



FAQ for UMCSC Ministers

Including Active & Retired Elders & Deacons,
Local pastors and Candidates

From the Office of Clergy Services

FAQs for Elders & Deacons in Full Connection, Candidates, and Pre-2000 Deacons & Associate Members

What is the *Book of Discipline* process that a pastor withdrawing from The United Methodist Church would follow?

The process a pastor must follow is found in ¶360.1-2 of *The Book of Discipline-2016*. Those paragraphs state:

¶ 360. Withdrawal—1. Withdrawal to Unite With Another Denomination—When ordained members in good standing withdraw to unite with another denomination or to terminate their membership in the denomination, their certification of conference membership, and their written request to withdraw shall be deposited with the conference secretary.

2. Withdrawal From the Ordained Ministerial Office—Ordained members of an annual conference in good standing who desire to leave their ministerial office and withdraw from the conference may be allowed to do so by the annual conference at its session. The ordained minister's certifications of ordination and conference membership, and their written request to withdraw, shall be given to the district superintendent for deposit with the secretary of the conference, and his or her membership may be transferred to a church which he or she designates, after consultation with the pastor, as the local church in which he or she will hold membership.

Persons seeking to serve in another denomination (including non-denominational/independent churches) would choose ¶360.1. Those persons that seek to leave the ministry altogether, would choose ¶360.2

What do I have to submit if I withdraw to unite with another denomination?

Under ¶360.1 persons must submit their certificate of conference membership if they wish to withdraw. If they wish to retain their certificate of ordination, the annual conference secretary will inscribe a statement on it indicating their withdrawal and return it to the pastor.

How can I signify my intent to withdraw?

Your intent to withdraw must be in writing. The annual conference has created **Notification of Intent to Withdraw** that must be completed by all person seeking to withdraw. This will satisfy the BOD requirement that a “written request to withdraw” will be given to the AC secretary.

What is a Certificate of Conference Membership?

All persons ordained beginning in 2005 and moving forward were given a certificate of conference membership. For those persons ordained prior to that date or for those that cannot find their certificate, the conference has created **Substitute Credential Certificate(s) Form**. This form would need to be printed and notarized and then submitted if there is no certificate.

What if I do not want to surrender my Certificate of Membership?

A letter will be written and placed in your file signifying your action. In addition, South Carolina Conference will not signify such a person as having left in good standing, since they were unwilling to comply with the procedures as determined by the annual conference.

What is a Certificate of Ordination?

It is important to make a distinction between conference membership and ordination. Conference membership is an action of the clergy session wherein a person is granted membership in the annual conference. Ordination is an action of the church whereby the Bishop, after the person is granted conference membership, ordains the person on behalf of the church. These are two distinct actions. All those that are ordained are given a certificate of ordination.

By withdrawing to unite with another denomination, a person is severing their relationship with the annual conference, but the person is not relinquishing their ordination. The person will remain ordained, but will no longer be an ordained United Methodist minister, since the relationship with The United Methodist annual conference has been severed.

What is the relationship between the certification of conference membership and the certification of ordination?

The certification of conference membership (voted on during Clergy Session and documented in Part II of the Business of the Annual Conference during Clergy Session, whether or not a physical certificate is provided) and certification of ordination (ordained by the Bishop in a sacred ritual, with a physical certificate provided) are distinct, yet related documentation of the completion of the overall ordination process.

When ordained members (active or retired) in good standing withdraw to unite with another denomination pursuant to ¶1360.1 (Book of Discipline), that withdrawal from membership also constitutes a withdrawal altogether from the ministry of The United Methodist Church.

“There is no disciplinary provision authorizing an ordained United Methodist minister to hold membership simultaneously in another denomination. Upon joining another denomination, membership in The United Methodist Church is terminated.” (Judicial Council Decision 696)

What will be inscribed on my Certificate of Ordination if I withdraw?

The following will be stamped upon the face of your Certificate of Ordination: “The South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church recognizes that (insert name of clergy) has withdrawn from conference membership and altogether from the ministry of The United Methodist Church.”

What if I cannot find my Certificate of Ordination or Certificate of Membership?

In the event that you cannot find your Certificate of Ordination, the conference has created **Substitute Credential Certificate(s) Form**. You would need to print this form and have it notarized. A copy, after it is notarized by the annual conference secretary, will be given to you.

