

Conference Disaffiliation Policy Task Force at Work

With the recent postponement of General Conference to 2024, many have been asking what the future holds for their local congregation, our conference, and for the United Methodist Church, particularly in relation to our ongoing divisions related to human sexuality. This is understandable. The last several years of conflict, complicated by postponements of General Conference and prolonged uncertainty, have been hard, particularly for churches that feel out-of-sync with the denomination. As the chairperson of the Board of Trustees, I wanted to offer a brief update.

Even with General Conference postponed, there is an exit provision passed by the called General Conference in 2019 for churches who wish to disaffiliate. This can be found in Paragraph 2553 of the addendum to the Book of Discipline. The trustees of every Annual Conference are authorized to interpret Paragraph 2553 and establish a disaffiliation policy.

In February, the Trustees established a task force to craft a New Mexico Conference disaffiliation policy for churches that wish to leave the United Methodist Church. The task force includes representation from every district, from clergy, cabinet, and laity, and includes diversity in theological outlook. In March, the task force began the work of crafting a disaffiliation policy. It will be reviewed, likely amended, and then adopted by the Board of Trustees, in accordance with Paragraph 2553. Before adoption, the policy will also be reviewed by the conference chancellor, benefits officer, CF&A, the cabinet, provost, treasurer and Bishop Schnase. We are working hard and asking for lots of help to ensure that the policy is fair, protects the needs of local churches, the annual conference, and retired clergy, and that it helps churches to make the best possible choice for their future.

If your congregation is able to fulfill its mission as a United Methodist Church, then no action is necessary. That relationship will continue without interruption. If your church believes that it cannot fulfill its mission as a United Methodist Church, the disaffiliation policy will be available to congregations at Annual Conference in June. It will include a short document explaining the required provisions for a church to disaffiliate under Paragraph 2553 as well as a workbook that will help congregations navigate the process. We know that this will be a hard decision, and the disaffiliation process will include a period of discernment where congregations prayerfully consider the theological and practical implications of disaffiliation.

At the end of the disaffiliation process, if churches meet all requirements, they will be permitted by the Annual Conference to leave the United Methodist Church with their property.

The Trustees will hold an informational session at Annual Conference to explain the details of disaffiliation. If you have questions or comment in the meantime, please feel free to contact me at pastorjosh@mesaviewumc.org. We appreciate your patience and prayers as the details of this important policy are finalized.

Josh Kouri, Chair of Trustees
New Mexico Annual Conference