

S. DISCONTINUED AND ABANDONED CHURCHES POLICIES

Note: At its corporation meeting of June 6, 1990, the Central Pennsylvania Conference brought its “closed” churches terminology into conformity with *The Discipline’s* differentiation between “discontinued” and “abandoned” churches. Complete guidelines were adopted at that time. The Conference Board of Trustees maintains lists of discontinued and abandoned churches according to those guidelines. Certain practical considerations are adjusted as necessary by the Board in discussion with the other involved parties.

I. Declaring A Church Discontinued

1. The district superintendent will note when a local church appears to have lost its “purpose for being” as defined in *The Discipline* (201-204). In order to validate or negate that perception, the district superintendent shall consult with remaining church members, if available, and the CCOM associate director in charge of parish development.
2. If the above consultations warrant, the district superintendent shall initiate the process by which that local church may be declared discontinued. The following steps should be followed:
 - a) Recommend discontinuance of a local church to the cabinet. Permission must be given by the presiding bishop and the majority of district superintendents. (*Discipline: 2549.2*)
 - b) Recommend discontinuance of a local church to the district Board of Church Location and Building. (*Discipline: 2549.2*)
 - c) When remaining members are available, properly call for a special session of Church Conference for the purpose of receiving a vote of discontinuance. (Conference tradition)
3. In the event that a special session of Church Conference is called, the district superintendent shall use the occasion to entertain a motion that the local church declare itself discontinued. If the motion passes, the district superintendent shall care for the following details:
 - a) Offer suggestions for relocating remaining members in nearby United Methodist churches and record their membership intentions when expressed. (*Discipline: 2549.2*)
 - b) Determine which persons or group will be responsible for upkeep of the building and maintaining insurance premiums: names, addresses, phone numbers. (Trustees and Property & Casualty Insurance Committee)
 - c) Obtain an opinion from legal counsel as to, “the existence of any reversion, possibility of reverter, right of reacquisition or similar restrictions to the benefit of any party.” (*Discipline: 2549.1*)
 - d) Explain insurance implications of being a discontinued church:
 - (1) premiums for discontinued churches must be kept current;
 - (2) property and liability coverage under the Conference program remains the same; and,
 - (3) a proper certificate of liability insurance must be provided by any outside group that will use the discontinued church. (Property & Casualty Insurance Committee)
 - e) Recommend, “An Order for the Leave-Taking of a Church Building” and, “An Order for Disbanding a Congregation,” pp. 648-51, *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992).
4. The district superintendent shall notify the Conference Board of Trustees when a local church in his or her district has been declared discontinued and provide the board with the following information:
 - a) the date of the Church Conference vote for discontinuance;
 - b) the name of the church or charge to which the discontinued church will be related; and
 - c) names, addresses, and phone numbers of persons or group responsible for upkeep of building and maintaining insurance premiums.
5. The cabinet, each district Board of Church Location and Building, and the CCOM associate director in charge of parish development will receive a current Discontinued Churches List from the Conference Board of Trustees on a quarterly basis. Additions to and corrections of that list should be reported to the Board of Trustees.

II. Declaring A Church Abandoned

1. A local church which is already discontinued, may be further declared to be abandoned when it is no longer, “used, kept, or maintained by its membership as a place of divine worship.” Request for this change in designation may come from the persons or group responsible for a discontinued church or the district superintendent of the district in which it is located. 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. (*Discipline: 2549.3*)
2. The district superintendent, in conversation with the Conference Board of Trustees, shall initiate the process of having a discontinued church declared abandoned. Strict sequence in the process is not necessary; but all four of the following authorities must agree to the declaration of a church as abandoned:
 - a) the presiding bishop and a majority of the district superintendents;
 - b) the CCOM associate director in charge of parish development;
 - c) the same district Board of Church Location and Building; and
 - d) the Conference Board of Trustees. (Corporation Minutes: 06/06/90)

3. The district superintendent shall help the Conference Board of Trustees secure the following items of information about an abandoned church in his or her district:
 - a) dates when cabinet and district Board of Church Location and Building approvals were given;
 - b) location of recorded deeds (county, deed book, page);
 - c) name, address and phone number of a local contact person; and
 - d) copies of deeds and other relevant documents.
4. The district superintendent and the Conference Board of Trustees shall cooperatively care for the following details:
 - a) remove sacred objects of special value, church insignia and symbols (*Discipline: 2549.3*);
 - b) arrange for appropriate modifications to or cessation of utilities;
 - c) secure the building and exercise control over access; and
 - d) secure any gift, legacy, devise, annuity or other benefit that becomes available to the Conference as a result of a church becoming abandoned (*Discipline: 2549.5*).
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 CCOM associate director in charge of parish development, the Property and Casualty Insurance Committee of the Conference, and each district Board of Church Location and Building.
6. Although casualty insurance coverage for an abandoned church remains the same as for a discontinued church, property insurance coverage is severely reduced. Any outside group using an abandoned church should be required to provide a certificate of liability insurance. (Property & Casualty Insurance Committee)
7. A discontinued church which is “without direction” concerning the disposition of its property, shall have that property disposed of as if it were an abandoned church. (*Discipline: 2549.2b*)

III. The Process for Selling an Abandoned Church

1. The Conference Board of Trustees and the district superintendents shall cooperate in the sale of abandoned churches. Initiative may come from either; but the following steps must be followed:
 - a) An independent appraisal must be secured, the cost of which shall be deducted from any sale proceeds (Trustees’ requirement);
 - b) A written offer for purchase must be directed to the Conference Board of Trustees;
 - c) The Conference Board of Trustees must give a positive vote to the offer;
 - d) The Conference Board of Trustees must authorize a proper Agreement of Sale and deed with appropriate signatures;
 - e) The 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 *The Discipline* (2516); and
 - f) The Conference Board of Trustees shall report all sales of abandoned churches in a given year at its annual corporation meeting.
2. Once an abandoned church has been sold, the Conference Board of Trustees shall forward its file of information about that church to Conference Archivist, Dr. Milton W. Loyer, Lycoming College, Williamsport, PA 17701. (*Discipline: 2549.4*)
3. It is the responsibility of the district superintendent to designate the beneficiary of the proceeds (minus costs) from the sale of abandoned churches in his or her district. It is expected that those proceeds will benefit a local United Methodist congregation presently serving the area once served by the abandoned church. (Conference tradition)
4. Any “gift, legacy, devise, annuity, or other benefit” to a local church, which becomes available upon its declaration as abandoned, shall become the property of the Conference Board of Trustees. The board shall dispose of such in the same manner as it disposes of the proceeds from the sale of an abandoned church. (*Discipline: 2549.5*)

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