

February 28, 2024

RE: House Bill 1382

Dear Maryland Legislator,

Please Vote YES to House Bill 1382.

Here is my story:

During a devastating time in my life when my mom passed away from Breast Cancer. Naturally, I was going through a very difficult time. When I should have been able to lean on my faith and my Pastor for comfort, I was refused this by the United Methodist Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Shortly, before my mom passed my family church, Waters United Methodist Church was forced to change pastors by the Conference. The pastor that I had grown to have a close relationship with was moved a few hours away to another church we were sent a new pastor. This new pastor was determined to sever any ties that we had with our old pastor, and this included allowing the old pastor to return to officiate funeral.

The United Methodist Baltimore-Washington Conference also prohibited our old pastor from reaching out to my family to offer comfort.

The new pastor that was sent to our church had no compassion for me or my family's grieving. This new pastor had the audacity to ask my sister and niece to work the sound system during the funeral.

The pastor that the United Methodist Conference sent to our church was not suited for us. I truly feel the Baltimore-Washington Conference was attempting to force our church to fail since we were not making them enough money.

Due to these circumstances my desire for Waters United Methodist Church and all churches to have the freedom to hold the property, buildings, and all assets that the congregation has paid for to belong to our church. That was the intent of the money and time donated.

Our church along with several other United Methodist Churches in Southern Maryland had a meeting to discuss this issue and these are the bullet points we came up with:

- We want a Bible-centric church, as did our founders.
- Church land was donated, and buildings were paid for and have been maintained by the congregation past and present, for over 180 years. We do not want the UMC Conference taking over what we paid for.

- People are attending church less and giving less money because they do not want monies to go to the Conference.
- We feel former members will come back to the church if we are no longer held hostage by the Conference.
- An heir to one of our founding families with drew his pledge to pay off our mortgage as he didn't want to throw away his money if we were going to lose our church.
- People who were tithing have stopped and attendees are giving less as they do not want money going to the Conference.
- Since people are not coming to church funds are down and we can only afford a half-time minister.
- We want our buildings and grounds, including our cemetery to belong to the local congregation who have paid for and maintain them.
- It seems the Conference is more interested in becoming a real estate baron than in developing Christians in the Methodist faith, by forcing churches out of existence due to their inability to pay the Conferences ransom.
- Maryland should not have a statute that only applies to one religious' denomination. This violates the entanglement clause.
- The only reasonable purpose for this statute is to provide benefit to the Baltimore Washington Conference.
- The land my church is built on was donated by a local member over 150 years ago. The church was built and paid for by local members. This predates this statute. The church continues to be maintained and operated by local members with no assistance from the Conference.
- If our church should cease to exist
 - The local elementary school would no longer receive meals for disadvantage students to eat over the weekend.
 - The pregnancy crisis center would receive less support.
 - The community would no longer have a place to shop for gently used household items where we ask for a donation or offer for free.
 - The community would lose a Bible-centric church.
- The Trust clause is not being applied equally to all Maryland United Methodist churches.

Blessings,

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