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Equipping local churches for ministry and providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church

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Virginia Conference Responds to Firm Claiming to Represent 26 Churches Seeking Disaffiliation

In recent weeks, the Virginia Conference has received more than two dozen letters from an organization called the National Center for Life and Liberty (NCLL) demanding that 26 churches be able to promptly disaffiliate under Paragraph 2548.2 of the Book of Discipline so they can join the Global Methodist Church.

A development like this is unfortunate and it could have been avoided had those churches chosen to disaffiliate under Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline. Paragraph 2553 is a fair and equitable way to leave the denomination.

The process of disaffiliation should be rooted in prayerful, Christian discernment and methodical, conciliatory discussions. The best way to accomplish this is through Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline, adopted at the 2019 Special General Conference.

The NCLL's demands are unreasonable, unworkable, unnecessarily hostile, have no legal basis, and likely to be quite expensive and distracting to the member churches NCLL claims to represent. NCLL's core demands and assertions are just plainly wrong and in violation of the Book of Discipline.

The reasons for this are summarized in the text below.

The Virginia Conference will continue to communicate with the 26 churches despite an unreasonable and improper demand from the NCLL not to do so. The churches are part of the connection and are subject to supervision by Bishop Lewis and the District Superintendents.

If NCLL and any of the member churches wish to proceed with legal action, we are confident that such litigation will be unsuccessful for those member churches and that the Virginia Conference and Conference Board of Trustees will prevail. We will also be seeking reimbursement to the Virginia Conference of all legal fees and related expenses.

Please pray for all churches in the Virginia Conference, the Conference, and our denomination, that we may address these matters in a way that will be truly Christian and honoring to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.



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Summary of Major Errors and Omissions by NCLL Regarding Disaffiliation and Related Actions

Lack of Clarity on Who They Represent or Can Represent

Several of the churches NCLL claims to represent have already begun the disaffiliation process under Paragraph 2553 and are meeting with their District Superintendents in September. Many of the churches listed by NCLL have never expressed interest to anyone at the Virginia Conference about pursuing disaffiliation.

Flawed Interpretation of Paragraph 2548.2

NCLL cherry picked language in Paragraph 2548.2 only quoting a portion of it in their demand letters to the Virginia Conference. They omit the most important conditions: consents from Bishop Lewis and a majority of the District Superintendents and the requirement of a recognized evangelical denomination to which they can transfer. In fact, Bishop Lewis and the District Superintendents unanimously and affirmatively reject disaffiliation of the Local Churches under Paragraph 2548.2. Furthermore, the General Conference must vote as to whether the Global Methodist Church will be a recognized evangelical organization covered under 2548.2. Such a vote cannot take place until 2024 at the earliest.

Paragraph 2553 Governs the Disaffiliation Process

Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline, adopted at the 2019 Special General Conference and affirmed and upheld by The United Methodist Church Judicial Council on August 23, 2022, is to govern the process of disaffiliation for any church wishing to leave for reasons related to human sexuality until December 31, 2023. The Judicial Council made it clear in Decision No. 1449 that the use of Paragraph 2548.2 was improper.

Civil Litigation Would Be Frivolous as This is an Ecclesiastical Matter

As rooted in the first amendment, the issues of interpretation of church practice, church law, religious doctrine, and the related authority of the Bishop, District Superintendents, Trustees, the Annual Conference, and other governing structures of The United Methodist Church **are not reviewable** by a civil court. As such, any lawsuit in a secular court should be unsuccessful because the civil court does not have jurisdiction to hear it.