

NWTX Conference Transition Process for Local Churches

There will be major decisions facing the delegates at the NWTX Annual Conference in June 2022 because of the fallout from the postponement of General Conference for another two years. Resolutions will be presented at annual conference with the intent of helping each local church discern where their future will be. These resolutions will create pathways for those who wish to remain with The United Methodist Church (UMC) and those who wish to exit to unite with the Global Methodist Church (GMC). If a local church desires neither of these paths, they may follow the process to become independent or to join another denomination. The hope is to do this in the healthiest possible way.

PHASE 1: DETERMINING OUR PATH FORWARD (prior to Annual Conference)

Option 1 – Resolution for the NWTX Conference to leave the UMC & join the GMC

1. A resolution will be presented at annual conference calling for the NWTX Conference to leave the UMC and unite with the GMC.
2. There is currently disagreement among leaders in the UMC over whether this resolution is allowed under the *2019 Book of Discipline*. Does an annual conference have the authority to vote itself out of the UMC? The Judicial Council (a body within the UMC similar to the Supreme Court) will consider this question in April and hopefully announce a declaratory decision by May.
3. If the Judicial Council's declaratory decision says the resolution is out of order, those submitting this resolution have stated they will withdraw it. The annual conference would then move on to Option 2.
4. If the Judicial Council decision says the resolution is in order, then it will be considered at annual conference.
 - a. If the resolution passes at annual conference, the conference would start the process of transitioning toward the GMC with an effective date of 1/1/23 with each local church following the process outlined in Path 1 below to determine their future.
 - i. The resolution will include provisions for those who disagree with its intent and wish to remain in the UMC.
 - ii. Those churches desiring to exit the denomination but not affiliate with the GMC (become independent or join another denomination) will move on to Option 2.
 - b. If the annual conference votes down this resolution, then local churches desiring to exit the denomination move on to Option 2.

Option 2 – Each local church who desires to exit the UMC disaffiliates under paragraph 2553 in the 2019 Addendum to the 2016 Book of Discipline

1. Paragraph 2553 allows a local church to leave the UMC for “reasons of conscience” related to issues of human sexuality within the UMC. The process results in each local church exiting with all their assets, liabilities, and full ownership of their property. This path may be used to unite with the GMC, join another denomination, or become independent.
2. If a church wishes to disaffiliate from the UMC as of 12/31/22, this path involves significant cost to the local church as they are required to pay their share of unfunded pension withdrawal liabilities, 100% payment of 2022 Shared Ministries, and 100% payment of 2023 Shared Ministries.

3. In order to help lower these costs, the NWTX Trustees are recommending using a portion of the conference's reserve funds to assist both exiting churches and those remaining in the UMC.
 - a. The designated reserve funds will be divided among all the churches of the annual conference using the 2022 Shared Ministries decimal.
 - b. If a church votes to exit, their share of the reserve funds will cover their unfunded pension withdrawal liabilities and their 2023 Shared Ministries. (If a church waits until 2023 to disaffiliate, they will have both 2023 and 2024 shared ministries credited to them.)
 - c. If a church decides to stay in the UMC, their share of the reserve funds would remain with the annual conference and be credited toward their unfunded pension withdrawal liabilities, 2023 Shared Ministries, and 2024 Shared Ministries.
 - d. Points a, b, and c listed above are all dependent on the June 2022 annual conference approval of the Conference Council on Finance & Administration's document *NWTX Transition Process Financial Framework* that supports these recommendations.

PHASE 2: WALKING YOUR PATH (after annual conference)

Once annual conference is concluded in June, there will be clearer paths forward for both those churches wishing to remain in the UMC and those wishing to exit. Each local church will enter a discernment process to determine which path they will choose.

Path 1 – If the NWTX annual conference votes to leave the UMC and join the GMC effective 1/1/23, every local church will follow this process:

1. Each local church leadership team will be challenged to spend two weeks after annual conference praying and fasting to seek God's direction for their future.
2. After the season of prayer, the Church Council (or equivalent leadership group) will call a church-wide meeting or series of meetings to talk about the action of the annual conference and the options now before their church of staying in the UMC or leaving with the NWTX Conference to go to the GMC.
 - a. A conference representative and resources will be made available for these meetings.
 - b. These meetings are only for information and conversation. No official vote will be taken.
3. After the church-wide meeting(s), each church will be challenged to spend an additional two weeks praying and fasting to seek God's direction for their future.
4. After the two weeks of prayer and fasting, the Church Council will meet and vote on whether a church-wide vote is necessary to discern the will of the majority of their members.
 - a. If the Council determines a vote isn't necessary because the will of their people is clear to exit the denomination, then no further action is needed, and the church will become a GMC church January 1, 2023.
 - b. If the Council determines a vote is needed because the church is too divided, wishes to remain in the UMC, or needs more time to discern God's will, then they will ask the District Superintendent to call a Church Conference for a vote on whether they will go with the annual conference to the GMC, stay with the UMC, or enter path 2 to move to another denomination.
5. The District Superintendent or an assigned elder will lead the called church conference.
 - a. Only professing members of the local church who are present may vote.

