

Explaining the Plain Grace Plan

Twenty petitions comprising the Plain Grace Plan (“PGP”) were submitted to the United Methodist Church via the web portal on September 13, 2019. This narrative is a relatively short explanation of the plan.

A reader reviewing this explanation of the Plain Grace Plan (“PGP”) should not read it as an advocacy piece arguing in favor of denominational separation. This explanation assumes that the merits of separation or denominational unity will be arrived at through holy discernment by the members of General Conference 2020. However, the Plain Grace Plan is intended to provide a clear step-by-step process to provide adequate space should the General Conference delegates conclude that some sort of multiplication by separation is the best path forward for all stakeholders to be able to live into the complete fullness of their Wesleyan vision while maintaining communion with one another. It is the goal of the PGP not only to provide a detailed step-by-step process to provide sufficient time and adequate missional support but also to provide the grace and structure needed to prevent future conflict and ruinous litigation.

The Plain Grace Plan (“PGP”) has been developed to provide General Conference 2020 with an option allowing peaceful separation between professing members of the Wesleyan expression known as the United Methodist Church. The plan focuses on the means of multiplying our witness and not the underlying disputes between members who have honest good faith disagreements about doctrinal and social positions; this disagreement is most clearly manifested in the current debate over human sexuality. The plan is based on the concept of “**Gracious Affiliation**”. Gracious Affiliation is different than “**Gracious Exit**”. Gracious Affiliation encourages unity, but the unity it encourages is between expressions as part of the church universal. Gracious Affiliation also insures connectionalism among those churches forming a new expression. The product of Gracious Affiliation is a new expression known as a **Full Communion Expression**.

It is the hope that the Plain Grace Plan will lead to another great awakening like the one that gave birth to historic “Methodism”. It is not a plan with the unstated intention of managing an inevitable decline of the United Methodist Church. For too long factions within the United States arm of the church have pointed at one another as the great anchor weighing down each other’s mission critical efforts. Maybe all of these factions are right. It is possible that the constant distraction of internal debate has distracted the church from focusing on its primary mission. It is intended that the plan will allow the sum of the refashioned Wesleyan parts to be greater than the current Wesleyan whole described as the United Methodist Church.

In fact, one of the new expressions that will be birthed by this process is the United Methodist Church. If the plan is adopted, the multiplication that may occur will result in the United Methodist Church becoming a new expression. It is likely to be leaner and refocused. General Conferences in 2024 and 2028 will be required to assess this new reality and decide what, if any, doctrinal and polity changes are necessary for effective ministry in the 21st Century. By 2024 the United Methodist Church will have a better understanding of the changes that will be occurring during its next fifty years of existence.

In the prior paragraph the phrase is used “If the plan is adopted, the multiplication that may occur . . .” This phrase is important. The PGP does not require any member, local church, annual conference or clergy person to leave the United Methodist Church. As such, the PGP is not a plan that compels separation. However, it allows those who seek a different path to choose to walk that path.

When a plan is proposed it's only fair that the proponent of the plan outline the objectives of the plan and the means by which those objectives are met. Every plan will have numerous objectives; in those circumstances there are inevitable compromises made to satisfy competing objectives. No plan can possibly be all things to all people. This narrative identifies the objectives of the Plain Grace Plan and discusses the means by which the plan meets those objectives. To some extent it also explains the rationale for a compromise where competing objectives are involved. However, it does not fully discuss all compromises; due to time and space considerations there are limits to what a summary narrative can achieve.

This explanation consists of two parts. The first is a summary narrative that describes the plan's objectives. The second part is a brief paragraph-by-paragraph rationale for the paragraph. In the future, a separate Executive Summary of the PGP will be prepared. A summary timeline also has been prepared and may assist the reader in following the plan. In addition, further discussion of the balance between competing objectives will be explained as questions may arise in the future.

PART ONE - A SUMMARY OF THE PLAIN GRACE OBJECTIVES

It's easy to describe a plan's objectives in generalities. Examples of generalities are "The plan will be simple", "The Plan will be implemented quickly" or "The Plan won't create winners and losers". It's more difficult to describe a plan's specific objectives. This narrative attempts to avoid generalities and identify specific objectives. With one exception, the objectives are not necessarily listed in order of importance.

