

# Central Conferences in Europe after 2022/23 On Separation from the UMC

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## *Important remarks:*

*This document will be sent to all Exexutive Committees of the central conferences for adding and enlarging the specifics and for forwarding it to the central conferences.*

*The European bishops will take contact with the Wesleyan Covenant Association to understand how WCA thinks such a process of separation should take place and what role bishops remaining in the UMC will have.*

## 1 - Background

The postponed 2020 General Conference may decide in September 2022 on a plan for a separation into two or more churches (e.g. Protocol on *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring*). As a consequence of its adoption at the postponed GC, the central conferences in the late fall of 2022 or spring 2023 will have the possibility to depart from The UMC. Following the central conferences, each annual conference and provisional annual conference will have the same possibility of choice, as also local churches afterwards. We call on all central conference delegates to work for the best possible outcome for all annual and provisional annual conferences and to bless each other as we continue our walk with God.

Decisions on departing from The UMC, may heavily affect the central conferences in Europe and their episcopal areas. For both traditionalists and the continuing UMC, a separation will result in a reduction in the number of annual conferences, local churches, and clergy.

### **Annual Conferences:**

ACs wanting to separate from the United Methodist Church, will decide if they wish to join the new traditionalist Methodist denomination, or if they will choose other possibilities in agreement with the decisions of the postponed General Conference meeting in 2022. Their bishop will assist them in this transition. Those working towards forming a new traditionalist Methodist denomination have launched a website “Global Methodist Church” and plan to call a first convening General Conference within 12 to 24 months after the postponed General Conference in 2022. Furthermore, in December 2020, the “Liberation Methodist Connexion (LMX)” was launched. Other denominations may be formed based on the Protocol. However, we have no specific information about this.

### **Clergy and local churches.**

For every clergyperson and every local church, the Protocol offers the possibility to join a different Methodist denomination than their respective annual conference. The timeline for decisions by clergypersons and by local churches is longer than for annual conferences.

**At present, as bishops and as central conferences, we are part of The UMC and we cannot plan or prepare a mandate for those who leave The UMC. Therefore, this document does not create a mandate for a task force, but – more modestly – shares some important regulations and steps for those who want to leave The UMC and not remain in a “Post-separation UMC”. It is based on the proposed Protocol and will be revised after the decisions by the postponed 2020 General Conference.**

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## 2 – Regulations on Separating from the UMC

### 2.1 Proposed regulations for separating according to the Protocol

The following explanations are based on the petition submitted to the postponed General Conference, now scheduled for late summer 2022, for a new ¶ 2556 – *Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring*.

The UMC shall continue as the denomination for all central conferences, annual conferences, and local churches that do not choose to separate and form or join a New Methodist Denomination. New Methodist Denominations may be formed, including any Traditionalist Methodist Denomination that maintains the current stance of the *Book of Discipline* regarding the definition of marriage and ordination standards. (cf. ¶ 2556.2 Intro).

Forming a new Methodist Denomination according to the Protocol requires among others also the following criteria (cf. ¶ 2556.2a):

- To follow doctrinal standards consistent with the Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church, the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and the General Rules of the Methodist Church, as set out in ¶ 104 of the *Book of Discipline*.
- To propose a definite and distinct ecclesiastical governance structure.
- To align a minimum of 100 United Methodist local churches, regardless of geography.

Any proposed New Methodist Denomination that has registered its intent shall be allowed to share information about the proposed New Methodist Denomination with central conference and annual conference members, as well as local church leaders, prior to any vote by such conferences or churches on whether to separate from The UMC to join a New Methodist Denomination. (cf. ¶ 2556.2b)

Annual conferences or local churches that separate from The UMC to form or join a New Methodist Denomination must relinquish all ecumenical relationships with other denominations that were acquired during their affiliation with The UMC, but may re-establish such relationships following separation through their own dialogues. (cf. ¶ 2556.2c(8))

Process of alignment outside the United States (cf. ¶ 2556.3):

- Central conferences may by two-thirds vote of those members present and voting at a regular or called session choose to form or join a New Methodist Denomination. The CC shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor supported by one-fifth of its members, or through its normal processes. If the CC does not vote, it shall by default remain with the continuing UMC. – For Europe, the bishops strongly recommend that a decision (or by default) be taken at the regular session in 2022/23 and not postponed to a called session.
- Annual conferences that disagree with the decision of their central conference may by a vote of 57% of the members present and voting at a regular or called session choose the reverse of their central conference. The AC shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor supported by one fifth of its members, or through its normal processes. If the AC does not vote, it shall by default remain with its central conference. – For Europe, the bishops strongly recommend that a decision (or by default) be taken at the regular session in 2023 or a called session no later than end September 2023. (see below point 3)

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- Clergy in CC's that disagree with the alignment decision (by vote or default) of their AC, may decide to transfer to a different Methodist denomination, whether the post UMC or one created under the provisions of the Protocol. (see below point 4)
- Local churches in CC's that disagree with the alignment decision (by vote or default) of their AC, may by a vote of those professing members present and voting at a regular or called church conference choose the reverse of their AC. The church council shall determine whether to require a simple majority or two-thirds for such a decision. Local churches may decide to join a different Methodist denomination, whether the post UMC or one created under the provisions of the Protocol. (see below point 5).

