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ARKANSAS CONFERENCE

August 19, 2022

Dear Church Council and Central UMC Members,

Based on the following, the pending request submitted on August 11, 2022 to enter into a discernment process regarding possible disaffiliation will not be further considered.

#### The Resolution

As you know, the Church Council of Central United Methodist Church met on August 10, 2022 and approved the following motion by a vote of 18 for and 6 against:

“I move that Central United Methodist Church, Inc. of Fayetteville, AR commence the official Discernment Process regarding possible disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church under paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, as amended, for reasons of conscience regarding human sexuality, as outlined by the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church.”

This was communicated by letter dated August 11, 2022 to District Superintendent Rev. Blake Bradford.

#### The Concern

Thereafter, we received from church members Brenda Gullett and Bill Kincaid a timely email protesting the adequacy of the resolution. These members expressed concern because the resolution states as reasons for entering the discernment process, shorthand language from an informal checklist regarding the major steps in the disaffiliation process (“for reasons of conscience concerning human sexuality”) rather than the language from ¶2553.1 (“reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avoid practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference”). The church members pointed out that “for reasons of conscience concerning human sexuality” is a vague notion rather than one of the two specific allowable reasons permitted for disaffiliation under ¶2553. They further argued that the materials presented

at the meeting and the corresponding discussion pertained primarily to future possible actions of the UMC and actions taken by persons outside of the Arkansas Annual Conference as their justification for disaffiliation, rather than a change in the requirements and provisions of The Book of Discipline. In summary, the concern is that the vote of the Church Council to proceed with the discernment process was based on improper criteria. To our knowledge, this is the first time this particular concern has been raised in the Arkansas Conference.

### The Review Process

The June 4, 2021 Principles Regarding Local Church Requests for Disaffiliation (regarding the applicable review process) state in pertinent part:

“When a request to disaffiliate is first received by a district superintendent, the request shall be forwarded to the Bishop, members of the appointive cabinet and the conference chancellor for review to determine if the request is based on at least one of the limited requirements found in ¶2553.1, namely:

“ . . . reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference. . . .” [or]

“ . . . the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.”

*The review will determine if the reasons of conscience are related to specific changes in the Book of Discipline as identified in ¶2553.1. Similarly, “actions or inactions of the annual conference” must also clearly relate to the specific changes to the Book of Discipline as identified in ¶2553.1.*

If it is determined that the request for disaffiliation is not founded on at least one of these requirements, the request will not be considered further . . . .

Thus, a review is required to determine whether the request is based on at least one of the “limited requirements” found in ¶2553.1 and specifically, “whether the reasons of conscience are related to specific changes in the Book of Discipline as identified in ¶2553.1.”

### Reasoning

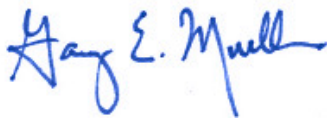
Based on the foregoing, the motion does appear to be vague and further, a genuine concern has been raised about whether the Church Council approved proceeding with the

discernment process based on the correct criteria. The resolution does not make clear whether it was based on one of the limited requirements of ¶2553.1 and in particular, whether the reasons for entering into the discernment process were reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of The Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference. To be clear, we have not considered the discussions and motivations behind the motion because many factors are considered when these issues are and should be freely discussed, but since the motion itself did not make clear exactly what was approved by the voting body, it is not possible to determine whether the resolution fulfills the requirements of ¶2553.

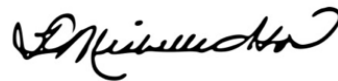
### Conclusion

Since it is important for everyone involved to be clear about whether the resolution was based on the appropriate criteria and since we cannot tell whether the request for disaffiliation was founded on at least one of the allowable requirements, the current request will not be further considered. If it wishes to do so, the Church Council has the option of considering a new motion that conforms to the requirements of ¶2553, as indicated above.

Grace and peace,



Gary E. Mueller  
Bishop



Michelle Ator  
Chancellor