Objective 1 - Avoid Ruling from the Grave

This objective is listed first because in my opinion it is the most important if new expressions are created. I consider forming new expressions before asking an annual conference or local church to join the expression as the bedrock principle of creating new expressions. If the United Methodist Church is to give birth to new expressions, the plan should allow new expressions freedom to form themselves and avoid attempts by the United Methodist Church to "rule from the grave".

During my years practicing law I became familiar with the phrase "ruling from the grave." This occurs when a person making a will places conditions on a gift being made by the will. For example, a grandparent might leave property or money to a grandchild under the condition that grandchild take some action before the time the grandchild turns 25. A bequest might read as follows: "I leave my granddaughter a sum of money on the condition that she completes her college degree in accounting by the time she turns 25 years of age." By making this gift in this fashion, the person making the will is attempting to control the grandchild by "ruling from the grave"; the granddaughter must (a) complete college, (b) have a degree in accounting and (c) accomplish the task before she turns 25.

A fundamental assumption underlying some plans is that each new expression of Methodism will have as its starting point the existing Book of Discipline. Such plans expressly contemplate that any new expression is birthed within the existing institutional constraints of the Book of Discipline with limited changes made to the Discipline. Usually those changes are limited to issues involving human sexuality.

Essentially such plans creates multiple new United Methodist churches each of which is cloned from the United Methodist Church DNA. In many ways this approach is similar to the quote, perhaps apocryphal, attributed to

Henry Ford regarding his Model Ts “Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black.” Such plans allow a new expression to be anything it wants to be as long as it conforms – mostly – to the existing Book of Discipline. In my opinion, those types of proposals attempt to “rule from the grave.” By making a number of conditions attached to the new expressions, the United Methodist Church is limiting what can emerge from the present circumstances. What is really needed is the opportunity to allow God to truly create something new.

Throughout this difficult season we have often invoked Isaiah 43:18-19 (“18 Don't remember the prior things; don't ponder ancient history. 19 Look! I'm doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it? I'm making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.” CEB). The PGP opens the door to the possibility that the new thing may be more than we have envisioned or are discussing.

The PGP is founded on the belief that a Full Communion Expressions should be formed prior to an Annual Conference, Local church, individual member or clergy person being asked to join it. The new expression should be free to select the composition of its organizing conference so that so-called “Traditionalists”, “Centrists” or “Progressives” are not compelled to work on each other's polity and doctrine. The Plain Grace Plan grants those who have a similar vision of a new expression the opportunity to come together so they may refine and birth the new expression. Once the new expression is birthed, annual conferences, local churches and individual members should be able to see the differences and choose an expression that they believe to be most faithful to Christ's call.

Any plan making the selection process occur before the formation process is merely institutionalizing the same conditions that created our current difficulties. Dividing the denomination into numerically smaller versions of the current United Methodist Church, with the same existing fault lines, will absolutely insure that the same struggle that is now being waged will continue into the new expression's foreseeable future.

Objective 2 - Insure that a New Expression shares a common core with the United Methodist Church

This objective is a limiting principle on objective number 1. Although a new expression should be free to determine its polity and doctrine as a descendent of the expression birthed by John Wesley and with the United Methodist Church as its forbearer, a new expression should reflect the core beliefs of the current United Methodist Church. The Report of the Commission on the Way Forward identified this common core as follows:

“The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith; General Rules; The Wesley Hymns; Disciplined Engagement with Scripture; Works of Piety, Mercy and Justice; Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist; Small Group Accountability and Support (Class and Band Meetings); A Connectional Way of Life that includes Superintendency, Itineracy, and Conferencing. From “Wonder, Love and Praise”, three concepts: The saving love of God is meant for all people; the saving love of God is transformative; and the saving love of God creates community.” Report of the Commission on the Way Forward at p. 2.

The PGP has used this common core as a starting point but has reduced the number of common core elements in the plan. For example, the Nicene Creed has never been formally adopted by the United Methodist Church so it is not included in the common core. The common core identified in the PGP should be non-controversial but the failure to include other elements into a common core, such as the Nicene Creed, can be addressed by the General Conference or by a new expression adding to its common core when it adopts its Book of Discipline.

Objective 3- Submit a Plan that is Constitutional

All plans have to work within the Constitution of the United Methodist Church; any plan that fails to do so is merely a false hope. **The PGP does not dissolve the United Methodist Church. In fact, it leaves the denomination and its agencies and institutions intact. Nor does the PGP require an annual conference to join a new expression.** Dissolving the United Methodist Church or requiring an annual conference to leave may occur in those plans where a default option is created that forces an annual conference or local church into a new expression.