Transitional operations following a vote to form or join a New Methodist Denomination (cf.

¶ 2556.5):

- The Separation Agreements for a CC, AC, or Local Church shall provide that the releases and indemnities are effective as of the Separation Date (but the separation date shall not be more than six months after the vote cf. ¶ 2556.7b(3)f)
- There shall be a grace period of six months to remove signage and other uses of the United Methodist name and insignia;
- Clergy or lay persons who choose to separate from The UMC shall immediately, upon the recordation of the vote, resign membership on CC or general agency boards remaining part of the continuing UMC.
- Clergy shall by default remain members of their AC, unless they choose otherwise (and allowing for transitional appointments till a transfer can be made).

A CC or an AC that vote to separate from The UMC and join a New Methodist Denomination, shall retain all of their property, assets, and liabilities (cf. ¶ 2556.7). The Wespath's Central Conference Pension program will continue (cf. ¶ 2556.8b), but its administration may change from a central conference approach (as in the CC-CSE) to an AC or country approach.

New Methodist Denominations, as well as their entities, are not required to participate in any program of The UMC and do not have a right to participate in them (except Wespath CCPI), unless through mutual agreement made (cf. ¶ 2556.11a)

## 2.2 Regulations in the present BOD for leaving the UMC without joining a new Methodist Denomination according to the Protocol

In principle, all assets belong to The UMC. An individual member may leave the church at any moment, but without any rights to assets of the church. Thus, if all members of a local church wanted to leave the denomination, they could leave individually but without any rights to the assets (and perhaps liabilities) of their local church. This "Trust Clause" (see also BOD, Part VI, chapter 6, Church Property) has been in the *Discipline* since its beginning, even if the UMC in some European countries has been working under civil legal situations that do not safeguard this "Trust Clause" and/or where the UMC has not paid attention to safeguarding it.

Similar to the discussions at the called session of the General Conference 2019, the Protocol now adds one sub-paragraph on local churches disaffiliating and not joining a New Methodist Denomination (cf. ¶ 2556.12). The sub-paragraph only addresses local churches, not districts or annual conferences. Local churches may disaffiliate without joining a New Methodist Denomination with a 2/3 majority, and the AC may require certain payments of apportionments to the AC and the AC needs to approve the final agreement. Then the local churches may withdraw with its assets and

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liabilities. This sub-paragraph in the Protocol only concerns local churches and gives certain rights to them exceeding what the *Book of Discipline* allows.

In the present BOD, central conferences and annual conferences outside the US may have a possibility to become an autonomous Methodist, affiliated autonomous Methodist, or affiliated united church, according to ¶ 572). There is a specific voting process with 2/3-majorities required according to this paragraph. The paragraph offers a possibility only for AC's outside the US. Within the US, an AC has no similar possibility.

### 3 – Consequences for an annual conference in 2023 that decides to depart from the UMC according to the Protocol

#### 3.1 Generalities

If a CC remains in the continuing UMC, but one of its AC's decides to depart from the UMC for joining one of the New Methodist Denominations according to the Protocol, then the following aspects should be addressed and clearly understood by all members of the AC who have to vote.

Before voting:

- Clearly identify which New Methodist Denomination to join
- Be informed on the relationship and support that will end with the effective date of separation from the central conference and the continuing UMC
- Administrative consequences of separation related to the episcopal area office and the central conference
- Financial implications of separation
- Ecumenical consequences of separation (within Methodist family and larger ecumenical bodies)
- Set effective date of separation and timeline for transition;
- Plan for official information to the Bishop(s) and Central Conference on the result of the vote;
- Plan for official information on immediate resignation of clergy and lay from official roles on the general level of the church, including the possibility of a subsequent, opposite choice for clergy and for local churches to remain in a continuing UMC

In the interim between voting and effective date of separation:

- Negotiations with new denomination
- Possible transitional episcopal leadership
- Clarify opposite choice of clergy and/or local churches within the AC
- Official information of ending ecumenical agreements and membership as UMC to the respective ecumenical partners
- Establish new organizational relationship
- Prepare organizing according to new denomination
- Revision of bylaws

The four active bishops in Europe affirm their willingness to do all which is in their authority to assist annual conferences in this transition, according to the *Book of Discipline*.

