

TWK Task Force on Use of ¶2549

September 2024 Update

On December 31, 2023, ¶2553 of the *Book of Discipline*, which was a temporary provision allowing a church to disaffiliate from the UMC on certain terms, expired. That provision was not renewed by the 2024 General Conference. At our most recent Annual Conference session, we discussed whether ¶2549, the provision of the *Book of Discipline* that addresses closure of local churches, can be used by a local church to depart from the denomination. The only two mechanisms for closure under ¶2549 are (1) initiation by the local church, by simply turning all property and assets over to the Annual Conference and asking to be closed, and (2) initiation by the Annual Conference, resulting in placement of all church property and assets under the control of the Conference Trustees. At the recent General Conference, additional provisions were added to ¶2549. Those provisions will become effective on January 1, 2025, and will allow local churches to vote to request that their Annual Conference close them as a United Methodist Church. These new provisions, like the rest of ¶2549, speak in terms of closure, not separation or disaffiliation. The new provisions do not create a right to separate (the decision to close remains in the discretion of the Annual Conference) and they do not release property from the UMC trust clause.

One of our sister annual conferences, the Kentucky Annual Conference, requested a declaratory decision from the Judicial Council (our denomination's "Supreme Court") on the question of whether an Annual Conference may utilize ¶2549 or some other provision of the *Discipline* as a pathway for exit of local churches from the UMC. Our Judicial Council has the final say on interpretation of General Conference legislation. We expect the Judicial Council to consider the request for declaratory decision in October and are hopeful an answer will come by late October or early November. Of course, we do not control the timing of the answer.

Shortly before our Annual Conference session, a task team consisting of District Superintendents, Administrative Strategy Team members and Conference Trustees was designated to begin considering potential options for churches wishing to use ¶2549 to depart the denomination. The task team has met, with Bishop Graves also in attendance, to begin discerning appropriate next steps so that we will be in a position to move forward once we hear from the Judicial Council as to what is permissible under ¶2549. The task team is committed to moving forward in a way that complies with the *Book of Discipline* and is fair to all involved. Thank you for your patience and for your prayers as we navigate this process. It is our intention to move forward expeditiously, but with intentionality, once we have the Judicial Council's decision.

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