

SENATE BILL 172

I Will Brown, Trustee Chair at Clarks Chapel UMC have been very concerned about our church property which was deeded to our ancestors in 1855 by Clark's family. A group of free and enslaved African Americans started the congregations in 1855 to include a gravesite. The church was rebuilt in 1883 and was called Clarks Chapel Church which is now deemed historic. In 2003 the congregation decided to build a brand new church with a full finished basement, commercial kitchen and outside a large pavilion. I expressed this because all ownership was accomplished by our ancestors and present congregation. The Clarks Chapel Church Trustees names are on both deeds and bank loans, no one has helped us pay the mortgage, mortgage insurance, cemetery maintenance, utility bills, building maintenance and all the various state and county inspections that are required.

The Baltimore Washington Conference provides pastors to churches but the churches pay their Pastors salary to include paying mission funds required by the Baltimore Washington Conference; we have always paid both! Our church does its own mission work by financially supporting Sickle Cell, Alzheimer's Association, homeless and others. When using a bank lender as an example who chooses a third party to put property in a trust, they will only take over property if the borrower defaults in payment and we have never done that. I feel the idea of the Church Conference owning church properties takes me back to what our ancestors went through by having property they owned stolen from them. We feel Clarks Chapel UMC Trustees and congregation of the church are the true owners of our property.

The Baltimore Washington Conference has always expressed that the state lawmakers should stay out of religious affairs but now they are asking the state to side with them on keeping the trust clause law in place. It appears that the Baltimore Washington Conference want it both ways! We hope your committee members can support SB 172 so we can retain all of our properties that we have worked so hard to build and maintain.

I feel over a quarter of the United Methodist churches have left the conference because of their greed of trying to take over churches who feel as we do that they are the true owners of their property.

Will Brown,

Clarks Chapel UMC, Trustee Chair