” or 2) Paragraph 2553 which grants the limited right, until December 31, 2023, for United Methodist congregations to disaffiliate for reasons of conscience over the practice of ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals; and

WHEREAS, the *Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation* offers a proposal to restructure the United Methodist Church by separation as the best means to resolve our differences, and allow each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect for every person; and

WHEREAS, prolonged uncertainty regarding if and when General Conference will meet, and whether the Protocol will be enacted, as well as limited information about requirements in Alabama-West Florida Conference for congregations desiring to disaffiliate continues to create anxiety and distraction in United Methodist congregations; and

WHEREAS, clarity and transparency about disaffiliation process and requirements will reduce anxiety and empower local churches to make informed decisions;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2022 Session of the Alabama-West Florida Conference directs the resident Bishop, the Cabinet, the Board of Trustees of the Alabama West-Florida Conference, and all officials of the Annual Conference to be governed by the following principles, policies and processes in engaging congregations desiring to disaffiliate to join “one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination (Paragraph 2548.2), or to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church “for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provision 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 which follow” (Paragraph 2553).

1. Congregations joining one of the denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or other evangelical church may, at their sole discretion, choose to disaffiliate under the provisions of Paragraph 2548.2.
2. Congregations disaffiliating may also utilize Paragraph 2553 and shall be required to use the provisions of Paragraph 2553. All churches, regardless of their theological position, should be permitted to disaffiliate pursuant to Paragraph 2553 so long as they meet the requirements of Paragraph 2553.
3. Any required payments for unfunded pension liability shall be based on Wespath calculations of the aggregate unfunded liability of the Annual Conference. Allocation of a proportional share of that liability to the local church shall be determined using the Alabama-West Florida Conference apportionment formula.
4. The resident Bishop, the Cabinet, the Alabama-West Florida Conference Trustees, and all officials shall adhere to the following policies in administering Paragraph 2548.2:
  - a. Any allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement shall include the following requirements. No additional sums shall be required.
    - i. The local church retains all its assets and liabilities.
    - ii. The local church shall be current in apportionments for the period of 12 months preceding disaffiliation. Payment of unpaid amounts for the 12 months preceding the effective date of disaffiliation shall be made preceding the effective date of disaffiliation.
    - iii. The local church shall repay previously documented loans from the Annual Conference.
    - iv. The local church shall either remain under Wespath and carry its unfunded liability forward with it, or repay the Alabama West-Florida Conference for the local church's proportional share of the unfunded liability. The liability shall include unfunded obligations related to The United Methodist Church's pre-1982 pension plan, the Ministerial Pension Plan, and/or the Clergy Retirement Security Program.

- v. The local church shall pay its Post Retirement Medical (PRM) liability as calculated by the Treasurer of the Alabama West-Florida Annual Conference.
  - vi. No additional sums will be required to obtain release of all the congregation's property and assets from the trust clause.
  - b. The local church shall make the decision to disaffiliate at a church conference duly called according to the provisions of The Book of Discipline. The Church Council (or its equivalent) shall determine whether a simple majority or a two-thirds super majority shall be required for approval of the motion to disaffiliate. The district superintendent shall approve the request of the Church Council, and shall preside or choose another elder to preside at a church conference to take place no later than sixty days after the request is made.
5. The Alabama-West Florida Conference Trustees and officials shall adhere to the following policies in administering Paragraph 2553:
- a. No additional sums shall be required for release of the local church's property and assets beyond those defined in Paragraph 2553.4 b – h. The local church shall retain all of its assets and liabilities.
  - b. The required apportionment payment (Paragraph 2553.4b) shall be for the twelve months immediately preceding the effective date of separation, plus twelve times the most recent month apportionment amount prior to separation. Payment of any of these unpaid sums shall be made by the local church prior to the date of separation.
  - c. The local church shall repay previously documented loans from the Annual Conference.
  - d. The local church shall either remain under Wespeth and carry its unfunded liability forward with it, or repay the Alabama-West Florida Conference for the local church's proportional share of the unfunded liability. The liability shall include unfunded obligations related to The United Methodist Church's pre-1982 pension plan, the Ministerial Pension Plan, and/or the Clergy Retirement Security Program.
  - e. The local church shall pay its Post Retirement Medical (PRM)

liability as calculated by the Treasurer of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference.

f. No additional terms, standard or otherwise, shall be imposed by the Annual Conference on the disaffiliating local church.