Objective 4 - Provide for Missional Funding during the Transition Period

The Full Communion Expressions that may form shared in the decisions that shaped the current United Methodist Church missional priorities. It is unreasonable to assume that the United Methodist Church can make immediate drastic changes to its priorities. It would also be a lack of stewardship to abandon, without notice, those missions the church is currently supporting. The Plain Grace Plan insures support of the currently agreed upon missional objectives of the United Methodist Church for a defined period of time and insures, to the extent reasonably possible, continued financial support for those missional priorities as the United Methodist Church becomes its own new expression. This is accomplished by the Missional Resource Allocation Formula. The formula insures support for Central Conferences, The Black College Fund and Africa University until 2028. It also insures funding for Archives and History and GCFA during this 8 year transition period. Moreover, it provides funding for specific agencies institutions until 2024, requires those institutions to use the next quadrennium to propose a plan for the future in the United Methodist Church and further requires those institutions to submit for consideration by the 2024 General Conference enabling petitions for proposed changes. It also allows, but does not require, other agencies and institutions to submit plans and petitions for their future.

Objective 5 - Provide for Pension Funding

The PGP uses a modified version of Wespath's 2019 pension proposal to insure funding for pensions. It is the intention that all clergy existing pension obligations shall be met.

Objective 6 - Provide for an equitable division of assets

The PGP uses the Missional Allocation Resource Formula as the basis for dividing assets at the levels of (1) agencies and institutions, (2) and annual conferences. As to local churches, the trust clause will remain in effect until the Full Communion Expression pays the sums required under the Missional Allocation Resource Formula.

Objective 7 - Provide a Timely Separation that also Allows Adequate time for Transition

This is truly a balancing act between two objectives. There are some who think the United Methodist Church should allow those local churches who wish to leave to do so immediately; for them, speedy action is the most

important objective. There are at least three problems with this approach. The first problem is that many long term problems are not addressed. The second is that litigation is more likely to ensue from such an abrupt separation. The third problem is that an abrupt departure will cause the mission of the Church to suffer immeasurably since organizational and funding issues will be unaddressed. The Plain Grace Plan attempts to reach a workable compromise between the speedy exit and an orderly restructuring. The Plain Grace Plan contemplates an initial period from October 15, 2022 through March 15, 2023 during which annual conferences and local churches may choose to transition to Full Communion Expressions if they so desire. However, it also allows local churches who wish to remain as part of the United Methodist Church or move to a different new expression than the one selected by the annual conference to change their affiliation by a simplified process. After the initial period that ends on March 15, 2023, a hiatus occurs where no annual conference or local church may use Gracious Affiliation to change its affiliation. However, there are two additional limited windows for annual conferences and local church's to have an opportunity to change their affiliation. On May 1, 2027 the window for sorting out the United Methodist Church and Full Communion Expressions will close. By ending the process by May 1, 2027, the 2028 General Conference will have a clear understanding of the changes that have occurred and may deal with those changes.

Objective 8 - Provide a Plan that is Simple but Unambiguous

A plan that is simply worded may seem easier to understand but it is likely that it fails to fully address processes. While the PGP may seem detailed, the detail is intended to make the process for implementing the plan clear. An ambiguous plan leaves room for subjective interpretation and invites appeals to the Judicial Council for clarification. Such appeals may very well destroy any plan which intends to birth new expressions. The PGP tries to limit ambiguity and subjectivity. The PGP also provides a simple process for local churches to join a different Full Communion Expression or to re-affiliate with the United Methodist Church in those circumstances where an annual conference joins a Full Communion Expression.

Objective 9 - Encourage Connectionalism

Through use of the Gracious Affiliation concept, annual conferences and local churches are encouraged to remain in connection with one another. While there is a proposed Gracious Exit provision, molded after the 2019 Gracious Exit, local churches may find it preferable to avail themselves of Gracious Affiliation rather than using Gracious Exit.

