

## **Disaffiliation Background and Process**

*The 2019 Special Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church added paragraph 2553 to The United Methodist Book of Discipline (see text of paragraph below). This paragraph was upheld as constitutional in April 2021 by the Judicial Council (decision 1401).*

As required by the Book of Discipline, Bishop Bruce Ough convened representatives from the board of trustees, the cabinet, and the Board of Pensions, as well as the annual conference treasurer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor in 2019 to establish the terms, conditions and process for that disaffiliation.

This approved process document, a frequently asked questions document, and the readiness assessment can be viewed on the Dakotas Conference Website at the following location (see the documents at the conclusion of this article): <https://www.dakotasumc.org/news/dakotas-conference-outlines-disaffiliation-process>

## **Dickinson Prairie Winds Disaffiliation Summary**

- A letter was sent by the Spiritual Leadership Team of Prairie Winds UMC on January 19, 2021, addressed to the NW DS and cabinet. It was a declaration of intent to begin the disaffiliation process and cites human sexuality as the primary reason including quoting the text from paragraph 2553 in the Book of Discipline 2016.
- The Board of Trustees and Dakotas cabinet are bound by the Book of Discipline to carry out the process as outlined through the Dakotas Conference Disaffiliation Process.
- The procedure outlined in the disaffiliation process for the Dakotas Annual Conference was followed step by step.
- The cabinet consulted with our ND Chancellor throughout the process.
- The Dickinson Prairie Winds UMC provided the required documents and information asked through the Dakotas Disaffiliation Process.
- Dickinson Prairie Winds UMC leaders held multiple informational/town hall meetings, shared on social media and sent letters to the congregation.
- The Church Conference was duly called and was announced as required by Discipline.
- On March 28, 2021, Rev. Joel Winckler, NW DS, presided at the Church Conference with the assistance of Randy Meissner, lay member of the Mandan UMC. The audited membership list was used to validate the ballots before they were counted. The vote was a 67-32 in favor of disaffiliation meeting the 2/3 majority disciplinary requirement.
- In the weeks following the affirmative vote, concerns were raised regarding clergy leadership and other portions of the process. The Cabinet exercised due diligence in following up on all concerns. Those concerns related to pastoral leadership were addressed separately as they do not affect the congregational disaffiliation vote.
- The Disaffiliation agreement is a negotiated contract and the terms of the disaffiliation have been worked on by the Conference Board of Trustees, Conference Treasurer, ND Chancellor and the local church Board of Trustees, local church Finance Committee, and pastor. This includes the property and financial obligations outlined in BOD paragraph 2553 and the Conference Disaffiliation terms.
- A meeting was held on June 7, 2021, with those who are interested in a continuing United Methodist Church in Dickinson.

## Next Steps

- Par. 2553.4 - *“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.”*
- Per Step 5 of the Disaffiliation Process: *“The disaffiliation agreement is fully executed when the annual conference approves. There is the presumption that when a local church has faithfully completed the disaffiliation process that the Book of Discipline, GCFA and the Dakotas Conference require, the Dakotas Annual Conference will vote to approve the agreement as executed in Step Four.”*
  - **Therefore, the Conference Board of Trustees will bring the disaffiliation agreement that they and the local church officers have signed to be memorialized by the Dakotas Annual Conference on Friday, June 11<sup>th</sup>.**
- Dickinson Prairie Winds UMC must fulfill all the requirements in the disaffiliation agreement, financial and otherwise, by the date they set, June 30, 2021, or the agreement is null and void.
- The Bishop, Cabinet and Dakotas Annual Conference will continue to work with those who are interested in a continuing United Methodist congregation in Dickinson, ND.

¶ 2553, page 776. [This new paragraph became effective at the close of the 2019 General Conference.]

### **Section VIII. Disaffiliation of Local Churches Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality**

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

1. Basis—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. 5 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.