What if I do not want to allow the annual conference secretary to inscribe my Certificate of Ordination?

A letter will be written and placed in your file signifying your action. In addition, South Carolina Conference will not signify such a person as having left in good standing, since they were unwilling to comply with the procedures as determined by the annual conference.

Does ¶360.1 (2016 BOD) apply to Deacons?

Yes, when a deacon in full connection withdraws to unite with another denomination pursuant to ¶360.1 (2016 BOD), that withdrawal from membership also constitutes a withdrawal altogether from ministry in The United Methodist Church.

FAQs for Associate Members (Post-2000)

How can I signify my intent to withdraw?

Your intent to withdraw must be in writing. The annual conference has created **Notification of Intent to Withdraw** that must be completed by all persons seeking to withdraw.

What must I relinquish if I unite with another denomination?

As an associate member, you have been issued a permanent license to conduct ministry. You will be relinquishing that license. In addition, you will be ending your membership in the annual conference. Since you no longer have a license to conduct ministry, you would be considered a lay person in The United Methodist understanding and you would be transferring as a lay person to the denomination that you have chosen. If you were in good standing at the time of your withdrawal, South Carolina Annual Conference will supply a statement to the other denomination that you were in good standing and a copy of your service record as found in the most recent edition of the South Carolina Journal.

What if I do not want to surrender my Certificate of Membership and/or my License for Pastoral Ministry?

A letter will be written and placed in your file signifying your action. In addition, South Carolina Conference will not signify such a person as having left in good standing, since they were unwilling to comply with the procedures as determined by the annual conference.

FAQs for Local Pastors

How can I signify my intent to withdraw?

Your intent to withdraw must be in writing. The annual conference has created **Notification of Intent to Withdraw** that must be completed by all persons seeking to withdraw.

What paragraph of the Book of Discipline governs my withdrawal to serve in another denomination?

While no paragraph specifically covers withdrawal to unite with another denomination, ¶320.1 states:

*¶ 320. Exiting, Reinstatement, and Retirement of Local Pastors Who Are Not Provisional Members—1. Discontinuance of Local Pastor—Whenever a local pastor retires or is no longer approved for appointment by the annual conference as required in ¶ 318, **whenever any local pastor severs***

*relationship with The United Methodist Church, (emphasis added) whenever the appointment of a local pastor is discontinued by the bishop, or whenever the district committee on ordained ministry does not recommend continuation of license, **license and credentials shall be relinquished to the district superintendent for deposit with the secretary of the conference.** (emphasis added) After consultation with the pastor, the former local pastor shall designate the local church in which membership shall be held. The Board of Ordained Ministry shall file with the resident bishop a permanent record of the circumstances relating to the discontinuance of local pastor status as required in ¶ 635.3d.*

The one item that would differ in this scenario is that when the license is relinquished, the local pastor will not be able to designate a local church where membership would be held. Since the person is seeking to serve as a pastor in another denomination, the person could not have membership in a local United Methodist Church.

What happens if I want to join with another denomination?

When you become a local pastor, you become a member of the annual conference and you cease to have membership within a local church. As long as you are appointed, you continue to hold membership within the annual conference. If you are no longer appointed, you cease to be a minister and your membership reverts to a local church you designate or is returned to your home church if you don't designate. At this point, you are classified as a lay person.

Therefore, if you desire to join another denomination, two things happen. First of all, you must relinquish to your district superintendent your license to preach. Secondly, your membership in the annual conference terminates and you are not allowed to hold membership in a local church, since you have indicated that you are uniting with another denomination.

You join the other denomination with a lay status, not a clergy status. Your clergy status is tied to your license to preach, which you have relinquished.

What if I do not want to surrender my License for Pastoral Ministry?

A letter will be written and placed in your file signifying your action. In addition, South Carolina Conference will not signify such a person as having left in good standing, since they were unwilling to comply with the procedures as determined by the annual conference.

FAQs for Certified Candidates and those approved to be licensed if appointed, but are not now appointed

What happens if I my home church decides to leave the United Methodist church?

