

For All Retired Clergy of the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

Those who are ordained “live in a covenant of mutual care and accountability with all those who share their ordination, especially in The United Methodist Church...The covenant of ordained ministry is a lifetime commitment, and those who enter into it dedicate their whole lives to the personal and spiritual disciplines it requires” (2016 BOD ¶ 303.3). Whenever one is recognized as an associate minister, commissioned as a provisional member or licensed as a local pastor, they too participate in this holy covenant of the clergy. This covenant is a lifelong commitment as long as one is in The United Methodist Church.

When a clergy person retires from full time ministry, they continue in that holy covenant in the following ways:

1. 2016 BOD ¶357.5 shares that all retired clergy members (elders, deacons, associate members, and local pastors) connect to a charge conference. This is one of the most basic and essential components of our covenantal and connectional life together. Retired clergy persons submit an annual report to the charge conference providing an account to the church and the district superintendent of the pastoral ministry provided during the year. Retired clergy members have a seat in the charge conference and are voting members. The retired clergy member continues to be active in the connection of the local United Methodist Church.
2. Retired clergy are members of the district conference to which the local church is connected and have a vote and say in the district’s mission, elections, budgets and leadership.
3. All retired clergy are accountable to the resident bishop of the Annual Conference. As such, they are eligible to receive an appointment when requested by the bishop and cabinet. 2016 BOD ¶344.1 d and ¶345 allow for a United Methodist clergy person to serve in a ministerial capacity in another denomination recognized as such by The UMC, but such service is under the direction and permission of the district superintendent and the resident bishop.
4. Paragraph 341.4 states: "No pastor shall hold a religious service within the bounds of a UMC pastoral charge without the consent of the pastor in charge or the DS. If that pastor does not refrain, s/he shall then be liable to the provisions of paragraph 362.1 and 2702."

Based on the above covenants, retired clergy of the Virginia Conference cannot serve in a non-United Methodist congregation without the written permission of the resident bishop and their district superintendent. If a retired clergy (ordained, associate or licensed) is serving a non-United Methodist Church without the permission of the resident bishop, the bishop or district superintendent will consider the clergy withdrawn from ministry in The United Methodist Church. If the clergy member does not initiate a withdrawal on their own and continues to serve in a pastoral capacity outside of the UMC, such conduct will be considered a disavowal to the bishop’s authority to make and fix all pastoral appointments of UM clergy (retired and active), a breach of the clergy covenant, and a refusal to be amenable to the bishop, the supervision of the district superintendent and “The Book of Discipline.”

Therefore, any active or retired clergy (licensed, associate or ordained), who choose to serve a disaffiliated church (a non-UMC local church) without being appointed to that position by the bishop and cabinet, have committed the chargeable offense of disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church. In so doing, their clergy membership will be terminated without appeal (Judicial Council Decision 696).

All retired clergy should

- Communicate their charge conference to the district superintendent and the Center for Clergy Excellence (BOD ¶357.5).
- Submit their annual report to their charge conference (BOD ¶357.5).
- Seek written permission of the resident bishop for an appointment to any ministry beyond the United Methodist Church (BOM ¶344.1d, 345).
 - Contact your district superintendent immediately for written permission or initiate a withdrawal from the UMC (BOD ¶ 360.1).
 - Retired licensed local pastors are required to meet with their district committee on ordained ministry (BOD ¶ 320.5).

-Board of Ordained Ministry, May 18, 2023