



## Disaffiliation Policy

*Adopted at the June 2019 Annual Conference Session, Updated at the June 2022 Annual Conference Session*

1. **Introduction** – This Policy sets out a framework to be followed when a significant number of members of a congregation express a desire to leave the South Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (the “Annual Conference”), pursuant to the provisions of ¶ 2553 of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (“The Discipline”). It is the intent of this policy that when a congregation chooses to leave the Annual Conference, it be allowed to do so in as amicable a manner as possible. The Annual Conference also recognizes a responsibility to members of a local church who want to remain part of the Annual Conference, even if they are in the minority of their congregation. Under the provisions of this policy, a local church shall have a limited right to exit the denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023\*. The right expires on December 31, 2023\* and the provisions of this policy and ¶ 2553 shall not be used after that date.
2. **Approval by Annual Conference** – This policy was approved at the 2019 Annual Conference session, and required approval by a majority vote of the annual conference.
3. **Time Limits** - The vote by a local church conference to disaffiliate under this policy shall be made no later than April 1 of the year in which the local church intends to seek Annual Conference consent to disaffiliate. If the decision is not made by April 1, the church may not request to disaffiliate until the next year’s session of annual conference, unless a special session of the annual conference is called under the provisions of #9. The latest date by which a local church can elect to disaffiliate under this policy is April 1, 2023\*.
4. **Decision Making Process** – If the church council of a local church determines that the church wishes to consider disaffiliation, it shall notify its District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall call a church conference under ¶ 248 of The Discipline for the sole purpose of deciding whether to disaffiliate. Such church conference shall be held within 120 days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. The call and conduct of the church conference shall be governed by ¶¶ 246-247. In addition, 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 must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference. In the event of disaffiliation by a local church, those members wishing to remain a part of the United Methodist Church shall have their membership transferred to another United Methodist Church or shall join the church of their choice (see ¶¶ 229, 2549.2.4).
5. **Terms and Conditions**. If the church conference votes to disaffiliate, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation shall be established by the Board of Trustees of the South Georgia Annual Conference (the “Trustees”), 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 or associate 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 its members. That agreement must be consistent with the following provisions, but may contain additional requirements, as determined by the Trustees –

- a) Terms of Disaffiliation Agreement. The Disaffiliation Agreement shall be consistent with the form to be developed by the General Council on Finance and Administration, and may contain other terms as determined by the Trustees so long as they are not inconsistent with such form.
  - b) Pension Liabilities – A disaffiliating local church shall contribute a withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations, which obligations shall be determined pursuant to the withdrawal liability formula to be adopted at 2019 Annual Conference in accordance with the Petition Number 90016 enacted at General Conference 2019. It must also pay all pension and health care arrearages, if any.
  - c) Apportionments - The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to the effective date of disaffiliation, as well as an additional equal amount representing 12 months of future apportionments.
  - d) Salary and Benefits – The local church shall pay its appointed clergy’s compensation and benefits through the date on which its disaffiliation is effective.
  - e) 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, including any costs or fees incurred by the Annual Conference in connection with the disaffiliation, shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.
  - f) Other Liabilities. A disaffiliating local church shall satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation.
  - g) All payments hereunder shall be made prior to the effective date of departure.
  - h) A church that disaffiliates from the United Methodist Church shall not use “Methodist” in its name, at any point after disaffiliation is complete, unless it affiliates with another denomination, association, or connection that includes the term “Methodist” in its name, nor shall it use the Cross and Flame in its logo. The use of the name “Methodist” and the use of the Cross and Flame implies that a church is part of a connectional denomination and should not be used for a non-connectional, separate and distinct church organization.
  - i) Once the disaffiliating local church has paid the annual conference all funds due under this policy and the agreement, and provided that there are no other outstanding liabilities or claims against the annual conference as a result of the disaffiliation, the Trustees shall release any claims that the annual conference may have under ¶ 2501 and other paragraphs of The Discipline commonly referred to as the trust clause.
6. **Approval by Annual Conference**. The Annual Conference shall vote whether to ratify any disaffiliation agreement at the next session of the Annual Conference following execution of

such agreement. Ratification of such agreement shall require the approval by a simple majority of the members of the annual conference present and voting. No disaffiliation shall be effective until ratified by the Annual Conference.