This legislation is respectfully submitted for consideration by the 2022 session of the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference by the following clergy and lay members of the Alabama West-Florida Conference:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Clergy/Laity</u>	<u>Local Church Membership/Appointment</u>
1. Lester Spencer	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Saint James UMC
2. Jeremy Smith	Clergy	Elder, Crosspoint UMC
3. Rurel Ausley	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Crosspoint UMC
4. Craig Carter	Clergy	Elder, Lynn Haven UMC
5. Allen Newton	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Destin UMC
6. Steve Winton	Clergy	Elder, Troy First UMC
7. Sung Kuk Hong	Clergy	Elder, GC Delegate, Korean Church of Prattville
8. Matt O'Reilly	Clergy	Elder, Hope Hull UMC
9. Sean Rezek	Clergy	Elder, Trinity UMC
10. Rusty Hutson	Clergy	Elder, Gulf Shores UMC
11. Doug Pennington	Clergy	Retired Elder, GC Delegate
12. Charlie Satterwhite	Clergy	Retired Elder, Deer Park/Minerva
13. John R Evangelista	Clergy	Retired LLP, Thomaston/Sweetwater Parish
14. Travis W Barnes III	Clergy	LLP, Barrett Road/Orrville UMC
15. Larry Teasley	Clergy	Elder, Clayton and Rocky Mount UMC
16. Jimmy Allen	Clergy	Elder, Lead Pastor, Woodbine Church
17. James Flick	Clergy	LLP, Trinity Opelika
18. Steve Spining	Clergy	Elder, Livingston UMC
19. Kevin Krist	Clergy	Elder, Linden/Jefferson UMC
20. Joe Wyatt	Clergy	Elder, Webb/Mt Zion
21. Randy Greene	Clergy	Elder, Abbeville UMC
22. Earl Ballard	Clergy	Retired Elder
23. Cooper Stinson	Clergy	Elder, Ramer UMC
24. Mark Osgood	Clergy	Elder, Perry Hill UMC
25. John F. Edwards	Clergy	Retired Elder, Allen Memorial UMC
26. Steve MacInnis	Clergy	Retired Elder, Society Hill/Williams Chapel
27. Tom Skeen	Clergy	Provisional Elder, Liberty/Notasulga
28. Josh Agerton	Clergy	LLP, Embrace Church
29. Stephanie A Cox	Clergy	Retired Elder, Highland Park UMC
30. Tommy Gaillard	Clergy	LLP, Epworth UMC/Fruitdale UMC
31. Denny McDavid	Clergy	Elder
32. Mike Sigler	Clergy	Elder
33. Terry Tatum	Clergy	Elder

<u>Name</u>	<u>Clergy/Laity</u>	<u>Local Church Membership/Appointment</u>
34. Lew Wilder	Clergy	Elder
35. Matt Albritton	Clergy	Elder, First UMC Wetumpka
36. Ronnie Bearden	Clergy	Elder
37. Walter Albritton	Clergy	Retired Elder
38. John Webb	Clergy	Retired Elder, Pollard UMC
39. Lee Bateman	Clergy	LLP, Annie Jones/New Hope
40. Mike McKnight	Clergy	Retired Elder
41. Forrest Weekley	Clergy	Elder
42. Ralph Sigler	Clergy	Elder, Harvest UMC Dothan
43. Mike Roberts	Clergy	Retired Elder, Mae Edwards UMC
44. Grant Parker	Clergy	Elder, Epworth UMC

