

Helpful Terminology

Annual Conference

A regional, organizational unit of The United Methodist Church and the yearly business meeting of that unit, both presided over by a bishop. The business session is composed of equal numbers of clergy and laity. At least one layperson from each pastoral charge is a member.

Appointment

The annual assignment to a field of service of ministerial members active in an annual conference. The appointment may be to a pastoral charge or to special appointments beyond the local church.

Apportionment

The share each annual conference or local church pays to support international, national and regional (annual conference) mission.

Bishop

An elder (ordained minister) who is elected to the office of bishop. A United Methodist bishop is consecrated for the office of bishop by other United Methodist bishops. A bishop serves as a general superintendent of the denomination. It is a responsibility of the bishops to see that the rules, regulations, and responsibilities developed by the General Conference are understood and effectively carried out.

Central Conference

One of seven geographic areas outside the territorial United States, each composed of annual conferences as determined by the General Conference. Central Conferences have responsibilities similar to those of Jurisdictional Conferences. The seven central conferences are in Europe, Africa and the Philippines.

Charge Conference

The charge conference is the basic governing body of each United Methodist local church and is composed of all members of the church council. All members of the charge conference must be members of the local church. The charge conference must meet at least once per year. The charge conference directs the work of the church and gives general oversight to the church council, reviews and evaluates the mission and ministry of the church, sets salaries for the pastor and staff, elects the members of the church council, and recommends candidates for ordained ministry.

Church Conference

The convening of the Charge Conference as a meeting in which all members of a local United Methodist church are invited to attend and are extended the privilege of vote. A Church Conference is called to have broad participation of the members of the congregation. The Church Conference may be authorized by the district superintendent.

College of Bishops

All active and retired bishops within a jurisdiction.

Council of Bishops

All active and retired bishops of The United Methodist Church. The council meets twice a year. According to The Book of Discipline 2000, "The Council of Bishops is...the collegial expression of episcopal leadership in the Church and through the Church into the world. The Church expects the Council of Bishops to speak to the Church and from the Church to the world, and to give leadership in the quest for Christian unity and interreligious relationships."

District Conference

The meeting held to conduct necessary work of the district. The annual conference determines what the membership of a district conference shall be. Generally, it consists of the clergy of the district and one or more delegates from each pastoral charge. It is presided over by the district superintendent.

District Superintendent

An ordained minister appointed by a bishop to oversee the pastors and local churches in a district. A district superintendent may not serve in that capacity more than six years in any consecutive nine years. No minister may serve more than a total of twelve years as a superintendent.

General Conference

The highest legislative body in The United Methodist Church. The voting membership consists of an equal number of clergy and lay delegates elected by the annual conferences. General Conference convenes every quadrennium (four years) to determine the denomination's future direction. It is the only body that can speak officially for the denomination.

Judicial Council

Nine persons elected by General Conference who rule on questions of constitutionality in church law and practice.

Jurisdictional Conference

The quadrennial meeting of clergy and lay delegates from the annual conferences within the boundaries of one of five U.S. jurisdictions: North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern and Western. Jurisdictional Conferences convene every four years. The business includes the election and assignment of bishops.

Trust Clause

The clause that must be included in the deeds of all United Methodist properties. All properties held by the General, Jurisdictional, Annual, and District Conferences or by a local church or by any agency or institution of the denomination are to be held in trust for the denomination. The titles are not held by "The United Methodist Church" since it is a connectional structure and not a legal entity in and of itself. The titles to the properties are held by boards of trustees established for the purpose of holding and administering property.

Paragraph 2553

¶ 2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality

1. Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.

2. Time Limits - The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church under this paragraph shall be made in sufficient time for the process for exiting the denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023. The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date.

3. Decision Making Process - The church conference shall be conducted in accordance with ¶ 248 and shall be held within one hundred twenty (120) days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. In addition to the provisions of ¶ 246.8, special attention shall be made to give broad notice to the full professing membership of the local church regarding the time and place of a church conference called for this purpose and to use all means necessary, including electronic communication where possible, to communicate. The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference.

4. Process Following Decision to Disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church - If the church conference votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation shall be established by the board of trustees of the applicable annual conference, with the advice of the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor. The terms and conditions, including the effective date of disaffiliation, shall be memorialized in a binding Disaffiliation Agreement between the annual conference and the trustees of the local church, acting on behalf of the members. That agreement must be consistent with the following provisions:

a) Standard Terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement. - The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth in ¶ 807.9. The agreement shall include a recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶ 2501, notwithstanding the release of property therefrom. Annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.

b) Apportionments - The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionments.

c) Property - A disaffiliating local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property. All transfers of property shall be made prior to disaffiliation. All costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.

- d) Pension Liabilities - The local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which the annual conference will determine the local church's share.
- e) Other Liabilities - The local church shall satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation.
- f) Payment Terms - Payment shall occur prior to the effective date of departure.
- g) Disaffiliating Churches Continuing as Plan Sponsors of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits Plans - The United Methodist Church believes that a local church disaffiliating under ¶2553 shall continue to share common religious bonds and convictions with The United Methodist Church based on shared Wesleyan theology and tradition and Methodist roots, unless the local church expressly resolves to the contrary. As such, a local church disaffiliating under ¶ 2553 shall continue to be eligible to sponsor voluntary employee benefit plans through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits under ¶ 1504.2, subject to the applicable terms and conditions of the plans.
- h) Once the disaffiliating local church has reimbursed the applicable annual conference for all funds due under the agreement, and provided that there are no other outstanding liabilities or claims against The United Methodist Church as a result of the disaffiliation, in consideration of the provisions of this paragraph, the applicable annual conference shall release any claims that it may have under ¶ 2501 and other paragraphs of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church commonly referred to as the trust clause, or under the agreement.

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2019 Addendum. © 2019 by The United Methodist Publishing House.