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According to the Protocol, local churches will have a longer period of time to make their decision than annual conferences. Superintendents will be responsible for ensuring that any voting in church conferences is conducted in a fair and transparent manner.

### 3.2 Specifics for annual conferences in their respective central conference

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OR OFFICERS OF THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE WILL NEED TO PREPARE THE SPECIFIC INFORMATION RELATED TO THE RESPECTIVE CENTRAL CONFERENCE AND/OR ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION NEEDED PRIOR TO DECISIONS OF ANNUAL CONFERENCES, CLERGY AND LOCAL CHURCHES.

## 4. Process for clergypersons who do not want to stay with their annual conference

In the Protocol, ¶ 2556.6 specifies the regulations for clergy who wish to join a different denomination than their respective annual conference is following.

- If the central conference, annual conference or local church decides to separate from the United Methodist Church and the clergyperson wants to remain in it, the clergyperson has to give notice of remaining in the continuing UMC to his/her superintendent **prior to the official separation date**. There may be transitional appointments up to the final transfer.
- If the central conference, annual conference or local church remains in the continuing UMC, but the clergyperson wants to join a new Methodist denomination according to the Protocol, notice shall be given to the superintendent **prior to the final date set in the Protocol** (With a GC in May 2020, the final date was set for July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022; with a postponement of GC to late summer 2022, the final date will probably move to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 or even to the end of year 2024).

## 5. Process for local churches who do not want to stay with their annual conference

In the Protocol, ¶ 2556.3d specifies for local churches:

*Local churches in the central conferences that disagree with the alignment decision (by vote or default) of their annual conference, may, by a vote of those professing members present and voting at a regular or called church conference, choose, as applicable, to remain in The United Methodist Church, or to separate and form or join a New Methodist Denomination. The church council or equivalent body of each local church shall determine in advance whether to require a simple majority or two-thirds vote for such a decision. A vote on any such motion shall occur in a church conference held not more than 60 days after the request for such a vote is made by the church council or the pastor to the district superintendent. Notwithstanding other provisions in the Book of Discipline, such church conferences shall be held in consultation with the district superintendent, who shall without exercising discretion authorize such church conferences according to the process laid out in ¶ 246. Local churches not taking a vote by December 31, 2024, shall by default remain in the denomination of their annual conference.*

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As all timelines in the Protocol, the date of December 31, 2024 may be postponed by about two additional years, which would mean about end December 2026.

## 6. Disaffiliation according to decisions of the 2019 General Conference

The 2019 General Conference has approved the following new paragraph on disaffiliation of local churches. This paragraph is not related to the Protocol. Decisions of the Protocol – when adopted by the postponed General Conference, scheduled for late summer 2022 – may have priority over this disaffiliation paragraph.

**NEW ¶ 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.

## Appendix – statistics of annual conferences 2019

	<b>Membership (Professing members)</b>	<b>Clergy (active and retired)</b>
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>52'334</b>	<b>1'052</b>
<b>CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE CENTRAL CONFERENCE</b>	<b>13'764</b>	<b>302</b>
Austria Provisional	746	9
Bulgaria-Romania Provisional	1'195	25
Czech and Slovak Republics	1'179	33
Hungary Provisional	509	19
Poland	1'925	30
Switzerland-France-North Africa	6'407	165
Serbia-Macedonia Provisional	1'803	21
<b>GERMANY CENTRAL CONFERENCE</b>	<b>27'904</b>	<b>448</b>
East Germany	7'414	86
North Germany	5'890	98
South Germany	14'600	264
<b>NORTHERN EUROPE AND EURASIA CENTRAL CONFERENCE</b>	<b>10'666</b>	<b>302</b>
<b>Nordic and Baltic (without Sweden!)</b>	<b>9'270</b>	<b>221</b>
Denmark	1'210	25
Estonia	1'461	51
Latvia (District)	557	13
Lithuania (District)	449	4
Finland-Finnish Provisional	773	17
Finland-Swedish Provisional	731	22
Norway	4'089	89
<b>Eurasia</b>	<b>1396</b>	<b>81</b>
Central Russia (Provisional?)	232	18
East Russia-Central Asia Provisional	633	28
North West Russia and Belarus Provisional	142	9
Southern Russia Provisional	141	13
Ukraine-Moldova Provisional	248	13