This legislation is respectfully submitted for consideration by the 2022 session of the Alabama West-Florida Annual Conference by the following clergy and lay members of the Alabama West-Florida Conference:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Clergy/Laity</u>	<u>Local Church Membership/Appointment</u>
1. Beverly Maddox	Laity	GC Delegate, Conference Lay Leader
2. George Mingledorff	Laity	Lay Delegate, GC Delegate
3. Trena Webb	Laity	Lay Delegate, FUMC Pace
4. David Hataway	Laity	Lay Delegate, Heritage UMC
5. Stan Cook	Laity	Lay Delegate, Hope Hull UMC
6. Jim Hammond	Laity	Bellview UMC
7. Russell Reeves	Laity	Creola UMC
8. Cindy Clem	Laity	Robinson Springs UMC
9. Mark Bethea	Laity	Lay Delegate, Shalimar UMC
10. Betsy Windle	Laity	Auburn UMC
11. Timothy Carty	Laity	Choctaw Beach UMC
12. Tamela Carty	Laity	Choctaw Beach UMC
13. Sheila Elmore	Laity	Lay Delegate, Aldersgate UMC
14. Ronnie Elmore	Laity	Aldersgate UMC
15. Kay Wingate	Laity	Grimes UMC
16. Lucinda Bateman	Laity	Annie Jones/New Hope
17. Deryl Horne	Laity	Society Hill UMC
18. Rebecca Coreno	Laity	Epworth UMC
19. Randall Jackson	Laity	Thomasville UMC
20. Alan Brewer	Laity	Saint James Church
21. Linwood McClain	Laity	Saint James Church
22. Clay McInnis	Laity	Saint James Church
23. Jacque Cooke	Laity	Lay Delegate, FUMC Pace

## A RESOLUTION

# Local Church Transfer or Disaffiliation Resolution

WHEREAS, The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church contains two options where local churches retain their property: 1) to transfer from the United Methodist Church to a denomination “represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another evangelical denomination” pursuant to Paragraph 2548.2 which relates to a release of the trust clause or 2) to disaffiliate using Paragraph 2553 which grants the limited right, until December 31, 2023, for United Methodist local churches, whatever their theological position, to disaffiliate over issues related to human sexuality; and

WHEREAS, the *Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation* offers a proposal to restructure the United Methodist Church by separation as the best means to amicably resolve our differences, and allows each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect for every person and local church; and

WHEREAS, prolonged delay of General Conference, uncertainty whether the Protocol will be enacted, and limited information about requirements in the Minnesota Annual Conference for local churches desiring to transfer or disaffiliate continue to create anxiety and distraction in United Methodist local churches; and

WHEREAS, clarity and transparency about the transfer and disaffiliation process and requirements will reduce anxiety and empower local churches to make informed decisions; and

WHEREAS, the United Methodist people of the Minnesota Annual Conference desire to do no harm and do as much good as we can;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2022 Session of the Minnesota Annual Conference directs the Board of Trustees of the Minnesota Annual Conference, the Extended Cabinet, and all officials of the Annual Conference to be governed by the following principles, policies and processes in engaging local churches desiring to join “one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination” (Paragraph 2548.2), or to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church “for reasons of conscience over issues related to human sexuality” as provided in Paragraph 2553.

1. Local churches joining one of the denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or other evangelical denomination may, at their sole discretion, choose to allocate or exchange property, or enter into a comity agreement under the provisions of Paragraph 2548.2.
2. Only local churches disaffiliating to an independent status shall be required to use the provisions of Paragraph 2553.
3. Local churches, regardless of their theological position, should be permitted to disaffiliate pursuant to Paragraph 2553 so long as they meet the requirements of Paragraph 2553. Any required payments for unfunded pension liability shall be based on Wespath calculations of the aggregate unfunded liability of the Annual Conference. Allocation of a proportional share of

