

After being escorted from the premises on Wednesday (first day of the 2023 Baltimore-Washington Conference), Rev. Travis Knoll sent the following email to all BWC churches listed in the 2022 Conference Journal: _

Hello, My name is Travis Knoll, I am a full elder in the Baltimore Washington Conference of 20+ years and I wrote an open letter (attached) to the BWC that I was sharing copies by hand with those in attendance. I am no longer able to do that, because I was threatened and expelled from the hotel at or near 6:30 last night (5/31). Because of that, and still desiring to share what I believe God has asked me to share, I email this to the churches of our conference as listed in our 2022 Conference Journal. If this will not reach your lay member and/or pastor directly, please consider forwarding it to them while they are at Annual Conference. Thank you, and God Bless - Travis Knoll PS - some will want to know more details of the expulsion. Rehashing this isn't the point of this email, but because I know human curiosity, I include some here to satisfy at least some of the open questions. A Mr. Arrington approached as I distributed flyers at about 6:30 pm last night in the publicly posted area for such activities (literally standing directly outside of the sign reading "No unauthorized distribution of materials beyond this point") If you want more on the conference policy, see: pp 3007.3.b.1 and 3007.3.b.2, available on the BWC website. He informed me that the sign in question means I have to be 25 yards away from that sign to distribute materials. I asked him to read it again. He said he was telling me that "this point" is 25 yards farther away. I said that I had been told that this was the correct area, and since I didn't know him or his role on the staff, I would need to hear that the sign means that from somebody I recognized as qualified to make such a ruling. He immediately then summoned a waiting nearby very large man who self identified as a hotel employee (wearing no visible identifier of same) who asked me if I was staying at the hotel. I am commuting, so I told him I was not. He immediately asked me to leave the premises. I asked him why, and he told me that I had 5 seconds to choose to walk out of the hotel peacefully, or I wouldn't be able to do so. I thought about it, and decided that there was no useful purpose to escalation to physical conflict, so I left. Mr. Arrington (conference staff) then aggressively escorted me down the escalator and out of the building, informing me that I was not welcome back. Given that I had two lay members and my associate inside, this left me in an interesting place. Fortunately, my associate drove on Wednesday, and I was able to make it home on my own without calling them out of our opening worship.

Here is a [Facebook Post](#) by Heath Wilson showing the sign and offering complaint over Knoll's treatment.

Here is what Travis Knoll was handing out:

Open Letter to the BWC
by Travis Knoll, Heath Wilson, and Earl Mason (Ret), Elders, BWC

Brothers and sisters in Christ.

After prayerful reflection, we feel compelled to write this letter to share what we feel is a significant moral hazard facing the BWC. The BWC is operating outside the bounds of the discipline. Even so, our policy burdens congregations that object and desire to remain in harmony with the discipline by withdrawing from our conference.

In 2019 the BWC began ordaining clergy outside the bounds allowed by the Book of Discipline (BoD). We continue to do so. The BWC does this, apparently, because this is what the consciences of a majority of our full member clergy dictate. Some congregations object to this deliberate and sustained disobedience to both our rules and process.

To allow space for ministry for congregations in these or similar situations, paragraph 2553 of the BoD was passed by GC2019 to allow for disaffiliation. For more on this from the BWC, see: <https://www.bwcumc.org/faq-on-disaffiliation/>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BFvq88IFE> (or QRs below)

Nationally, 2/3 of Annual Conferences have allowed a “no-additional-surcharge” disaffiliation to such congregations. The BWC has not. Instead, our Conference Trustees policy adds a 50% of property value surcharge. The fees incurred vary, but range from tens of thousands to several million dollars per congregation. The consequence of this will be the diminishment or destruction of vital and thriving ministries.

We voted last year to allow 2 churches to disaffiliate under this policy, and this year’s list includes about 20 more. Yet more than 40 others object to this surcharge on legal and moral grounds. They have filed a lawsuit to express their objection. For more on this, see <https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:0b231224-d505-39c7-becd-5877ee6697bf>. [or QR 3 below]

How much **should** conscientious objectors in the minority
be asked to pay to exercise their consciences?

In such a disagreement, what should we then do? Some would say that legal action is inappropriate. There are scriptures that can be read to support this belief. However, the purpose of the courts is to adjudicate, as a last resort, conflicting claims of legal and moral justice when direct conversation among the parties in question fails.

As for us, we believe that there is a court that is above all others – so we call for prayer. Please pray with us, and if your prayers lead you, join us as we encourage our BWC leaders who pursue their consciences to likewise allow all our brothers and sisters an unhindered path to pursue their conscience and ministries.

Earl Mason, Heath Wilson & Travis Knoll

FAQ



Bishop's video



Court Filing



In response to Travis' decision to send his email to all the churches, BWC sent their own email to all churches:

June 2, 2023

The Baltimore-Washington Conference is meeting in Baltimore for four days of learning, worship, service, and conducting the business of the church. It has been a sacred time of holy conferencing. A Bible study by Bishop Peter Weaver has centered us each morning in the knowledge that we are all children of God – Spirit-filled and Spirit-sent. As part of our deliberations, conference members voted to approve the disaffiliation of 23 churches seeking to leave the denomination. A handful of conference members have expressed disappointment over the BWC Trustee's requirement that churches must pay 50 percent of the assessed value of church property to disaffiliate. One member acted on his disappointment by writing a letter to the churches of the BWC and handing it out to the members. When he began to violate conference rules by not remaining the required distance from the meeting space while distributing his message, a security consultant, hired for the session, asked him to observe the required distancing. Upset by this encounter, the person wrote and distributed an email to conference churches, presenting a version of facts that differs from those of the security personnel and other observers. We regret that this incident and the response to it detract from the important work being done by conference members, both at the session and back in our churches. While it is unfortunate that a small number of people choose to act to further personal agendas, the conference has policies, procedures, and channels that allow individuals and groups throughout the connection to express themselves and their thoughts in constructive ways. These channels seek to assure that Conference leaders understand the whole story and can properly care for all involved. One of the strengths of United Methodism is that we are a connectional body that councils together to live out a covenant of grace and discipleship. It is imperative that during these times of ongoing challenge and change, we embrace a prayerful attitude that builds up the body in love. So many positive things are unfolding at this Annual Conference Session, all revolving around making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Today, more than a thousand conference members put love into action when they went out to four area schools and two community sites to serve, and packed bags full of supplies and two books for students in eight other schools. In these moments of mission, the church is living out God's call for transformation, serving in partnership with the community. We hope you will not be distracted by other incidents that diminish our call to vitality and love. For some, these are challenging times. We are looking forward with hope, and are glad to be on the journey with you.

Melissa Lauber, Director of Communications

11711 East Market Place, Fulton, MD 20759 410.309.3455 | mлаuber@bwcumc.org