



Local Church Discernment Process of the South Carolina Conference

Purpose

The purpose of this discernment process is to provide an opportunity for church members to engage in dialogue with one another, to allow every voice in the congregation an opportunity to be heard, to hear the reasons separation from The United Methodist Church is being proposed for their local church, and to discern the congregation's sentiment regarding separation. Most importantly, this discernment process reminds us that God and neighbor are in the midst of every part of this process. Here we ask that the Holy Spirit lead and guide us to what we believe to be our next faithful steps.

Process

Local congregations considering separation from The United Methodist Church shall enter a process of intentional discernment. This process must be completed before a church conference (§ 248) is held. The purpose of that church conference shall be to determine if the congregation approves entering into an Agreement to Separate. That discernment process is outlined as follows.

- 1) The request for a church conference shall be guided by The Book of Discipline (2016) ¶248, and shall be held to determine if that local church desires to separate from The United Methodist Church. The request for a church conference must come from the church council.
 - a. Before a church council may request a church conference, the church council shall mandate that the congregation of a local church shall engage in a period of discernment for a minimum of thirty (30) days. The discernment process will encourage members to practice spiritual disciplines both individually and as a congregation during the period of discernment. (e.g. prayer; reading, meditating over, and studying Scripture; fasting; attending worship; sharing in the sacraments; Christian conferencing; and Bible study.) The discernment process shall be led by the pastor(s) and/or district superintendent, or their designee.
 - b. Before the church council invites the congregation into the discernment process, each member of the church council shall have the opportunity to receive and review the Agreement to Separate established by the Trustees of the South Carolina Annual Conference.

- c. During the discernment process, the local church pastor and/or district superintendent shall facilitate opportunities for “listening sessions,” during which all local church members may have an audience with all those present. Discipleship Ministries provides an example with [“Courageous Conversations Regarding the Future of the UMC.”](#)
 - d. During the discernment process, the church council shall gather and present to the congregation all costs and requirements included in the Agreement to Separate.
 - e. Before the end of the discernment period, at least one church-wide meeting shall be held to present all financial costs and other requirements of the Agreement to Separate, provide copies of the proposed Agreement to Separate, and discuss ramifications of separation. Church members shall be given an opportunity to express their opinion regarding the possibility of separation.
- 2) When the church council votes to enter into a time of congregational discernment, the council shall also determine the beginning and end dates of the discernment process (which shall be no less than 30 days) and determine if a request for a church conference shall be forwarded to the district superintendent.
- 3) Upon receipt of a church council’s written request for a church conference, which shall include the beginning and end dates of the period of discernment, the district superintendent shall immediately schedule a church conference on a date after the end date of the discernment process, in keeping with the requirements of ¶248.
- 4) The vote of the church conference to pursue or not to pursue separation shall be by anonymous (paper/written) ballot. The district superintendent or their designee shall preside. The ballots shall be counted in the presence of all those in attendance, and the report of the vote announced before the church conference is adjourned.
- 5) The decision to separate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the professing members of the local church present and voting at the church conference.