- that liability to the local church shall be determined using the Minnesota Annual Conference apportionment formula, which shall be provided immediately upon request to a local church.
4. The Minnesota Conference Trustees, Extended Cabinet, and officials shall adhere to the following policies in administering Paragraph 2548.2:
    - a. Any allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement shall include the following requirements. No additional sums shall be required.
      - i. The local church retains all its assets and liabilities.
      - ii. The local church shall be current in any apportionments for the period of 12 months preceding transfer to another denomination. The payment of any unpaid amounts for the 12 months preceding the effective date of transfer shall be made preceding the effective date of transfer.
      - iii. The local church shall repay previously documented loans without interest from the Annual Conference. Any liabilities related to the local church from other sources will be the sole responsibility of the local church.
      - iv. The local church shall either remain under Wespath and carry its unfunded liability forward as part of a comity agreement, or pay the Minnesota Annual Conference for the local church's proportional share of the unfunded pension liability.
      - v. No additional sums will be required to obtain release of all the congregation's property and assets from the trust clause in Paragraph 2501.
    - b. The local church shall make the decision to transfer to a Pan-Methodist Commission or other evangelical denomination at a church conference duly called according to the provisions of The Book of Discipline. The Church Council (or its equivalent) shall determine whether a simple majority or a two-thirds super majority shall be required for approval of the motion to transfer. The district superintendent shall approve the request of the Church Council for said church conference, and shall preside or choose another elder to preside at said church conference which shall take place no later than sixty days after the request is made.
  5. The Minnesota Conference Trustees, Extended Cabinet, and officials shall adhere to the following policies in administering Paragraph 2553:
    - a. No additional sums shall be required for release of the local church's property and assets beyond those defined in Paragraph 2553.4 b – h.
    - b. The required apportionment payment (Paragraph 2553.4b) shall be for the twelve months immediately preceding the effective date of separation, plus twelve times the most recent month apportionment amount prior to separation. Payment of any unpaid sums shall be made by the local church prior to the date of separation.
    - c. No additional terms or standards shall be imposed by the Minnesota Annual Conference on the disaffiliating local church.

**SUBMITTED BY:**

- Wesley Gabel, Osseo UMC, pastor
- Larry Sorenson, Arlington UMC, lay member
- Bruce Kronen, Plymouth Pilgrim UMC, pastor
- Patty Kyro, Sebeka UMC, lay member
- Josh Doughty, Marshall Cornerstone UMC, pastor
- Jonathon Churho Lee, Maple Grove Christ Community, pastor
- Greg Ciesluk, Faribault Fourth Ave. UMC, pastor
- Wesley Johnson, retired elder
- Alan Campbell, Lakeville Crossroads, church council chair

**ACTION:** guides conference entities and local churches on how to work cooperatively and charitably through transfer to a new denomination or disaffiliation using the pertinent provisions of the 2016 Book of Discipline and its 2019 revisions

**IMPLEMENTATION:** Until the expiration of Paragraph 2553 on December 31, 2023 and actions of the 2024 General Conference alter the relevance of Paragraph 2548.2, local churches and officers of the annual conference follow these procedures in making and working through requests to be released from the trust clause in Paragraph 2501

**RELATIONSHIP TO THE SCRIPTURE IMPERATIVES AND RATIONALE:**

*Grow in love of God and neighbor:* The resolution gives direction on how to incarnate God’s love for one another with our conflicting convictions as we pursue the aspirational vision that we believe honors God. No one is marginalized as we leave the win-lose mentality behind.

*Reach new people:* The resolution shifts the focus in local churches of the Minnesota Annual Conference from fighting about our convictions to finding and sharing good news with lost and broken people.

*Heal a broken world:* “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear...” (1 John 4:18). The resolution offers a way for the Minnesota Annual Conference to lower anxiety, respect people’s faith, and care for one another, demonstrating to the world that we are followers of Jesus Christ, who are known by how we love each other... especially in our disagreements.

**OUTCOME:** Creates a method for the annual conference to navigate the unfolding division of The UMC in a way that:

- Fosters healthier local churches
- Multiplies the Wesleyan movement in Minnesota
- Does no harm to the annual conference or local churches (including preventing the acrimony and cost of litigation)
- Creates ongoing partnerships with sisters and brothers in Christ despite divergent convictions

**RESOURCES REQUIRED:** No additional staffing or funding is required.

**Title:**

**Clear, Transparent, Fair, and Collaborative:  
Guidelines for Congregations Considering Leaving  
the Northern Illinois Annual Conference**

**RESOLVED:**

That the 2022 Session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference (NIC), out of respect for one another, a desire to do no harm, and a commitment to allow congregations and their members grace and space freely to consider their options for the future, encourages all officials and entities of the Annual Conference to be governed by the following principles, policies and processes when engaging congregations considering withdrawal from the NIC to join “one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or ... another evangelical denomination” (*Book of Discipline*, paragraph 2548.2), or to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church “for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provision of *The Book of Discipline* related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexual persons as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow” (Paragraph 2553).

