

Conference Workbook

Special Session

Saturday, November 23, 2024

10 a.m. CST

9 a.m. MST



Dakotas Annual Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Grow. Reach. Heal.

**Special Session
of the
Dakotas Conference
The United Methodist Church
November 23, 2024**

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Section 1: Agenda and Procedures

1.1 Agenda

**2024 Dakotas Annual Conference
Special Session – November 23, 2024**

Time	Activity
9:30 a.m. CT / 8:30 a.m. MT	Log into Zoom – Use Number ID and Name
10:00 a.m. CT / 9:00 a.m. MT	Opening Worship
	Plenary
	- Organizational Resolutions
	- Cabinet Resolution
	Closing Devotion
	Adjournment

1.2 Special Session 2024 Organizational Resolutions

The official agenda, proceedings, vote, and minutes are taking place digitally for the Called Special Session of the Dakotas Conference. Therefore, Section 7: Rules of Order, as published in the 2024 Official Journal of the Dakotas Conference, will be replaced with the following procedures for this virtual session:

1. The online agenda is the official agenda. All requests for personal points of privilege should be emailed to the agenda coordinator, Duane Coates (dcoates@yahoo.com) and communications team (Rebecca.trefz@dakotasumc.org) at least 48 hours in advance.
2. The session will be a webinar format. Members' presence will be noted by logging in on their individual device with an assigned number
3. Voting will take place electronically through the polling feature, within the webinar platform.
4. Voice—questions, clarifications—of the members will take place through chat feature within the webinar platform. Speeches for or against will take place using audio or the microphone in Zoom webinar.
 - a. Chat moderators will bring questions and speaking requests to the attention of the presiding officer.
 - b. When posting a question or item that needs clarification, please state concisely and clearly your question or concern, and refer to the agenda item.
 - c. Members can request permission to speak to the body or may be requested to speak by the presiding officer. Speakers, when recognized must turn on their audio. Please state your name, church or agency, and if you are speaking for or against the legislation
 - d. Speeches will be limited to two minutes in length.

Section 2: Cabinet Resolution to close Embrace Church/Embrace UMC

Resolution: WHEREAS, through mutual discernment and deliberation, it is recommended that Embrace United Methodist Church be dissolved as a United Methodist congregation;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the congregation be recognized with thanks to God for their partnership in ministry, and that Embrace United Methodist Church in the Southeast District of the Dakotas Conference of The United Methodist Church be officially discontinued under the provisions of *The Book of Discipline*, ¶ 2459 by the Dakotas Conference.

Respectfully submitted by: Rev. Dan Bader, Southwest District Superintendent, Rev. Kris Mutzenberger, Northeast District Superintendent, Bishop Lanette Plambeck, Dakotas-Minnesota Area, Rev. Brandon Vetter, Southeast District Superintendent, Rev. Joel Winckler, Northwest Area Superintendent



Background

Beginning in early 2023, Dakotas Conference and Embrace United Methodist Church leadership began to have conversation regarding Embrace’s future ministry in and with the United Methodist Church.

Since that time, in addition to the Bishop and Cabinet, conversations and discernment regarding Embrace included representatives from CCFA, the district board of church locations, both Conference chancellors, as well as the Board of Trustees and Common Table. Information and historical data were gathered. A formal mediation was also held to aid in the deliberation and discernment.

Throughout the conversation, it was clear to Conference leadership that Embrace Church, though constituted as a United Methodist Church, did not reflect the identity, polity, practices, or doctrinal standards and theological task of our connection.

Conference leadership saw this in the following:

- a. This discernment was affirmed by reflection on other points in which Embrace no longer aligns with the purpose for which it was organized including: the connectional nature of clergy appointments, understanding and practice of sacraments, education and accountability required for credentialed pastors, connectional giving through apportionments and shared mission, and membership process.
- b. United Methodist membership vows, as outlined in ¶217 of the Book of Discipline, state that members will “be loyal to Christ through The United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen its ministries.” Embrace pastors and leadership have been unable to do this. While Embrace is still a viable congregation of Christian ministry, through our discernment process, it was determined that it no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized (as a United Methodist congregation) and is recommended for closure as such.

Through these conversations and discernment, it was also established that it is in the best interest of the Conference as it relates to a Kingdom-minded witness and stewardship of resources (being particularly mindful of the limited market for and \$9+million debt load on the property) to sell the property to the new Embrace entity after closure. As a reminder, closure needs to be ratified by the lay and clergy members currently elected.

In determining financial terms for Embrace ending their connection with other United Methodists, the following was considered:

- Amounts given for Embrace by other churches and individuals through apportionments and capital campaigns
 - Since its inception in 2007, the Dakotas Conference has invested the following amounts into the mission and ministry of Embrace:
 - 2007-2011: \$300,000 – At the time, this was a typical amount invested in a new church start, primarily covering the salary and benefits of the planter as well as initial ministry costs.
 - 2007: \$40,000 for parsonage down payment
 - 2012: \$200,000 for purchase of 57th Street building
 - 2014: \$300,000 for Tea campus and online campus
 - 2016: \$361,500 for West Sioux Falls campus and Embrace Network startup
 - 2019-2021: \$50,000 for staff support of Embrace Network UMCs
 - Total: \$1,222,000
- Property equity (i.e. fair market value minus debt load)

Prior to the ruling of the Judicial Council, a mutual agreement and settlement were reached with a financial settlement of \$1.25 million.

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On October 23, 2024, Bishop Lanette Plambeck called a special session for the Dakotas Conference for the singular purpose of consideration of the resolution ratifying the closure of Embrace Church/Embrace United Methodist Church per the provisions of ¶2549.

On November 12, 2024, Bishop Plambeck met with chancellors, Nancy Oviatt and Eric Olson, to review the recent decision issued by the United Methodist Church’s Judicial Council (Decision No. 1512), which clarified usage of ¶2549 of the 2016 Book of Discipline. In compliance with this decision, we want to iterate this special session is not a reinstatement or replication of ¶2553 (the disaffiliation allowance that expired on 12/31/23), nor is the session calling for the adoption of legislation, policies, guidelines, rules, or regulations authorizing the departure of local churches.

The Dakotas Conference reviewed our process with Embrace in light of this recent decision to ensure full compliance. Following this review—conducted by the Bishop, Cabinet, Director of Finance and Administration, and conference trustees, along with legal counsel—the Dakotas Conference is confident in the decision to move forward with the called special session.

After months of negotiation and mediation—including review of church and civil law—and prior to the issuance of Decision No. 1512, the Conference’s Board of Trustees and Embrace reached agreed upon terms. The agreement terms culminate with the required ratification vote of church closure at the special session of the Annual Conference under Section 2549 of the Book of Discipline. In order to honor that agreement, the Cabinet is bringing forward a resolution to close Embrace Church effective at the end of 2024. Because we reached the agreement to terms prior to the issuance of Decision 1512, the Conference leadership believes that the best way to resolve the relationship with Embrace Church is to proceed with the agreed upon terms. This also lowers the Conference’s risk of a civil lawsuit.