PART TWO - A PARAGRAPH-BY-PARAGRAPH DISCUSSION OF THE PLAIN GRACE PLAN

Overview

The PGP consists of twenty paragraphs to be added to the Book of Discipline. The twenty paragraphs address the following six separate areas of the Book of Discipline:

1. The Local Church - adds new ¶248A
2. Ecumenical Relationships - adds new ¶¶ 431A through 431F
3. Annual Conferences - adds new ¶¶ 673-680

4. Administrative Order - adds new ¶725
5. General Board of Pension and Health Benefits - adds new ¶1510
6. Church Property - adds ¶¶2553-2555

Except for paragraphs dealing with division of church assets and dispute resolution, the PGP paragraphs will sunset by December 31, 2028.

The Local Church - adds new ¶248A

¶248A The Affiliation or Reaffiliation Church Conference

This paragraph creates a procedure for local churches to vote on the questions of Affiliation and Reaffiliation. It is modeled after existing ¶248 (which remains in effect for churches exiting by use of the Gracious Exit provision found at ¶2553); however, It includes a shortened time period of 60 days for a District Superintendent to act rather than the 120 days allowed under ¶248. The time period is shortened due to the limited six month windows available to local churches for affiliation or reaffiliation. Unlike current ¶248, it uses a simple majority as the voting requirement for the local church to join a Full Communion Expression or reaffiliate with the United Methodist Church.

Ecumenical Relationships - adds new ¶¶ 431A through 431F

¶431A Full Communion Agreement for Full Communion Expressions

This paragraph outlines the requirements of a Full Communion Agreement entered into under the Plain Grace Plan.

¶431B Intent to Become a Full Communion Expression

This paragraph first establishes the requirements for a petition of intent that that must be met for an entity attempt to form a Full Communion Expression. There are four, but only four, requirements that petitioners must satisfy to begin the process of creating a Full Communion Expression.

First, the entity must commit to adopt a common core of beliefs. ¶431D subparagraph 4 unequivocally states that if a new expression fails to adopt this common core at its organizing conference then it shall be not be entitled to become a Full Communion Expression. Thus, while the new expression is a free to reject the common core at its organizing conference, doing so will result in its inability to issue an invitation for an annual conference or local church to join it.

Second, the entity must commit to signing a Full Communion Agreement that will remain in full force and effect until December 31, 2028. One of the important aspects of a Full Communion agreement is that it insures that both the United Methodist Church and a Full Communion Expression will abide by their commitments made in the Plain Grace Plan through December 31, 2030. The Full Communion Agreement may be thought of as an agreement in the nature of a contract with each side promising performance of the covenants made in the agreement. Consequently, a future General Conference of the United Methodist Church or a Full Communion Expression should be unable to revoke the commitments made in the Full Communion Agreement until the transition period is completed in 2028. At that time the United Methodist Church and the Full Communion Expression would be free to modify the Full Communion Agreement or enter into a new one.

Third, the Full Communion Expression commits to enter into a Gracious Affiliation Agreement with the United Methodist Church that governs the missional support through 2028 and the resource division that will occur following 2028. Under ¶431C the Gracious Affiliation Agreement will be a standardized agreement drafted by GCFA and incorporating the substantive requirements of ¶¶431F, 1510, 2554 and 2555.

Finally, the Full Communion Expression commits to enter into a dispute arbitration agreement that will be used if there is a dispute between the United Methodist Church and one or more the Full Communion Expressions. While the Dispute Resolution Agreement will insure, to the extent possible, that litigation is avoided, its greatest efficacy may be encouraging parties to reach a voluntary agreement without the need to invoke dispute resolution. It is a means to require all parties to act in a timely fashion or risk having the decision making placed in the hands of a neutral third party. The last sentence is added to insure that no additional requirements are created or attempted to be imposed on the petition process.

The petition process is designed to be very simple. While the Council of Bishops' Executive Secretary is the recipient of the petitions, the role of the Council of Bishops is merely administrative, not adjudicatory. If the face of the petition of intent establishes an entity's intention to meet the four requirements then the Council of Bishops will recognize the new expression as a Qualified New Expression. Upon obtaining the status of a Qualified New Expression the entity is tendered a signed standardized Full Communion Agreement, standardized Gracious Affiliation Agreement and standardized Dispute Resolution Agreement to be executed by the new expression after it receives authorization to do so from its organizing conference.

¶431C Agreements between the United Methodist Church and Full Communion Expressions

This paragraph authorizes and directs GCFA to prepare standardized Full Communion Agreements, Gracious Affiliation Agreements and Dispute Resolution agreements that comply with the requirements of the Plain Grace Plan.

