



# EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE

The United Methodist Church

*Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Disaffiliation Process.....            | 1 |
| 7 Steps.....                           | 2 |
| Discernment Process.....               | 3 |
| Connectional Covenant.....             | 3 |
| Term Sheet & Documentation .....       | 4 |
| Annual Conference Approval .....       | 4 |
| Fulfilling the Agreement .....         | 5 |
| Clergy That Seek to Disaffiliate ..... | 5 |
| Pensions .....                         | 5 |

### Disaffiliation Process

**Are all congregations expected to go through the disaffiliation discernment process?**

No. Only congregations that are seriously considering leaving The United Methodist Church (UMC) and EPA.

**Why aren't superintendents leading the disaffiliation and covenanting process?**

The District Superintendents will be working with the EPA congregations who are discerning their pathway to future mission and ministry as we emerge from the pandemic. These pathways were identified in the second letter and may be found [here](#). God has important mission and ministry for the congregations of EPA, and this will be the primary focus of EPA over the next year.

**How much is the stipend for Guides who lead the disaffiliation discernment process?**

Each Guide will receive \$500 per session; and an additional \$500 will be paid to Guides who receive, review and ensure all documentation is in order for the creation of the congregation's Term Sheet.

**Will the Guides represent a particular theology or viewpoint about ministry with and by LGBTQ persons?**

Everyone has a theology and viewpoint, but Guides are not representing themselves or their theology and viewpoint. They are assisting a congregation to discern if it will disaffiliate from the UMC and EPA. Successful Guides will be those whose theology or viewpoints are not detected by congregations in the discernment and decision process. The Guides will assist each congregation in discerning its future, not the desires of the Guide or of EPA or The UMC.

## What will the congregation vote on to disaffiliate?

A congregation that discerns it wants to vote on disaffiliation will vote on legislation based on Paragraph 2553 of The Book of Discipline which states:

*Because of the current deep conflict within The UMC 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.*

*The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The UMC 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.*

*The decision to disaffiliate from The UMC must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference.*

## Can a congregation disaffiliate under paragraph 2548.2 of The Book of Discipline?

Some have inquired or recommended the use of paragraph 2548.2 of the Book of Discipline which allows church property to be transferred to another denomination. This paragraph was developed in the mid-1940's shortly after the Southern and Northern Methodist Churches reunified after their nearly 100-year split over slavery. This paragraph was developed for a specific time period for a specific purpose, just as paragraph 2553 was developed for this time period and purpose. Paragraph 2548.2 does not provide sufficient clarity to all of the current issues and matters. The paragraph also requires the approval of the bishop and cabinet. The Council of Bishops has reviewed the paragraph and does not recommend using it. The Cabinet has also reviewed this paragraph, and the Cabinet and I have decided that we will not approve 2548.2 to be used for congregations that seek to disaffiliate, because it does not provide thorough guidance; nor does it have Judicial Council rulings to clarify its use in the present matters before us. The Cabinet will only consider Church Conferences for congregations seeking disaffiliation under paragraph 2553.

## 7 Steps

### What are the seven steps to the disaffiliation process?

1. Request to Explore and Discern Disaffiliation - A Congregation's Church Council votes to explore and discern disaffiliation and the Pastor notifies the District Superintendent of the desire to engage in the disaffiliation process.
  - a. Timeline – June through September 2022.
2. Discernment and Congregational Vote – Two Guides, appointed by the Cabinet and the Connectional Table, will work with a Congregation to explore disaffiliation. At least one will be a clergy elder of the church. Both will be trained in leading the process. The Guides will receive a stipend from the congregation for leading the disaffiliation discernment process.
  - a. Timeline – up to six months starting in September/October of 2022.
3. Relationship Covenant – Once a congregation votes to disaffiliate, the Guides will present and guide the congregation through a covenanting process about: A) ministries that may be continued to be shared with EPA; and (B) communication during the disaffiliation period.

- a. Timeline – up to one month once a congregation votes to disaffiliate.
4. Due Diligence – The Congregation gathers materials and documents necessary for disaffiliation including a review of the church deed(s). The Guides work with the congregation to respond to questions and gather all of the materials for presentation to the EPA Board of Trustees.
  - a. Timeline - up to two months once a congregation votes to disaffiliate.
5. Term Sheet Review and Vote – The Term Sheet outlining the terms and costs of disaffiliation is prepared by the EPA/ Board of Trustees and voted on by the Disaffiliating Congregation’s representative body.
  - a. Timeline – up to two months once the congregation votes to disaffiliate. Must be completed by March 31, 2023.
6. Annual Conference Approval – Annual Conference regular session votes to approve a Congregation’s disaffiliation.
  - a. Timeline – 2023 regular session of Annual Conference in May.
7. Fulfill the Requirements of the Term Sheet – The disaffiliating Congregation makes all payments and fulfills the requirements for disaffiliation in the Term Sheet.
  - a. Timeline – fulfillment of the Term Sheet must be completed by the day of disaffiliation and no later than December 31, 2023, in order for a congregation to disaffiliate.