You are still a lay person and a member of your home church who has been examined and is still under the care of a DCOM. If you choose to stay a member of your home church you would no longer be United Methodist, and your certified candidacy would be discontinued. If you wish to stay United Methodist, your DS can help you identify another United Methodist Church/Ministry to which your membership can be transferred and your Candidacy can continue in the United Methodist Church.

FAQs for Seminarians

What happens if I decide I do not want to become a United Methodist minister?

As a seminarian you are either fully committed to attending school and do not have a student appointment or you are attending school and have a student appointment.

For those attending without a student appointment, your connection to the annual conference is via your certified candidacy. You are still a lay person who has been examined and is still under the care of a DCOM. If you choose to unite with another denomination, your certified candidacy would be severed and you will lose your membership in The United Methodist Church.

If you are serving a student appointment, you would be doing so as a Local Pastor and have been issued a License for Pastoral Ministry. You would relinquish that license and would also lose your membership in The United Methodist Church.

FAQs for Provisional Elders or Deacons

What portion of The Book of Discipline would govern a Provisional Member that seeks to unite with another denomination?

¶327.6 states:

6. *Discontinuance from Provisional Membership*—Provisional members may request discontinuance of this relationship or may be discontinued by the clergy session upon recommendation of the Board of Ordained Ministry. ***When provisional members in good standing withdraw to unite with another denomination or to terminate their membership in The United Methodist Church, their action shall be considered a request for discontinuance of their relationship and their credentials shall be surrendered to a district superintendent.***

(Emphasis added)

What is the process for moving to another denomination?

You would need to complete **Notification of Intent to Withdraw Form**. As a provisional member you have a provisional membership in the annual conference and you have a license to minister. If you united with another denomination, you would lose your provisional membership with the annual conference and you would relinquish your certificate of membership and license to do ministry to your district superintendent.

FAQs for Retired Ministers

How can I signify my intent to withdraw?

Your intent to withdraw must be in writing. The annual conference has created **Notification of Intent to Withdraw Form** that must be completed by all persons seeking to withdraw.

Since I am retired, does that mean I can work wherever I want to...even in a church in another denomination?

Credentialed United Methodist Clergy (FE, FD, AM), active or retired, may not serve non-United Methodist churches unless the context is approved by the Board of Ordained Ministry and the

Bishop and Appointive Cabinet as an appointment to an extension ministry setting governed by ¶343 & ¶344 of the Book of Discipline.

Serving in a non-related United Methodist church without approval is deemed as Withdrawal from the United Methodist annual conference membership and requires that the credentials of conference membership certificate and certificate of ordination be relinquished to the annual conference secretary.

Retirement does not change these requirements. A retired UMC Elder is still an Elder and under the authority of the Office of Bishop, Board of Ordained Ministry and Clergy session of the Conference. The Retired Elder still has all the powers and responsibilities of an Elder. The Retired Elder can be appointed to serve a church. If not under appointment, the Retired Elder must affiliate with a local United Methodist church charge conference and therein annually report all ministry activity.

Will retired clergy still be able to receive their pension if they leave The United Methodist Church?

Yes, an already retired clergyperson who relinquishes credentials (voluntarily or involuntarily) after retirement or terminates their conference relationship does not lose earned pension benefits. Earned pension benefits are vested under the terms of the retirement plans and cannot be taken away. However, the clergyperson may forgo certain future pension benefit increases, such as past service rate (PSR) increases under the Pre-1982 Plan. Additionally, the retired clergyperson might have other benefits in retirement that could be affected by termination.

FAQs: Miscellaneous

Will clergy credentials be transferable to another denomination? What is the process?

The United Methodist Church does not transfer United Methodist credentials to other denominations. United Methodist clergy who choose to leave the denomination do so by notifying their District Superintendent and working with the Board of Ordained Ministry to follow the steps outlined in Book of Discipline ¶360.1 and ¶360.2. Another denomination may recognize the ordination that occurred in The United Methodist Church and records of that action would be provided by the UMC if requested. The receiving denomination could have additional ordination or licensing requirements.

Can a church or pastor be members of both The United Methodist Church and another denomination, such as the new Global Methodist Church?

