

PART 2

LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Chapter 1

LOCAL CHURCH ORGANIZATION

A. Function of Local Churches

500. The local Wesleyan church is a body of Christian believers who hold the faith set forth in the Articles of Religion of The Wesleyan Church, who have been duly received as members of The Wesleyan Church and formally organized according to its *Discipline*, who acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of The Wesleyan Church, who support its worldwide mission, and who meet together regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship and worship (240).

B. Types of Organization

503. A pastoral charge may consist of a single church, or of two or more churches designated by the district conference as a circuit; is supplied as a regular pastoral appointment by the district conference; and transacts business through a local conference of the covenant members. The constitutional rights of a pastoral charge are given in 315. If the district conference desires to appoint a minister to serve two or more churches that shall continue as separate pastoral charges, it may appoint the minister as pastor of one church and supply pastor of the other (3255-3260).

1. Developing Church

510. A developing church is either a formerly established church that has been reclassified by the district board of administration because it no longer meets the qualifications in 518, or a church planting project supervised by a parent church, a cluster of parenting church partners, the district board of administration, or the General Department of Evangelism and Church Growth. A developing church is eventually intended to become an established church, but does not yet meet all requirements for this

classification (518). Its local organization shall be in keeping with 807. A developing church shall be authorized by the district conference (1180:24) or the district board of administration (1233:29), and shall be governed as follows:

(1) The pastor shall be selected by the district board of administration and appointed by the district conference, except in the interim of district conference sessions when the district board of administration shall have full power of appointment.

(2) A membership roll shall be maintained, ordinarily for one to eleven members. Candidates for membership shall be examined and recommended by the pastor until such a time as a local advisory council is formed and assumes this duty; and their reception shall be authorized by the district superintendent (1310:15).

(3) As soon as qualified members are available, the district superintendent, in cooperation with the pastor, may appoint a local advisory council of three to five members. The pastor shall serve as chair of this council (cf. 807; 1310:15). The council shall exercise the duties and powers of a local board of administration (782), making all recommendations to the district superintendent or the district board of administration instead of the local church conference (1310:15). All investments in land, buildings and equipment (1233:32; 4650-4660), matters involving employed staff, and other major decisions must be authorized by the district board of administration; and all actions of the local advisory council shall be subject to the review and approval of the district superintendent. The local advisory council shall be responsible to assist the district superintendent in qualifying the church as quickly as possible for organization as an established church.

(4) All property of a developing church shall be held by the district, with titles secured as given in 4660.

(5) A developing church may have one lay delegate to the district conference when so assigned by the district board of administration (1086; 1100:2; 1103).

(6) Each developing church shall be assigned by the district board of administration to one of the following categories for annual district conference and General Church reporting purposes, until it is organized as an established church or discontinued:

(a) District/denominational church plant (a new church initiated and supervised by the district or the General Department of Evangelism and Church Growth but not yet classified as an established church in keeping with 520);

(b) Daughter church plant (a new church initiated and supervised by a parent church or a cluster of parenting church partners but not yet classified as an established church in keeping with 520);

(c) Revitalization project (a former established church reclassified by the district conference or the district board of administration in keeping with 518:5 for the intentional purpose of renewal and redevelopment); or

(d) Restart project (a former developing or established church temporarily closed by the district and subsequently reopened at the same location and/or with some of the previous members).

2. Established Church

518. Authorization for Organization. The organization of a developing church as a fully established church, or of a group of believers who have applied to a district superintendent for organization as a Wesleyan church, empowering it to assemble for business as a local church conference and to elect a local board of administration, and investing it with all the rights, powers and duties of a local church as given in the Constitution (315) and as set forth elsewhere in *The Discipline*, may be authorized by the district board of administration and effected by the district superintendent when it meets these requirements:

(1) Twelve or more persons who are covenant members or are approved and ready to be received as covenant members when the organization shall be effected.

(2) A reasonable degree of financial stability, including the meeting of such obligations as it may have to the general church and the district..

(3) A reasonable degree of leadership and organizational maturity, with sufficient qualified persons to staff the minimum organization provided for in 810.

(4) The holding of all property in trust for The Wesleyan Church as required in 4610 (4680) or steps taken to accomplish the same.