## Discernment Process

### What is spiritual discernment?

There are a variety of ways to make decisions. In the church, sometimes spiritual discernment is used particularly during deep and challenging decision making. Spiritual discernment is setting oneself or the community apart for a time of deep listening for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom, insight and calling. It is not judging others (Matthew 7:1-2), but encountering God’s wisdom and understanding in others, the community of faith and ourselves for discerning God’s calling for the congregation and each of us individually.

### What is needed for spiritual discernment?

There are four things needed for spiritual discernment.

1. Creating space and time to listen deeply and contemplate.
2. Prayer, scripture reading and the words of Jesus to center and root ourselves spiritually.
3. Openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit in ourselves and others.
4. Holy conversation that listens to understand, responds with grace and respect for God and one another and recognizes that we are in conversation with one another and with God.

## Connectional Covenant

### What is the Connectional Covenant?

If a congregation votes to disaffiliate from with The UMC and EPA, in order to move to the next stage, it will need to enter into a covenant with the Cabinet and the Connectional Table about ministries that may continue to be done jointly. That covenant may outline what information will be shared with the public and the broader church, and if there is openness to reunification in the future. [Click here for the Connectional Covenant.](#)

# Term Sheet & Documentation

## What is the Term Sheet?

A Term Sheet, which is developed by the EPA Board of Trustees, is an agreement of the basic terms and conditions of the disaffiliation. The term sheet is reviewed by the Disaffiliating Congregation's authorized local church governing body (Church Board of Trustees and/or Church Council or Church Conference) that votes to accept the terms of the established Disaffiliation Agreement. It is then signed by the local church pastor and the chair of the local church Board of Trustees.

## What are the financial requirements in the Term Sheet?

The Board of Trustees is currently working on the Term Sheet which the Trustees will be finalize by the end of May. The Term Sheet will include both financial payments and documents that must be provided in order to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and EPA. Once the Board of Trustees has completed their work, the general nature of the Term Sheet will be available. Each Term Sheet is developed for the particular disaffiliating congregation related to their pension liabilities, retiree health liabilities and other payments required to disaffiliate.

## Is the Term Sheet negotiable?

The Term Sheet is not negotiable. These items are included by action of the General Conference and items added by the Board of Trustees with input from the Cabinet, Treasurer and Chancellor.

Disaffiliation is a limited option which suspends the Trust Clause of The UMC and allows a congregation to disaffiliate and take the property held in trust. As a connectional church, United Methodists hold property in common. Property of The UMC is held in trust for the United Methodist mission and ministry. When a church discontinues as a United Methodist congregation, either by closing or disaffiliating from The UMC, all real and personal property reverts back to The UMC to strengthen the witness and mission of the church. Since for this brief period of time, the Trust Clause is suspended, payments for the items listed in the Term Sheet are paid to ensure that past, present and future liabilities incurred by the congregation are paid. These liabilities are explained above under the Term Sheet.

## May the Term Sheet payments be paid over several years?

The financial payments of the Term Sheet must be fully paid by December 31, 2023, for a congregation to disaffiliate.

## What if there are land and/or building deed restrictions on the property?

All deed restrictions must be followed by the disaffiliating congregation prior to disaffiliation.

# Annual Conference Approval

## Does the Annual Conference have to approve a Congregation's disaffiliation?

In order for a congregation to disaffiliate, the Annual Conference must approve the disaffiliation by a simple majority vote. If the Annual Conference does not vote in favor of the disaffiliation, the congregation may not disaffiliate.

### **When does the Annual Conference vote to on a congregation's disaffiliation?**

If all of the above steps are completed by March 31, 2023, the Annual Conference will vote at its May 2023 session. The Annual Conference must approve the disaffiliation for the congregation to disaffiliate.

## **Fulfilling the Agreement**

### **When does a disaffiliating congregation officially end its relationship with The UMC and EPA?**

When all seven steps of disaffiliation are completed and the church makes all required financial payments. This must occur no later than December 31, 2023, for the congregation to disaffiliate.

## **Clergy That Seek to Disaffiliate**

### **What will be the impact of disaffiliation on our appointed clergy person?**

Clergy persons who continue with The UMC and are appointed to a congregation that continues as a UMC congregation will their maintain membership in The UMC as a clergy person and participate in the appointment process as in the past. Clergy who are appointed to a congregation that disaffiliates, but the clergy person continues with The UMC, the cabinet will work to identify a new appointment and will require financial support from the disaffiliating congregation to maintain salary and benefits until the next appointment. Clergy persons who leave The UMC on their own accord or with a disaffiliating congregation, must surrender their membership credentials and join another denomination or serve an independent congregation and the clergy person will need to be credentialed by the denomination or independent congregation.

## **Pensions**

[Wespath FAQ](#)