No. There is no provision in the Book of Discipline or citation from the Judicial Council for a United Methodist church to also be in another denomination. A clergy cannot hold credentials in The United Methodist Church and another denomination. Judicial Council Decision 696 asserts: "There is no disciplinary provision authorizing an ordained United Methodist minister to hold membership simultaneously in another denomination. Upon joining another denomination, membership in The United Methodist Church is terminated." Clergypersons whose conference relationship is terminated for any reason are no longer eligible to continue participating in the Conference's health care plan or other benefits where the Conference serves as the plan sponsor.

Can a pastor join the new Global Methodist Church and serve in The United Methodist Church (particularly while waiting for their current congregation to join the Global Methodist Church)?

Alignment with another denomination terminates membership and clergy credentials in The United Methodist Church. See Judicial Council Decision 696.

Can a clergy person join another denomination and later return to The United Methodist Church?

Yes, the Book of Discipline currently contains processes for reinstatement of orders or licenses for ministry. These processes are not quick nor automatic, but they do exist and have been used previously.

How will it affect my relationship to the annual conference if my church votes to close as a United Methodist Church, but I do not want to withdraw?

The South Carolina Conference Appointive Cabinet will work with clergy remaining in the denomination after their church closes as a United Methodist Church to secure a new appointment within the South Carolina Conference. *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* ¶1334.1 says “Every effective elder in full connection who is in good standing shall be continued under appointment by the bishop.” The Conference Leadership Team is actively developing plans to start new congregations and ministries in areas where current United Methodist congregations vote to leave the denomination. These could include new churches, house churches, fresh expressions, band meetings and more. These new ministries could provide new appointment opportunities for clergy.

What if I choose to not join another denomination but to become an independent pastor?

You would still be subject to the provisions of *The Book of Discipline-2016* as outlined in this document in the section that represents your current status.

Does ¶1360.1 (2016 BOD) address the recognition of the denomination the clergy is uniting with?

No, this disciplinary provision does not speak to The United Methodist Church recognizing the denomination to which the withdrawing clergy will unite.

Does ¶1360.1 (2016 BOD) apply to clergy withdrawing to unite with ANY denomination?

Yes, this provision applies to any denomination.

If I join with another denomination or leave the ministry, can I get a copy of my clergy files?

No. Clergy files are the property of the annual conference. You have the right to review them, but you do not have the right for a copy of them to be created for you. If another denomination asks us for copies of clergy files we will supply the following data:

- A copy of your pastoral record as found in the most up-to-date journal.
- A listing (not all may apply in all situations) of:
 - the year you were certified,
 - the year you first became a local pastor

- the year you became an associate member
 - the year you became a provisional member
 - the year you become a full connection member
 - the year of your retirement
- In addition, we will state whether you left in good standing. i.e., Did you comply with all the exit procedures established by the annual conference and/or were you under charges or complaint at the time of your exit.

Is there a certain date when I must withdraw from the annual conference?

Yes. When you indicate your intent to withdraw and complete **Notification of Intent to Withdraw Form** there will be a place on that form indicating the effective date of withdrawal. If your church closes as a United Methodist Church, then you must withdraw on the same day or sooner than the church closure date ratified by the annual conferences (generally June 30th). If you seek to withdraw and your church does not seek to close, please be in conversation with your district superintendent about next steps and a timeline.

At A Glance

Items That Are Relinquished If You Withdraw to Another Denomination

	Ordination Certificate	Conference Membership Certificate	License to Perform Ministry	Local Church Membership
Full Connection Elder	Yes, for Inscription or substitute form	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	N/A	N/A
Full Connection Deacon	Yes, for Inscription or substitute form	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	N/A	N/A
Provisional Elder	N/A	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	Yes	N/A
Provisional Deacon	N/A	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	Yes	N/A
Associate Member	N/A for post 2000 Yes, or substitute form for pre 2000	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	Yes	N/A
Local Pastor	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A
Seminarian	N/A	N/A	Maybe, if student pastor	Yes, unless a student pastor
Full Connection Retired	Yes, for Inscription or substitute form.	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	N/A	N/A
Associate Member Retired	N/A for post 2000 Yes, or substitute form for pre 2000	Yes, Issued post 2004. Pre-2005 complete Substitute form.	Yes, Permanent License to Conduct Ministry	Yes. Would no longer be UM and could not hold membership in a local church.
Retired-Local Pastor	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes. Would no longer be UM and could not hold membership in a local church.