¶431D Qualified New Expression Organizing Conference

This paragraph sets limited requirements for an organizing conference. It requires the organizing conference to seat annual conference selected representatives as voting members. However, it also permits the new expression to select enough at-large representatives to control the organizing conference. The United Methodist Church's representation is not intended to control the organizing conference, its intended purpose is to insure that United Methodist Church representatives have an opportunity to provide input into the conference and its resulting Book of Discipline, doctrinal statements and other matters of polity. Nonetheless, sub-paragraph 4 requires the organizing conference to adopt the common core or else fail to become a Full Communion Expression.

¶431E Full Communion Expressions

This paragraph establishes a simple procedure to insure that the Qualified New Expression meets the standards it agreed to meet in the Petition to Join it submitted in connection with ¶431B. The decision should be an administrative one performed by examining the face of the documents. At this point the Qualified New Expression becomes a Full Communion Expression by submitting its Book of Discipline, and a signed Full Communion Agreement, Gracious Affiliation Agreement and Dispute Resolution Agreement. The Council of Bishops has to confirm that the requirements are met and then it is obligated to post the Book of Discipline on the internet and make it available for the general public to review it and download it. This publication requirement is to allow members of annual conferences to read and understand the Full Communion Expression's doctrine and polity. Of course, the Full Communion Expression may also take steps to publish its Book of Discipline and make it generally available.

¶431F Gross and Net Missional Shares and Missional Allocation Resource Formula

This paragraph creates two categories of missional support; those that will be financially supported by Full Communion Expressions through 2028 and those that will receive support through 2024. The division generally falls along the lines used in the original Bard Jones plan dated July 8, 2019. Support is provided to the Central Conferences through 2028 by Full Communion Expressions paying that portion of the World Service Fund used to support Central Conferences that portion of the Episcopal Fund representing salaries, housing and office expenses to support Bishops in Central Conferences. In addition support is provided through 2028 to the Black College Fund, the Africa University Fund, and the General Administrative Fund. Those agencies and institutions identified in ¶684 are provided financial support through the end of fiscal year 2024. This should provide a transition period and also allow budgeting to occur in 2024 and 2028 that is consistent with the changing reality of the United Methodist Church. Although professing membership may be an imperfect measure for allocating missional shares it seems to offer the most reasonable basis for allocation. Some may worry about inaccurate, perhaps inflated, numbers for professing membership; however, since no one knows with certainty which annual conferences or local churches have inaccurate numbers it is impossible to conduct a timely and cost effective audit that will resolve all inaccuracies. Using professing membership numbers assumes all entities have done their best to report their numbers in an accurate fashion. Nonetheless, if a Full Communion Expression has inflated numbers then its share of missional support will be inflated as well as its share of assets to be divided under ¶686. The concept of Net Missional share is provided to insure that a Full Communion expression is not required to meet one hundred percent of its budgeted apportionment while the United Methodist Church provides support at some lesser percentage during the period from 2020 to 2028. While a Full Communion Expression may pay more than its net missional share voluntarily, it is not forced to provide more a greater share of support than the United Methodist Church does during the period. Using the Net Missional Share should encourage United Methodist Churches to give knowing that their generosity is being matched by the generosity of the Full Communion Expressions.

Annual Conferences - adds new ¶¶ 673-680

¶ 673 Creating New Expressions of Methodism through Gracious Affiliation

This paragraph addresses two issues. First, it creates a plan of separation that is available for a limited time period. Except on a few occasions, the Plain Grace Plan sunsets at the close of General Conference 2028. In addition it makes the Plain Grace Plan take precedence over potentially conflicting paragraphs of the Book of Discipline; this should greatly reduce, if not eliminate, judicial challenges to the PGP. Even if a paragraph of the Plain Grace Plan is found to be in conflict with a non-constitutional provision of the Book of Discipline, the Plain Grace Plan will govern.

