

## **Support for SB 172: Corporations and Associations – Methodist Churches – Trust Requirement Repeal and Disaffiliation**

**Date:** January 26, 2026

**To:** The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair **Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee 2**  
East, Miller Senate Office Building Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Re: SUPPORT for Senate Bill 172**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for **Senate Bill 172**, introduced by Senator Muse. This legislation is a necessary step in restoring property rights and fundamental fairness to local Methodist congregations across the State of Maryland.

For decades, Maryland law (**§ 5-326 and § 5-327 of the Corporations and Associations Article**) has uniquely and unfairly bolstered the United Methodist Church's "Trust Clause." While most religious property disputes are decided by "neutral principles of law" (the names on the deed), Maryland's statutes have effectively bypassed the deeds of local churches, handing "beneficial ownership" to a regional Conference that, in many cases, has provided no financial support for the acquisition or maintenance of these properties.

**Local churches deserve the protection of SB 172 for the following reasons:**

- **Financial Autonomy:** In nearly every instance, local congregations—not the Conference—have paid the mortgages, covered the insurance, funded the repairs, and maintained the grounds of their buildings for generations.
- **The "Pay-to-Play" Inequity:** Local churches are required to pay monthly "apportionments" to the Conference simply to maintain their membership. These payments are often viewed as a service fee for a connection that provides little to no direct financial assistance in return. It is unjust for the Conference to then demand 50% or more of the property's value as an "exit fee" when the congregation decides to disaffiliate.
- **Correction of Historical Overreach:** Current law (§ 5-327) even applies the trust clause retroactively to deeds signed before 1953, even if those deeds contain no mention of a trust. This is a legislative overreach that prioritizes a denomination's internal policy over the legal property records of Maryland citizens.
- **Fair Reimbursement:** SB 172 is balanced. It requires a local church to reimburse the Conference for any *actual* financial investments the Conference made. If the Conference truly contributed to the building, they get their money back. If they did not, they cannot claim ownership of a building they did not build.

By passing SB 172, the Maryland General Assembly will ensure that religious property disputes are handled with transparency and that the state no longer acts as an enforcer for a denomination's internal property claims against its own citizens.

I respectfully urge a **FAVORABLE** report on Senate Bill 172.

Sincerely,

Marlene Diehl  
3997 Shamrock Court  
Port Republic, MD 20676  
natediehl@comcast.net