

DISCONTINUED AND ABANDONED CHURCHES POLICIES FOR THE SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

I. Discontinued Churches

1. The district superintendent may initiate a process for assessment of a local church's potential following the steps of Book of Discipline (hereafter BOD) ¶ 213:1-3.
2. Upon reaching the conclusion that a local church no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized (BOD ¶201-204), the superintendent shall initiate the process by which that local church may be declared or may declare itself discontinued.
3. It is recommended that when remaining members are available, a charge or church conference be held for the purpose of voting to discontinue.
4. If there is a cemetery cared for by the trustees of the congregation, they shall arrange for incorporation of a Cemetery Association, either among themselves or including other interested persons in the community, with deeding of the cemetery to the Cemetery Association.
 - a. A separate survey of church and cemetery property may be required.
 - b. Charge/Church Conference approval is required to deed the cemetery property to the Cemetery Association.
5. Action to discontinue a local church requires an affirmative vote of the bishop and a majority of the district superintendents and the district board of church location and building (BOD ¶2549.1).
6. When a local church is discontinued according to the procedures above, the district superintendent shall care for the following details: transferring remaining members to other United Methodist churches (BOD ¶229); obtaining a legal opinion as to any reversion restrictions in the deed (BOD ¶2549.1); determining which persons or group will be responsible for upkeep of the building and maintaining insurance premiums; and making recommendations for the future use of the property (BOD ¶ 2549.2).
7. Use of the following resources is recommended: "An Order for the Leave-Taking of a Church Building" and, "An Order for Disbanding a Congregation," in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.
8. The district superintendent shall notify the Conference Board of Trustees when a local church has been declared discontinued and request the Board to have such action affirmed by the annual conference. Superintendents will present resolutions for discontinuance of churches at the corporate session of annual conference.
9. The Conference Board of Trustees shall maintain a list of Discontinued Churches, update the list on a quarterly basis, and provide the list to the cabinet, the district boards of church location and building, the congregational development director, and the Property and Casualty Insurance Committee.
10. A Discontinued/Abandoned Checklist is attached as Schedule A.

II. Abandoned Churches

1. A local church, which is already discontinued, may be further declared to be abandoned. This change in designation may come along side a charge/church conference action for discontinuance or at the recommendation of the district superintendent.
2. The following groups must approve the change of status: the presiding bishop and a majority of the district superintendents, and the district board of church location and building. This process shall be done in consultation with the Conference Board of Trustees
3. It is understood that this change in status means the church is now available for future sale or other means of disposal by the Conference Board of Trustees (BOD ¶2549.3).
4. The district superintendent or designee and the Conference Board of Trustees shall cooperatively care for the following details: removing sacred objects of special value, church insignia and symbols; arranging for appropriate modifications to or cessation of utilities; securing the building and exercise control over access; and securing any gift, legacy, devise, annuity or other benefit that becomes available to the Conference as a result of a church becoming abandoned (BOD ¶2549.3-5).
5. The Conference Board of Trustees shall maintain an accurate Abandoned Churches List, updated quarterly. Copies of this list shall be given to the cabinet, the district boards of church location and building, the congregational development director, and the Property and Casualty Insurance Committee.
6. A Discontinued/Abandoned Checklist is attached.

III. The Process for Selling an Abandoned Church

1. The Conference Board of Trustees and the district superintendents or designee shall cooperate in the sale of abandoned churches. Initiative may come from either; but the following steps must be followed:
 - a. It is recommended, when appropriate, that an independent appraisal be secured, the cost of which shall be deducted from any sale proceeds;
 - b. All listing agreements shall include the following wording: “The seller is required by church law (The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church) to give consideration to other denominations represented in the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and Union. The seller reserves the right to reject offers from independent church organizations not connected with the Commission.”
 - c. The Conference Board of Trustees must authorize a proper Agreement of Sale and deed with appropriate signatures;
 - d. All written offers for purchase must be directed to the Conference Board of Trustees;
 - e. For an offer to be accepted, the Conference Board of Trustees must give a positive vote to the offer;
 - f. Conference Board of Trustees shall request a written statement from the bishop indicating that the *ad interim* sale of the abandoned church has been executed in conformity to *BOD* ¶2515.
 - g. The Conference Board of Trustees shall report all sales of abandoned churches in a given year at the annual corporation meeting.

IV. DISTRIBUTION OF PROCEEDS FROM ABANDONED CHURCHES

1. The Conference Board of Trustees shall distribute the proceeds in keeping with the Book of Discipline ¶ 2549.3, ¶ 2549.7 and the Conference Policy.
2. All proceeds from the sale of abandoned churches located in non-urban centers, after all financial obligations are satisfied shall be distributed to the following escrow accounts.
 - a. A Conference Abandoned Property Account, managed by the Conference Board of Trustees, for the maintenance and disposal of abandoned churches shall maintain a balance not to exceed \$150,000 (cap). Once the cap in the Trustee Account is reached, proceeds will be distributed evenly between the following accounts.
 - b. Respective District Emerging Ministry Accounts to be used by the District Superintendents in consultation with the Cabinet.
 - c. Congregational Development: New Church Starts and Congregational Vitalization Account to be used by the Director of Congregational Development, in consultation with the Cabinet and any team established to assist in the work of new church starts, congregational vitalization and leadership development.
3. All proceeds from abandoned churches in urban centers of the Conference (the cities of Altoona, Harrisburg, Scranton, State College, Wilkes-Barre, Williamsport, and York) after all financial obligations are satisfied, shall be placed in the respective District Emerging Ministry Account, to be used by the District Superintendent in consultation with the Cabinet in the Urban Center in which the sold property is located. "Urban centers" will be defined as cities and contiguous suburbs.
4. The Conference Treasurer shall provide regular financial reports to the Board of Trustees and the Cabinet on the Conference Abandoned Church Property Proceeds Funds with income received and disbursements made for the Abandoned Property Account, the District Emerging Ministry Accounts and the Congregational Development Account. The President of the Board of Trustees shall include in the Trustees Report to the Annual Conference a Financial Report on the Conference Abandoned Churches Property Proceeds Funds.
5. Proceeds realized from abandoned churches prior to the date of the approval of this policy shall be maintained and distributed in keeping with prior conference policy and commitments.

APPROVED BY THE SUSQUEHANNA CONFERENCE 06/08/2012