

Conference Relationships Statement
June 8, 2023 Clergy Session

We know that many of our clergy colleagues are in the process of discerning whether to stay with The United Methodist Church or leave to pastor churches that have disaffiliated. In order to assist your discernment, we offer the following information.

If your church is in the process of disaffiliation, you will need to make your decision before all of the requirements have been fulfilled. Understand that serving in an unauthorized church setting outside of The United Methodist Church terminates your membership in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The Board of Ordained Ministry will work with the Cabinet to ensure that clergy are contacted by the Conference Relations Committee at the appropriate time to be shepherded through this process.

If a pastor of a disaffiliating church decides to remain a member of The United Methodist Church and serve under appointment, then they will be asked to complete a pastoral advisory form and updated profile, including limited itineracy if applicable.

If she/he intends to withdraw from The United Methodist Church, and/or serve as pastor of a church outside of the UMC, the steps for withdrawal are outlined here from the 2016 Book of Discipline:

ORDAINED CLERGY/FULL MEMBERS

¶ 360. Withdrawal—1. Withdrawal to Unite With Another Denomination—When ordained members in good standing withdraw to unite with another denomination or to terminate their membership in the denomination, their certification of conference membership, and their written request to withdraw shall be deposited with the conference secretary.

2. Withdrawal From the Ordained Ministerial Office—Ordained members of an annual conference in good standing who desire to leave their ministerial office and withdraw from the conference may be allowed to do so by the annual conference at its session. The ordained minister's certifications of ordination and conference membership, and their written request to withdraw, shall be given to the district superintendent for deposit with the secretary of the conference, and his or her membership may be transferred to a church which he or she designates, after consultation with the pastor, as the local church in which he or she will hold membership.

Persons seeking to serve in another denomination would choose ¶360.1. Those persons that seek to leave the ministry altogether, would choose ¶360.2

In the case of withdrawal to unite with another denomination, the pastor retains their Certificate of Ordination, but it will be inscribed to note that they have withdrawn from the denomination.

PROVISIONAL MEMBERS

¶327.6 states: 6. Discontinuance from Provisional Membership—Provisional members may request discontinuance of this relationship or may be discontinued by the clergy session upon recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry. When provisional members in good standing withdraw to unite with another denomination or to terminate their membership in The United Methodist Church, their action shall be considered a request for discontinuance of their relationship and their credentials shall be surrendered to a district superintendent.

LOCAL PASTORS

While no paragraph specifically covers withdrawal to unite with another denomination, ¶320.1 states:

¶ 320. Exiting, Reinstatement, and Retirement of Local Pastors Who Are Not Provisional Members—1. Discontinuance of Local Pastor—Whenever a local pastor retires or is no longer approved for appointment by the annual conference as required in ¶ 318, whenever any local pastor severs relationship with The United Methodist Church, whenever the appointment of a local pastor is discontinued by the bishop, or whenever the district committee on ordained ministry does not recommend continuation of license, license and credentials shall be relinquished to the district superintendent for deposit with the secretary of the conference. After consultation with the pastor, the former local pastor shall designate the local church in which membership shall be held. The Board of Ordained Ministry shall file with the resident bishop a permanent record of the circumstances relating to the discontinuance of local pastor status as required in ¶ 635.3d.

RETIREEES

Credentialed United Methodist Clergy (FE, FD, AM), active or retired, may not serve non-United Methodist churches unless the context is approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Bishop and Appointive Cabinet as an appointment to an extension ministry setting governed by ¶343 & ¶344 of the Book of Discipline.

Serving in a non-related United Methodist church without approval is deemed as Withdrawal from the United Methodist annual conference membership and requires that credentials (conference membership certificate and certificate of ordination) be relinquished to the annual conference secretary.

Retirement does not change these requirements. A retired UMC Elder is still an Elder and under the authority of the Office of Bishop, Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy session of the Conference. The Retired Elder still has all the powers and responsibilities of an Elder. The Retired Elder can be appointed to serve a church. If not under appointment, the Retired Elder must affiliate with a local United Methodist church charge conference and therein annually report all ministry activity.

We pray for all those who are discerning their next steps in this process. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Board and your District Superintendent if you have any questions. In addition, you may want to consult Wespath or the Conference Benefits Coordinator to understand how your decision may impact your benefits.