

Clarification of the United Methodist Book of Discipline regarding a Retired Local Pastor's Relationship to the Local Church, the District, the Annual Conference, and the United Methodist Church

*from the North Texas Annual Conference Resident Bishop and Cabinet
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Introduction: The Book of Discipline is clear that each retired local pastor who is under appointment or who has been granted a license per ¶316.8 remains connected to a local church, a district (and, therefore, under the care and supervision of a district superintendent), and an annual conference (and, therefore, under the leadership and ultimate supervision of the resident bishop). Per ¶320, retired local pastors without an appointment return to lay status and are encouraged to become a member of a local congregation. The emergence of a new Wesleyan movement prompts the need to clarify the relationship between retired local pastors and pastoral ministry beyond the UMC. To that end, we desire to strengthen this part of our connectional system.

Charge Conference: Retired local pastors who have been granted a license per ¶316.8 are required to connect to a charge conference. This is one of the most basic and essential components of our connectional life. The retired local pastor serving in a ministerial capacity in that congregation, the members of that congregation and the lead pastor are encouraged to live out the “*one anothers*” expressed throughout the scriptures in the local church (see John 13:34; Romans 12:10, 16; Galatians 6:2; Colossians 3:13). Paragraph 357.5 instructs retired clergy persons to submit an annual report to the charge conference providing an account to the church and to the District Superintendent of the expressions of pastoral ministry provided during the year. Retired clergy members, including retired local pastors who have been granted a license, have a seat in the charge conference and are voting members unless otherwise restricted by the Book of Discipline on a given matter. Thus, retired clergy members continue to be active in the connection of the local United Methodist Church.

District Conference: Retired local pastors who are under appointment or who have been granted a license are members of the district to which their local church is connected. Again, there is reciprocity as the clergy person receives reports regarding the direction and ministry of the district, elects leaders, approves budgets, and serves on district boards and committees as requested and

the clergy person receives the benefits of community with the district superintendent and other leaders in the district. Thus, retired clergy members continue to be active in the connection at the district level.

Annual Conference: Retired local pastors who are under appointment or who have been granted a license are members of the Annual Conference with voice and vote (see 2011 Judicial Council Decision). They continue to participate in shaping the ministry and direction of the Annual Conference by participating in the discussions, deliberations, and determinations of this basic body of the connection. The session of the Annual Conference is where retired members benefit from reunion, revival, and renewal of a strong connection. Thus, retired clergy members continue to be active in the connection at the annual conference level.

Accountability and Support: Accountability and support are key components inextricably bound together in the connection of the United Methodist Church. This is especially true regarding clergy members. From the time of exploring candidacy throughout our earthly life, there is someone to whom this person called to representative ministry is connectionally accountable and who has the responsibility of supporting the candidate and subsequent clergy person. These persons are pastors, mentors, district superintendents and bishops. This continues in retirement. Retired local pastors who are under appointment or who have been granted a license 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. However, all expressions of pastoral ministry of a United Methodist clergy member are under the authority of the resident bishop. ¶ 344.1.d and ¶ 345 do allow for a United Methodist pastor to serve in a ministerial capacity in another denomination recognized by the United Methodist Church, but such service is under the direction of the bishop and the Board of Ordained ministry.

The Current Situation: Retired local pastors of the North Texas Annual Conference who are under appointment or who have been granted a license are not to serve in a ministerial capacity, whether paid or unpaid, outside of The United Methodist Church without the expressed and written permission of the resident bishop. To do so would indicate that the pastor has withdrawn from ministry in the United Methodist Church according to ¶ 360. If the clergy

member does not initiate a withdrawal and continues to serve in a pastoral capacity outside of the United Methodist Church, such conduct is tantamount to a disavowal of the United Methodist bishop's authority to make and fix all pastoral appointments and of the clergy member's continued amenability to the bishop, the Discipline, and the annual conference. Therefore, once a local pastor, whether active or retired, purports to serve as pastor of a disaffiliated and now non-United Methodist local church, without having been appointed to that post by the bishop, they have committed the chargeable offense of disobedience to the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church in regard to the provisions outlined above and in doing so, under the reasoning applied in Judicial Council Decision 696, they may be deemed to have terminated their clergy membership in the annual conference as a matter of church law.

Next steps for retired local pastors who have been granted a license per ¶316.8:

- Submit an annual report to your charge conference according to ¶ 357.5
- If you are serving in a ministerial capacity outside of The United Methodist Church without the expressed and written permission of the resident bishop,
 - Discontinue this relationship immediately, or
 - Visit with your district superintendent to move toward a request for expressed and written permission from the resident bishop, or
 - Initiate a withdrawal from the UMC by contacting your District Superintendent.

REFERENCES

¶316.8. Responsibilities and Duties of Those Licensed for Pastoral Ministry – Local pastors who have completed the Course of Study may upon retirement annually request from the District Committee of Ordained Ministry and the bishop a license to continue to serve in the local church where they hold membership for the purpose of providing sacramental rites of baptism and Holy Communion, at the request of the appointed pastor.

¶ 357.5. Charge Conference Membership—a) All retired clergy members who are not appointed as pastors of a charge, after consultation with the pastor and the district superintendent, shall have a seat in the charge

conference and all the privileges of membership in the church where they elect to hold such membership except as set forth in the Discipline. They shall report to the charge conference and to the pastor all marriages performed, baptisms administered, and other pastoral functions. If they reside outside the bounds of the annual conference where membership is held, they shall forward annually to the charge conference where membership is held a report of their Christian and ministerial conduct, signed by the district superintendent or the pastor of the affiliate charge conference where they reside. (See ¶316.8 for details specific to retired local pastors who are not pastors of a charge.)

¶ **344.1.d** (in part) d) Elders, associate members, and those licensed for pastoral ministry may receive appointments beyond the ministry usually extended through the local United Methodist church and other institutions listed above in a) and b). when considered by the bishop and the annual conference Board of Ordained Ministry to be a true extension of the Christian ministry of the Church. They may be appointed to pastoral ministry in other Christian denominations at the request of appropriate judicatory officers of that denomination. These ministries shall be initiated in missional response to the needs of persons in special circumstances and unique situations and shall reflect the commitment of the clergy to intentional fulfillment of their ordination vows to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service.

¶ **320.5. Appointment of Retired Local Pastors**—A local pastor who has made satisfactory progress in the Course of Study as specified in ¶ 318.1 or .2 may be recognized as a retired local pastor. Retirement provisions for local pastors shall be the same as those for clergy members in ¶ 358.1, .2, .4, with pensions payable in accordance with ¶ 1506.5a. Retired local pastors may attend annual conference sessions with voice but not vote. A retired local pastor may be appointed by the bishop to a charge and licensed upon recommendation by the district committee on ordained ministry without creating additional claim upon the conference minimum compensation nor further pension credit.

Judicial Council Decision 696 can be found at:

<https://www.resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/judicial-council/judicial-council-decision-home/judicial-decisions/the-legality-of-holding-membership-in-two-denominations-simultaneously>