

Motion 1. Maker of the motion: The Nordic, Baltic and Ukraine Area Group

**The future of the United Methodist Church
in the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference**

¶1554 The future of the United Methodist Church in the Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference

This paragraph comes into effect on 19. March 2023 upon the adjournment of the extra session of the central conference. (The provisions of subparagraph 1, 2 and 3 expire at the opening of the 2025 regular session of the central conference and shall not be used anymore.)

1. Local Churches disaffiliating to merge with another Methodist or another protestant church. The annual conference must decide on criteria/conditions that need to be fulfilled for the annual conference to permit a local church to disaffiliate from the UMC in order to merge with another Methodist denomination or another protestant church.

Paragraph 2547 and 2548.1 provides a framework for the process of requesting to merge with another Methodist or protestant denomination and form what is or is equivalent to an interdenominational local church merger:

- a) A local church makes a request to merge with either another Methodist or another protestant denomination present in the country and a member of the national council of churches. This request must be made by a two-thirds majority vote at a duly called church conference. (JCD 1379). The church conference must be called with at least a one month notice and at least 30% of the professing members must be present, for the vote to be valid. If the 30% quorum is not achieved a second church conference may be called with at least a one month notice but without any requirements for a quorum.
- b) All members (baptized and professing) shall receive a written letter informing them of the decision that has been made and asking them to confirm in writing that they will be leaving The United Methodist Church at the effective date of the merger
- c) The request is submitted to the resident bishop and the cabinet.
- d) The bishop and a majority of the cabinet must give their approval.
- e) The bishop of the annual conference informs the bishop/head of communion of the receiving denomination to clarify the process and conditions for transfer.

- f) The approval of the annual conference by a majority vote. (in accordance with the provisions set forth and precedent established by Judicial Council Decision No. 1379).
- g) Upon approval by the annual conference, the annual conference Council is instructed to deed the church property to the merging church.

2. Disaffiliation of districts covering an entire country in the Estonia Annual Conference

a) *Initiating disaffiliation.* By a two-third majority vote the district conference can direct all local churches to call a church conference within a certain time frame to vote on a motion to merge with another Methodist denomination or another protestant denomination present in the country and member of the national council of churches or to create an independent Methodist Church. In preparation of such a vote, the district conference must prepare and submit to its members all the documentation described in the conditions for the merger of local churches with another Methodist or protestant denomination. ¶554.3

b) *Annual Conference.* If district conferences have been functioning as individual annual or provisional annual conference, no annual conference action is needed.

c) *Local churches.* Upon an affirmative vote (2/3 majority) in the district conference in favor of a process to merge with a specific Methodist or other protestant denomination or to create an independent Methodist church, all church conferences of said district can be encouraged but not requested to vote on a request to align with the decision of the district conference. The documentation prepared by the district conference shall be used for preparing the votes in the church conferences.

If a church conference approves the request to align with the decision of the district conference by a two-thirds majority, such local church has decided to disaffiliate with the United Methodist Church.

Each church conference must set a date (preferably the same) later than the close of the district conference for the decision to take effect.

d) *Further process for disaffiliation of a district conference.* If a two-thirds majority of the church conferences in said district have voted in favor of disaffiliation, the district conference may initiate the final steps of disaffiliation with its respective annual conference. Such final steps need to include all administrative and financial regulations agreed upon with the respective entities of the annual conference.

The district conference shall vote on the final motion of disaffiliation with a two-thirds majority. The motion shall contain at least the names of the church conferences that have supported the request for disaffiliation, the supporting documents on separation, the proposal for a fair proportional share of the district assets and the proposed date for disaffiliation. The motion must include a signed copy of the agreement ¶554.2.i Such final motion shall be presented to the district conference for approval.

If one or several church conferences have not voted with a two-thirds majority in favor of disaffiliation, such local churches will remain in The United Methodist Church. The district conference must give a fair proportional share of all the district assets (based on number of professing members) to the annual conference to support the remaining local churches on the district in their future mission and ministry.

e) Implementation of disaffiliation. The constitution and/or bylaws of the district conference/annual conference and of conference institutions must be prepared in a timely manner to enable the conference to fulfill its intentions to merge with another Methodist or protestant denomination.

f) Transfer of district property. At the district conference where the vote on merger is taken, the district conference may by a 2/3 majority vote instruct the district council to deed all district property to the denomination the district conference is deciding to merge with.

g) Transfer of restricted and unrestricted funds to another denomination. At the district conference where the vote on merger is taken, the district conference may by a 2/3 majority vote do one of the following:

- a. Transfer all restricted and un-restricted funds of the district conference to the denomination that the local churches have voted to merge with. The transfer should take place on the effective date of the merger of the local churches.
- b. Divide all un-restricted funds among the local churches and transfer the restricted funds to the denomination that the local churches have voted to merge with. The transfer should take place on the effective date of the merger of the local churches.

The vote must take place before the effective date of the merger of the local churches, and the transfer must be effective on the same date.

h) Caring for members and local churches desiring to remain in the United Methodist Church.

