

This is a common-sense bill that must pass.

For years, we have dealt with a Conference that has done nothing but take from churches and hold them hostage under an archaic rule that should have been eliminated long ago. Our church—and many others—has paid enormous amounts of money over the years, with continual increases, yet received nothing in return except the constant threat of losing our church if we chose to leave.

I couldn't begin to calculate how much our church alone has paid compared to what the Conference has actually done to assist us—or any church. You simply cannot claim to be a beneficiary of something you had no part in starting, supporting, building, or maintaining.

I would also like to see the documentation showing the agreement that was supposedly made when churches joined the Conference. No one seems able to produce it, or even explain when or how such an agreement occurred.

Before COVID, the disaffiliation process was simple and straightforward. Instead of continuing the same process, the Conference made changes behind closed doors while churches were not present, making it far more difficult to leave. It's hard not to conclude that this was done deliberately, knowing they would lose a significant number of churches—and a significant amount of money. Changing the rules at the last minute may have protected their bottom line, but it was not the right thing to do.

This entire situation reinforces why so many churches simply fold and why people stop joining. A dark cloud hangs over the process because it feels like a business transaction—not a ministry. The Conference operates like a business, is structured like a business, and behaves like a business—cut-throat when money is at stake. That is why they are fighting so hard and demanding so much from churches that want to leave. To them, it is about money, not people or purpose.

Our church is different. We are one of the oldest—if not the oldest—African American churches in Harford County. We are an officially recognized African American Historical Site. The Conference never even acknowledged the award we received. Once again, it was clear that history, people, and purpose did not matter—only business.

This bill is about fairness. When an organization has done nothing to purchase, help build, maintain, or even visit a church, it should not be able to lay claim to that property. The law that allows this must be revoked.

This is not radical. It is not complicated.

It is simply common sense.

Curtis White