

Testimony in Support of SB586

I urge you to vote favorably on SB586 as amended, which would repeal the Methodist Church Trust Requirement currently codified in *Article – Corporations and Associations, Sections 5–326 and 5–327* of the Annotated Code of Maryland (2014 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement). These provisions stem from a 1976 law in which the Maryland General Assembly improperly inserted itself into church policy, benefiting United Methodist conferences at the expense of local congregations. Today, the General Assembly has the opportunity to correct this injustice.

In recent years, many churches have sought to leave the United Methodist denomination. Across the country, most conferences required reasonable payments—such as current-year dues (called apportionments) and pension obligations for pastors. However, a very few conferences, including ours, imposed additional financial burdens based on property values, seeking to cash in on equity that is not theirs.

This excessive financial demand effectively traps small, rural congregations that cannot afford such steep buyouts. Many of these churches have stood for over 150 years, faithfully serving their communities through worship, outreach, and charitable work. These congregations are not just buildings; they are pillars of their communities, providing spiritual guidance, social support, and historical continuity. It is an unjust policy that threatens the survival of churches built and maintained solely by their members. That is why we are asking the Maryland General Assembly to repeal Sections 5–326 and 5–327.

Our own church is a clear example of why this repeal is necessary. Our sanctuary was built in 1893 with local fieldstones collected for the foundation and wood milled on-site from trees donated by neighbors. As our congregation grew, we expanded the church in 1950 and again in 2000—each time using funds raised entirely by our members, including bequests from longtime congregants. The Baltimore-Washington Conference made no financial contribution to our church. Our building stands as a testament to the dedication and sacrifices of generations of local church members, not the conference. Yet, under the current law, the conference is demanding payment for something it never built, maintained, or funded.

Some legislators may hesitate to involve themselves in religious matters, but this issue is different. By repealing these sections, the General Assembly would not be inserting itself into church affairs; rather, it would be removing an inappropriate government intervention from 1976. This repeal is a necessary step to restore fairness and protect the rights of local congregations.

I respectfully urge your support for SB586 to correct this long-standing inequity.

Thank you,

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