It is the obligation of the district superintendent to inform the bishop about members and local churches that wish to remain in the United Methodist Church, and the bishop in collaboration with the district superintendent is responsible for offering pastoral care to these members and churches.

Based on their number of professing members the local churches remaining in the United Methodist Church will receive a proportional share of the full assets of the district conference.

i) Agreement of mutual respectful relationships for the future. The parties hereto stipulate and agree that the District Conference and the Local Churches have the authority to enter into this agreement of mutual respectful relationships for the future, and they acknowledge and recognize one another based on the following agreement:

- a. Each recognizes in one another that they are constituent members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church as expressed in the Scriptures, confessed in the Church's historic creeds, and attested to in our common doctrinal standards

rooted in our shared Methodist, United Brethren in Christ, and the Evangelical Association history.

- b. Each recognizes the authenticity of the other's sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion
- c. Each recognizes the validity of each other's respective offices of ordained ministry, while stipulating that each has different qualifications for set-apart ministry that members of the other may or may not meet.
- d. Each commit to seek continued good respectful relations and, where possible, collaboration in mission and ministry and to welcome each other's members.

3. Conditions for the disaffiliation of local churches and of districts covering an entire country in the Estonia annual conference.

a) The local church and the district , prior to the disaffiliation, shall be expected to maintain its connectional responsibilities, including, but not limited to paying apportionments and direct billed benefit costs from the annual conference, through the effective date of the merger.

b) The disaffiliating local church would be responsible for payment of any previously documented loans from the annual conference.

c) The disaffiliating church will be responsible for unfunded pension liability to the annual conference. If the district conference is part of the Central Conference Pension Initiative or another pension plan, the terms of separation need to be clarified with the Board of Pension of said plan and, if necessary, with Wespeth.

d) The annual conference may also assess other obligations to the disaffiliating church, such as repayment of loans to the annual conference, reimbursement of significant financial support from the annual conference with the purpose of improving, renovating, or repairing property.

e) The disaffiliating church must also assume full responsibility for any liability or costs (including reasonable attorney fees) resulting from any claim, action, or cause of action that may exist, or that may arise in the future. This shall include, but not be limited to

- a. the acts or omissions of any clergy or other employees, volunteers, or others acting on behalf of the local church or the Conference and its respective entities or local churches (except for clergy who choose to remain with The United Methodist Church), based upon acts or omissions that occurred prior to the effective date of the disaffiliation;
- b. liability or cost incurred because of any claim, action, or cause of action for damages to persons or property resulting from the annual conference's failure to take all necessary steps as required by this agreement.

f) Each disaffiliating church is responsible for agreeing to and signing the "Agreement of mutual respectful relationships for the future". ¶1554.2.i

g). The annual conference decides on if and under which conditions a local church will retain their assets.

h). Effective no later than 6 months after the date of the disaffiliation the United Methodist Logo “The Cross and the Flame” and name “The United Methodist Church” can no longer be used and must be removed from buildings, websites, social media, printed material etc.

i). Effective from the date of the disaffiliation the relationship and support from the annual conference and the UMC will end. This may include but is not limited to:

- Services from the episcopal office and the central conference office
- Missionary assignments
- NIM positions
- Grants from the Central Conference Theological Education Fund
- Grants from the Fund for Mission in Europe
- Support from the Central Conference

j). Effective from the date of the disaffiliation all membership of ecumenical bodies and all ecumenical agreements end. This may include but is not limited to:

- The World Methodist Council
- The European Methodist Council
- The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE/Leuenberg)
- The Conference of European Churches (CEC)
- The National Ecumenical Council of Churches
- Other ecumenical and interreligious bodies of which the church has been a member
- Community Agreement of Methodist and Methodist Churches in Europe
- National agreements with other denominations

4. The name of “the Estonia Annual Conference” changes to “the Baltic Annual Conference”.

5. Standards and policy for marriage. Based on ¶543.7, 543.13 and 543.14 the central conference delegates to each of the annual conferences within its boundaries the power to set the standards and policy for rites and ceremonies for the solemnization of marriage, taking into consideration the laws of the country or countries within its jurisdiction and provided that such policy and standards are not contrary to the Doctrinal Standards, the Constitution, the General Rules of the United Methodist Church, and provided that the spirit of connectional relationship is kept between the local and the general church.

6. Standards for ordination and the license for pastoral ministry. Based on ¶543.7 the central conference delegates to each of the annual conferences within its boundaries the power to set the standards for ordination and for pastoral ministry provided that such standards are not contrary to the Doctrinal Standards, the Constitution, the General Rules of the United Methodist Church, and provided that the spirit of connectional relationship is kept between the local and the general church.

Rationale: The purpose of the motion is to care for several needs related to the future of the annual conferences within the central conference. For a limited period of time, section 1, 2 and 3 offer a pathway for

disaffiliation for local churches and specifically for districts covering an entire country within the Estonia Annual Conference. Section 4 changes the name of the Estonia Annual Conference to the Baltic Annual Conference, which is a more suitable name for the conference. Within the boundaries of the Book of Discipline laid out in ¶543.7, section 5 and 6 offer annual conferences the opportunity to set and clearly state policies and standards in certain areas.