**7. Re-establishment of local church as a local United Methodist Church**

- a) If a local church that has disaffiliated determines that it wishes to re-enter the Annual Conference, it shall notify the Presiding Bishop. The decision to become a member of the Annual Conference can only be made with the consent of the Presiding Bishop and the Cabinet and in accordance with the provisions of ¶ 259 of The Discipline. In addition, the decision must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at a church conference called for this purpose.
- b) If a local church is re-established as a local United Methodist Church, the Conference Treasurer shall determine the amount of any funds paid for pension liabilities pursuant to paragraph 5 hereof, plus any investment earnings and minus any investment losses, calculated in accordance with the Annual Conference pension liability policy to be adopted at the 2019 Annual Conference and any subsequent revisions. The balance, less any funds paid to cover pension obligations, shall be rebated to the local church within 6 months of the date in re-enters the Annual Conference.

8. **General Conference action** – The Annual Conference recognizes that future action by General Conference of the United Methodist Church may make it necessary or desirable to amend or revoke this policy, and that this policy is subject to revision or revocation by a future Annual Conferences.

9. **Called Sessions of Annual Conference** – ¶603.5 provides that “a special session of the annual conference may be held at such time and at such place as shall have been determined by the annual conference after consultation with the bishop, or by the bishop with the concurrence of three-fourths of the district superintendents. A special session of the annual conference shall have only such powers as are stated in the call.” Should there be a called session of the annual conference after a meeting of the General Conference or Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference or a ruling by the Judicial Council, and should the call include acting upon or responding to said General Conference or Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference or Judicial Council decision, the Conference Chancellor, Director of Administrative Services, and Bishop shall amend the time limits of this policy so as to allow churches to present petitions for disaffiliation at the special session, provided that the timeline also allows for the Bishop and Cabinet to make such appointments as may be necessary in consideration of disaffiliating churches, and provided further that Disciplinary requirements for a called church conference are met. All other provisions of this policy shall be followed.

If a church or charge votes to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church at a time other than at the June session of the South Georgia Annual Conference and the pastor appointed to serve that church or charge does not desire to leave the United Methodist Church and an appointment is not available, the disaffiliating church will pay the salary, housing and benefits of the pastor (all appointed clergy regardless of status - to include local pastors, provisional and full deacons appointed to the local church, and provisional and full elders) for the remainder of the Conference year to the Annual Conference along with the other funds required by the Discipline in ¶2553 and the Annual Conference disaffiliation policy.

## **Rationale**

This policy creates a consistent process for local churches who desire to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church over disagreements related to human sexuality to receive their property while reducing the impact on the Annual Conference by paying their portion of conference pension liabilities, and other financial considerations. It is not intended to be an open-ended departure mechanism. The requirements related to timing of notice and payment of an additional 12 months' apportionments allow the annual conference to properly budget for departures. Funded ministries are not left unfunded by unplanned departures. This policy is also consistent with new ¶ 2553 of The Discipline, enacted at the 2019 Special General Conference and with Judicial Council Decision 1379, upholding the constitutionality of said paragraph.

## **\*Terms of Disaffiliation Policy Extended until 2024**

At the 2022 Annual Conference Session, members approved a report from the Conference Trustees in which a process was affirmed that extends the terms of South Georgia's current disaffiliation policy through December 31, 2024. The wording is below.

*The Trustees affirmed that, after the expiration of the provisions of ¶2553 and the Disaffiliation Policy, and in accordance with the provisions of ¶2549 which vest the Trustees with the power to dispose of property of a closed church their sole discretion, the Trustees will continue to enter into agreements with local churches that desire to exit the Annual Conference on the same terms outlined in ¶2553 and the Disaffiliation Policy. A local church shall have a limited right to exit the denomination pursuant to this resolution which shall be available until the later of any new deadline set by General Conference for disaffiliation or December 31, 2024. Any Disaffiliation Agreement entered into pursuant to this resolution shall require approval by a majority vote of the Annual Conference in accordance with the Annual Conference's existing Disaffiliation Policy.*