¶674 Annual Conference Gracious Affiliation and Gracious Reaffiliation Agreements

This paragraph authorizes and directs GCFA to prepare a standardized Gracious Affiliation Agreement that may be used by an annual conference's Trustees. While it appears that General Conference may impose a duty upon an annual conference to create a Gracious Affiliation Agreement it is not clear that the General Conference can legally impose the terms such an agreement. Consequently, as to an annual conference Gracious Affiliation Agreements the annual conference Trustees are free create an agreement so long as it meets the requirements of ¶¶431F, 1510, 2554 and 2555. By GCFA providing a model agreement, this should simplify the work for an annual conference Board of Trustees. Several additional important factors are at work here. First, it is clear that an annual conference must approve a local church's departure from the annual conference; however, in considering local church disaffiliation it appears that annual conference approval may be given in advance of the local church vote. Such a process is followed here; the annual conference approves terms and conditions that, if met by the local church, approves the local church's decision to join a Full Communion Expression. In Judicial Decision 1379 the Judicial Council stated as follows concerning annual conference approval of local church disaffiliation: "Paragraph 2529.1(b)(3) does not say whether the consent must be obtained before or after the church conference action, nor does it indicate the majority (simple or supermajority) required for the annual conference action. Absent specific language to the contrary, this provision can reasonably be construed as requiring ratification (i.e. consent after) by simple majority of the members of an annual conference.". Although the Judicial Council was construing existing Book of Discipline ¶¶2529 and 2553; it did not make a blanket statement prohibiting an annual conference from allowing a church to disaffiliated if it unequivocally meets clearly established standards developed by the conference board of trustees and approved by the annual conference by a simple majority vote. By establishing clear standards by which a local church may join a Full Communion Expression there will be greater certainty in the process. Although an annual conference is not required to develop and approve a reaffiliation agreement, this paragraph allows that course of action if the annual conference decides it is prudent. If the annual conference decides to join a Full Communion Expression in the future it will no longer be an part of the United Methodist Church and thus unable to approve a Gracious Reaffiliation Agreement at that time. However, in those circumstances where a different annual conference has joined a Full Communion Expression and the annual conference is assigned all or part of the geographic territory of the former annual conference by the Jurisdictional Conference, if a Gracious Reaffiliation agreement has been put in place by that annual conference there will be a mechanism to allow local churches from the former annual conference to join the annual conference given territorial jurisdiction.

¶675 First Called Special Conference for Gracious Affiliation

The first Called Special Conference is intended to allow each annual conference to have some input into organizing conferences for Qualified New Expressions. The paragraph is intended to limit the time and expense an annual conference spends dealing with the issue. It is anticipated that the Called Special Conference could be conducted on a single day at venue having adequate space for the annual conference to conduct its worship and business. The General Conference cannot dictate how the annual conference proceeds but it is entitled to impose upon the annual conferences the duty to conduct a Called Special Conference. While not mandating a procedure, this paragraph establishes a safe harbor provision, which if followed, should not be open judicial challenge.

The suggested procedure uses a simple caucus process to select representatives, not delegates. Selecting “delegates” to an Organizing conference would imply that the annual conference is providing some type of endorsement for each organizing conference and would require the persons selected to operate as a delegate. Since the representative are not delegates there also is no constitutional requirement that clergy and laity representatives be selected on an equal basis.

This paragraph makes clear that the annual conference is not obligated to incur expenses to send representatives to an organizing conference but it may do so. However, it may not discriminate in the payment of expenses for representatives.

This paragraph also permits presiding Bishops to attend organizing conferences.

¶1676 Full Communion Expression’s Invitation to Annual Conference

This paragraph establishes a simple procedure by which a Full Communion Expression may invite an annual conference to join it. There is no requirement that a Full Communion Expression invite any annual conference and it may choose not to do so. However, even if a Full Communion Expression declines to issue an invitation to an annual conference it may still issue invitations to local churches within the annual conference’s geographic boundaries. Those local churches may not join the Full Communion Expression before the annual conference has had an opportunity to vote of joining a Full Communion Expression.

¶1677 Second Called Special Conference for Gracious Affiliation

This paragraph outlines the procedure for the second Called Special Conference. If an annual conference does not receive an invitation to join a Full Communion Expression then it will not hold a second Called Special Conference. However, if it does receive an invitation this paragraph requires a Called Special Conference, establishes the qualifications of the delegates and sets forth a recommended procedure. Like ¶1676, the annual conference has latitude on how to conduct the Called Special Conference but a safe harbor procedure is provided. If the annual conference elects to join a Full Communion Expression it provides notice to its College of Bishops and the annual conference’s territory will be reallocated. If an annual conference joins a Full Communion Expression it does not affect the membership of the Clergy or the annual conference’s presiding Bishop. This paragraph also closes the initial window for any annual conference to join a Full Communion Expression and insures no further movement by an annual conference until 2026. This insures that the delegates elected to the 2024 General Conference of the United Methodist Church will not become members of a Full Communion Expression.