1. Congregations considering their relationship with the NIC shall undertake a deliberate and intentional process of informed, prayerful discernment.
2. Congregations joining one of the denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another evangelical church may, at their sole discretion, choose to withdraw for purposes of transfer under the provisions of Paragraph 2548.2.
3. Congregations disaffiliating to an independent status shall be required to use the provisions of Paragraph 2553. All churches, regardless of their theological position, should be permitted to disaffiliate pursuant to Paragraph 2553 so long as they meet the requirements of Paragraph 2553.
4. Any required support for unfunded pension liability shall be based on Wespath calculations of the aggregate unfunded liability of the Annual Conference. The formula for the proportion of the aggregate liability allocated to particular congregations shall be determined by the appropriate group within the NIC. Actuarial reports, financial statements, audit reports, and calculations supporting both the aggregate amount of unfunded pension liability as determined by Wespath as well

as the NIC formula for apportioning the aggregate amount of unfunded pension liability to local churches shall be provided to all churches.

5. Northern Illinois Annual Conference officials and entities are encouraged to abide by the following guidelines in administering Paragraph 2548.2:
  - a. Any allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement shall include the following requirements. No additional sums, “exit fees”, or penalties shall be required.
    - i. The local church retains all its assets and liabilities.
    - ii. The local church shall repay previously documented loans from the Annual Conference.
    - iii. The local church shall either remain under Wespeth and carry its unfunded pension liability forward with it or owe the Northern Illinois Conference for the local church’s proportional share of the unfunded liability. The liability shall include unfunded obligations related to The United Methodist Church’s pre-1982 pension plan, the Ministerial Pension Plan, and/or the Clergy Retirement Security Program. Actuarial reports and financial statements from Wespeth documenting any unfunded liability shall be provided to departing churches. This liability may be satisfied by direct payment to the NIC before the effective date of withdrawal, by partial payments over time until the liability is fulfilled, or a promissory note approved by the conference chancellor or another attorney retained by the Conference in the sum of the withdrawal liability.
    - iv. The local church shall be current in its apportionment payments to the NIC for the current year.
    - v. No additional sums will be required to obtain release of all the congregation’s property and assets from the trust clause.
  - b. The local church shall make the decision about its future relationship with the NIC at a church conference duly called according to the provisions of *The Book of Discipline*. The Church Council (or its equivalent) shall determine whether a simple majority or a two-thirds super majority shall be required for approval of a motion to separate from the NIC. If the motion is to disaffiliate to an independent status, a two-third majority will be required per paragraph 2553 of the *Book of Discipline*.
  - c. The district superintendent shall approve the request of the Church Council (or its equivalent) for a church conference and shall preside or choose another

elder to preside at a church conference to take place no later than sixty days after the request is made.

6. Matters pertaining to the role of the currently appointed or assigned pastoral leadership, as well as any other church staff, will be addressed in the withdrawal agreement. Further, professing members of the withdrawing church who desire to continue in a United Methodist congregation shall have the option of transferring membership to another United Methodist congregation congruent with paragraphs 229 and paragraph 2549.2 of the *Book of Discipline*.
7. A written agreement detailing the requirements of departure and, in the case of withdrawal to align with another eligible denomination, the reception of the congregation into its new denomination, is to be signed by the NIC, the local congregation, and, if applicable, the receiving denomination after review by the NIC chancellor or attorney retained by the NIC for this purpose.
8. All agreements for separation are undertaken with the consent of the presiding bishop and shall be presented to the Annual Conference at a regular or specially called session for final approval. Any congregations seeking disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 must complete the process by December 31, 2023, per the requirements of that section of the *Book of Discipline*. The process for withdrawal to align with another eligible denomination under paragraph 2548.2 will have no time limit imposed or implied.

