

Draft*

Church Disaffiliation: A Short Guide to Key Paragraphs from the *Book of Discipline of the UMC*

In the coming months, as annual conferences and their leaders consider how churches may disaffiliate, you may hear people citing United Methodist laws, especially paragraphs 2553; 2548.2; 1504.23; 2549; and 2547. Here is a summary version to help you keep track.

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

¶2553 was enacted by General Conference 2019 as a path for church disaffiliation in our current circumstances. It requires a 2/3 vote of professing members in attendance for disaffiliation. Congregations must pay 2 years of apportionments and their pension liability. Conferences may add additional costs.)

¶2548.2 Deeding Church Property to Federated Churches or Other Evangelical Denominations

¶2548.2 was enacted in 1948 by the Methodist Church in a very different context. Some WCA/GMC leaders want to use 2548.2, because it would provide an easier and less expensive path to church disaffiliation. The Council of Bishops has asked the Judicial Council to rule on whether ¶2548.2 may be used.

¶1504.23 [Regarding Pensions]

¶1504.23 only deals with pensions. It mandates that no matter which paragraph might be used for disaffiliation, local churches MUST pay unfunded pension liabilities. This was passed at the 2019 General Conference to ensure that churches pay what they owed toward pensions.

¶ 2549. Disposition of Property of a Closed Local Church

Some leaders have mentioned ¶2549 as a possible path. This provision is for transferring property to another denomination when a church has failed. Provisions were added recently for churches that are not yet closed but in “exigent circumstances.” It does not seem to be fitting for viable churches.

¶2547. Interdenominational Local Church Mergers

Some leaders in the WCA/GMC are also considering ¶2547 as an alternate path that might provide a way for a church to have dual affiliation with both UMC and GMC. ¶2547 lays out a procedure by which “one or more local United Methodist churches may merge with one or more churches of other denominations and become a single church.” We do not yet know if this would pass muster in the Judicial Council for use in our context.

Summary:

We affirm that conservative and progressive churches wishing to exit need to have a clear path, and we think ¶2553 is the best option in most cases. Moreover, we hope that ¶2553 will be used as it is, without conferences adding additional costs to churches. Remember that the judicial council may rule that one or more of these options may not be used in our current context for churches wishing to disaffiliate.

For more information see

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-should-united-methodist-congregations-know-about-disaffiliation>

<https://www.ctcumc.org/discipline-disaffiliation-paragraphs>

<https://www.wespath.org/assets/1/7/5641.pdf>

**If you find errors here, please let us know so that we can correct them. Rebekah Miles rlmiles@smu.edu. Feel free to edit this and use it in your contexts, but if you make changes, please remove my name.*