¶1678 Procedure Where Annual Conference Remains in Connection with the United Methodist Church

This paragraph establishes procedures for local churches, Clergy and presiding Bishops to join a Full Communion Expression if their annual conference elects to remain in the United Methodist Church.

¶1679 Procedure where an Annual Conference Joins a Full Communion Expression

This paragraph is similar to ¶678; however, this paragraph establishes procedures for local churches to re-affiliate with the United Methodist Church in those circumstances where their annual conference votes to join a Full Communion Expression. Since Clergy and presiding Bishops remain a part of the United Methodist Church there is no need for provisions allowing the clergy or bishops to “re-join.” The procedures of this paragraph will remain in effect and be available based upon the Full Communion Agreement entered into by the United Methodist Church and the Full Communion Expression.

¶ 680 Additional Time Periods for Joining a Full Communion Expression or Reaffiliating with the United Methodist Church

This paragraph allows two additional limited periods for annual conferences, local churches, clergy and Bishops to choose to join a Full Communion Expression or re-affiliate with the United Methodist Church. The procedures of this paragraph will remain in effect and be available based upon the Full Communion Agreement entered into by the United Methodist Church and the Full Communion Expression.

Administrative Order - adds new ¶725

¶ 725 Proposed operational Plans for Agencies and Institutions

This paragraph requires those agencies and institutions identified in ¶685 to present a proposed operational plan to the 2024 General Conference. This allows the agencies and institutions to develop a plan for their future mission. During the period from 2020 through the end of fiscal year 2024 the agencies and institutions will continue to receive support from Full Communion Expressions.

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits - adds new ¶1510

¶1510 Pension Resource Allocation Formula

This paragraph is a slightly modified version of the language proposed by Wespath at Appendix 4 of the Report on the Commission on the Way Forward.

Church Property - adds ¶¶2553-2555

¶2553 Disaffiliation of a Local Church - Gracious Exit - Plain Grace Plan

This paragraph is a modified version of the Gracious Exit enacted at General Conference 2019. It has eliminated the limitation for exit based on human sexuality issues and is therefore broad. However, it is available for an extremely short time frame. It contemplates that all local churches using this process will have completed their disaffiliation no later than October 15, 2022. This ensures that once the process of annual conferences voting on Gracious Affiliation begins, Gracious Affiliation will be the exclusive separation and multiplication process until 2028, at which time that General Conference may take further action if it so desires.

¶2554 Asset Resources Valuation and Asset Distribution Plans - Plain Grace Plan

This paragraph provides an equitable means for dividing church assets. In the case of assets held by annual conferences or agencies and institutions, the assets are given an agreed to fair market value then a plan is created to distribute the assets "in whole and in kind." This means no assets will have to be sold so long as the assets divided are equal. The plan requires unanimous agreement by the representatives of the United Methodist Church each representative from a Full Communion Expression. In the event unanimous agreement proves impossible, outstanding issues will be resolved by using the processes of the Dispute Resolution Agreement. To participate in formulating the values and the plan for the assets held by Agencies or Institutions, a Full Communion Expression must pay at least two thirds of its Missional Resource Share for each fiscal year through 2028; however, if it fails to do so, it is still entitled to receive a proportionate share of the assets but it cannot participate in formulating or voting on the agreed upon distribution plan. Any unpaid net missional resource share owing by a Full Communion Expression is treated as a cash payment made to the Full Communion Expression under the plan. Since Full Communion Expressions are responsible for satisfying the expression's commitment, this simplifies the process for releasing local churches from the operation of the trust clause; once a Full Communion Expression meets its obligations the benefit of the trust clause is transferred to that Full Communion Expression.

¶2555 Compliance with Gracious Affiliation Agreement - Release of Trust Clause as to Local Church Property - Plain Grace Plan

This paragraph provides for release of the operation of the Trust Clause as to those assets being transferred in conjunction with ¶2554 and the local church property of a Full Communion Expression. Since the Full Communion Expression is responsible for paying the Missional Resource Share, the release of property is tied to compliance by the Full Communion Expression, not the local church. Moreover, the asset division process insures that the net missional share of each Full Communion Expression will be received by the United Methodist Church. In addition, the trust clause continues to operate in favor of the United Methodist Church until the Missional Resource shares are satisfied.