## **Rationale:**

*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* contains two options for congregations choosing to separate from the United Methodist Church: 1) Paragraph 2548.2 relating to release of the trust clause for a local congregation to join a church “represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or another evangelical denomination;” or 2) Paragraph 2553 which grants the limited right, until December 31, 2023, for United Methodist congregations to disaffiliate for reasons of conscience over the practice of ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals; and

*The Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation* and its legislation submitted to the now postponed 2020 General Conference offers a proposal to restructure the United Methodist Church by separation as a means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect for every person; and

*The Covenant to Build BeLoved Community*, adopted by the North Central Jurisdictional Conference (November 2021) and affirmed by the NIC General and Jurisdictional Conference delegation states,

*We encourage conferences and local churches to strive for reconciliation and understanding. However, some congregations and clergy may feel called to a different future in the faith. We respect our siblings who depart and desire to do*

*no harm as we anticipate cooperative ecumenical efforts in the future. We grieve each separation. NCJ annual conferences should use existing disciplinary and conference provisions to accommodate local congregations and clergy seeking disaffiliation.* (<https://www.ncjumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/NCJ-Covenant-to-Build-BeLoved-Community-1.pdf>)

The prolonged delay of General Conference, and uncertainty whether the *Protocol* will be enacted, as well as limited information about requirements in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference for congregations desiring to disaffiliate or withdraw for purpose of transfer contributes to anxiety, loss of trust, and distraction in our local churches.

Clear guidance by Annual Conference action regarding the separation process and expected requirements will reduce anxiety, allow for open, peaceable, and informed consideration by local churches, their pastors, and NIC leaders, and empower local churches to make better decisions about their futures if and when they choose to do so.

Submitted by:  
Rev. Scott N. Field  
NIC Clergy (Retired)

**Petition: To Clarify Process in the Western Pennsylvania Conference  
for Deeding Church Property to Another Evangelical Denomination**

WHEREAS, Scripture says, "...all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." (I Corinthians 14:40),

WHEREAS, the *2016 Book of Discipline* states that a local church from the United Methodist Church may deed its property "to one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination under an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement" (§2548.2),

WHEREAS, The United Methodist Church believes that a local church which leaves the denomination continues to share common religious bonds and convictions with The United Methodist Church based on shared Wesleyan theology and tradition and Methodist roots, and is therefore eligible to continue to utilize plans through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits,

WHEREAS, because of our common religious bonds and convictions and shared Wesleyan theology and tradition and Methodist roots, we believe the Global Methodist Church qualifies as another evangelical denomination in the Wesleyan tradition,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the 2022 Session of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference directs the Board of Trustees of the Western Pennsylvania Conference and all officials of the Annual Conference to be governed by the following principles, policies and processes in engaging congregations desiring to join "one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination (§ 2548.2)

1. Congregations joining one of the denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or other evangelical church may, at their sole discretion, choose to deed church property to another evangelical denomination under the provisions of § 2548.2.
2. Any required payments for unfunded pension liability shall be based on Wespah calculations of the aggregate unfunded liability of the Annual Conference. Allocation of a proportional share of that liability to the local church shall be determined using the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference apportionment formula.
3. The Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference Trustees and officials shall adhere to the following policies in administering § 2548.2:
  - a. Any allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement shall include the following requirements. No additional sums shall be required.
    - i. The local church retains all its assets and liabilities.
    - ii. The local church shall be current in apportionments for the period of 12 months preceding deed church property to another evangelical denomination. Payment of unpaid amounts for the 12 months preceding the effective date of deed church property to another evangelical denomination shall be made preceding the effective date of deed church property to another evangelical denomination.
    - iii. The local church shall repay previously documented loans from the Annual Conference.

- iv. The local church shall either remain under Wespeth and carry its unfunded liability forward with it, or repay the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference for the local church's proportional share of the unfunded liability. The liability shall include unfunded obligations related to The United Methodist Church's pre-1982 pension plan, the Ministerial Pension Plan, and/or the Clergy Retirement Security Program.
  - v. No additional sums will be required to obtain release of all the congregation's property and assets from the trust clause.
- b. The local church shall make the decision to deed church property to another evangelical denomination at a charge or church conference duly called according to the provisions of *The 2016 Book of Discipline*. The Church Council (or its equivalent) shall determine whether a simple majority or a two-thirds super majority shall be required for approval of the motion to deed church property to another evangelical denomination. The district superintendent shall approve the request of the Church Council, and shall preside or choose another elder to preside at a charge or church conference to take place no later than sixty days after the request is made in accordance with ¶¶246; 248.

Respectfully Submitted,

Neil Shindledecker

Laura Saffell