- b. Requires a simple majority vote, but the Church Council may wish to set a higher threshold.
- c. The vote will be whether to exit to the GMC or to remain with the UMC. If the local church wishes to go independent or to another denomination, they can instead hold a vote on disaffiliation at this meeting using the process outlined in Path 2 below.
- d. The vote will be taken by written ballot with at least two unrelated members counting the votes under the supervision of the District Superintendent or assigned elder.
- e. The District Superintendent or assigned elder will complete the conference form to record the vote and immediately submit it to the Director of Transitional Ministries.

Path 2 – If the conference-wide vote to leave is withdrawn or fails to pass, then churches will enter a discernment process about staying in the UMC or exiting under paragraph 2553 in the 2019

Addendum to the 2016 Book of Discipline:

1. Every local church's leadership team will be challenged to spend two weeks praying and fasting to seek God's direction for their future.
2. After the season of prayer, the Church Council (or equivalent leadership group) will call a church-wide meeting or series of meetings to discuss if their church should remain in the UMC or start the process to leave under paragraph 2553.
 - a. A conference representative and resources will be made available for these meetings.
 - b. These meetings are only for information and conversation. No official vote will be taken.
 - c. Information will be distributed on the disaffiliation process and the cost of leaving under paragraph 2553.
 - d. If the church wishes to disaffiliate by December 31, 2022, they will be required to pay 100% of their Shared Ministries for 2022 by November 15, 2022. The remainder of their disaffiliation costs (unfunded pension withdrawal liabilities and 2023 Shared Ministries) will be covered by the conference's reserve funds.
 - e. Point d listed above is dependent on the June 2022 annual conference approving the Conference Council on Finance & Administration's document *NWTX Transition Process Financial Framework* that supports these recommendations.
3. Each local church will be challenged to spend an additional two weeks after the church-wide meeting praying and fasting to seek God's direction for their future.
4. After the two weeks of prayer and fasting, the Church Council will ask the District Superintendent to call a Church Conference to take a vote.
5. The District Superintendent or an assigned elder will lead the called church conference.
 - a. Only professing members of the local church who are present may vote.
 - b. The vote will be between two options (2/3 majority required):
 - i. Remain in the UMC (this could be because the church needs more time to make their final decision or because this is their long-term desire).
 - ii. Disaffiliate and leave the UMC.
6. If the vote to disaffiliate reaches the 2/3 majority, the church will proceed to the following steps.
 - a. Local church Trustees sign a binding Disaffiliation Agreement provided by the annual conference.
 - b. Local church must submit all funds they owe for disaffiliation to the conference treasurer by November 15, 2022.
7. Bishop Nunn will lead a special called session of annual conference on 12/3/22 to give annual conference approval to all churches who have completed all steps to disaffiliate. The effective date will be 12:00 a.m. 1/1/23.

8. Local churches who have completed this process can choose to unite with other NWTX churches who are exiting to join the GMC, go independent, or join another denomination. These exiting churches will retain all assets, liabilities, and property.

Path 3 – Churches may decide to postpone their decision about their future until a later date

1. Local churches may need more time to work through their decisions about their future. They would need to ensure they follow the process in Path 1 or 2 to remain in the UMC while making this decision.
2. Two more seasons for disaffiliation under paragraph 2553 will be made available to churches in 2023:
 - a. January – June 2023: those churches who need longer to work through their decision will have another opportunity in early 2023 to move toward a July 1, 2023 separation date (final vote taken at annual conference June 2023).
 - b. June – December 2023: those churches who may want to delay even longer can take advantage of the final window available under paragraph 2553 for a December 31, 2023 separation (final vote taken at a yet to be called session of annual conference December 2023).
3. Churches could later choose an alternate path such as transferring to another denomination under paragraph 2548.2 in the *2019 Book of Discipline* or another path provided by General Conference in 2024 or at a later date.

Disclaimer: Any of these paths outlined in this document could be changed by the actions of a future General Conference as it relates to the *Book of Discipline* or the actions of the annual conference or its leadership as it relates to annual conference policy.