(5) An established church may be reclassified by the district conference or the district board of administration as a developing church if such is recommended by the district superintendent and:

(a) If its covenant membership drops to ten or fewer (cf. 1180:24; 1233:29; 5320); or

(b) If it ceases to meet one or more of the other conditions set forth in 518:2-4 (cf. 4670).

520. Organizational Meeting. When the organization of an established church has been authorized by the district board of administration, the

district superintendent shall consult with the pastor and the local advisory council, or if there are none, with those interested in forming the church, and appoint a time for an organizational meeting. The organizational meeting shall be conducted by the district superintendent or a representative appointed by the district superintendent as follows:

(1) The reading of the Summary of the Articles of Religion (299) and the Covenant Membership Commitments by the presiding officer.

(2) An examination of each of the candidates for membership, conducted by the presiding officer, using the questions commonly addressed to such candidates (cf. 5560-5575), and the baptism of such as have not previously been baptized. When the organization involves a church previously organized as a developing church, those who have been accepted as members of the developing church need not be reexamined.

(3) A mutual pledge of purpose and fellowship on the part of all covenant members, including those being received. The presiding officer shall ask each one:

Question 1: "Are you in Christian fellowship with all those who present themselves for membership in this church organization?"

Answer: "I am."

Question 2: "In that Christian fellowship will you promise to walk with each other in love, giving and receiving counsel, sympathy and instruction in the Spirit of Christ?"

Answer: "I will."

(4) A declaration made by the presiding officer:

"On the basis of these mutual pledges in the presence of God, I proceed to give you each the right hand of fellowship, and declare by this act that you are a Christian church organized on the basis of *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*, and are invested with all the rights, powers and duties assigned to an established church by *The Discipline*."

(5) The first session of the local church conference, with the election of officers who shall serve for the remainder of the year, or until specified, and the installation of the officers (5915) by the person presiding over the organizational service.

(6) The report of the organization by the district superintendent to the next regular session of the district board of administration, and to the next regular session of the district conference (1180:24; 1310:14).

(7) The taking of steps to provide for the pastoral oversight and care of the new church, if such has not already been done.

3. Circuit

525. Relationship of Circuit and Church. A circuit is a pastoral charge in which a district conference has grouped two or more local churches under one pastor, and designated them as a circuit, with business to be transacted by a circuit conference. Each church on the circuit shall be organized and shall conduct its business according to the regulations for an established church, and shall exercise its constitutional rights to receive, expel and discontinue its members, to elect its own officers and trustees, and to have recourse to a proper court of jurisdiction in matters of controversy between itself and other units or agencies of The Wesleyan Church (315:1, 5, 6, 8). The circuit shall exercise all of the constitutional rights of a pastoral charge which are not reserved to the local church (315:2-4, 7), and take charge of all matters of circuit business as given in 525-535.

526. Developing Circuit Conference. When the churches on the circuit are all developing churches, the regulations governing a developing church will be applied to the developing circuit (510).

528. Circuit Conference. The covenant members of the several churches on a circuit, duly called and assembled together to do business, shall constitute a circuit conference. It shall follow the same organizational and procedural pattern as a local church conference (cf. 630-650). Its duties and powers shall be:

(1) To call the pastor and set the terms of pastoral service (315:2; 690-722).

(2) To license lay ministers (3410-3420) and to recommend suitable members to the district conference for district licenses as ministerial students and special workers (3015:3-4; 3033:1-2; 3460).

(3) To elect lay delegates to the district conference (315:7; 1100-1109).

(4) To elect a circuit secretary, such members of the circuit advisory council (530) in addition to the *ex officio* members as the circuit conference shall determine are needed to assure proper representation, and a circuit board of trustees (if such is needed, cf. 532).

(5) To determine all matters involving two or more of the churches on the circuit, including the authorization of transactions involved in the purchase, erection, encumbrance, sale or other disposition of a circuit parsonage or other property (4740-4750).

530. Circuit Advisory Council. The circuit advisory council shall direct circuit affairs between sessions of the circuit conference, bearing the same relationship to the circuit conference that the local board of

administration bears to the local church conference (750; 782). It shall consist of the pastor as chair, the circuit secretary as secretary, the chair of the circuit board of trustees, the treasurer of each local church, and such other representatives as the circuit conference shall determine are needed to assure proper representation. It shall elect one of its members as vice-chair, and shall meet at least quarterly at such time and place as it shall determine. It shall nominate the pastor, make recommendations on all matters over which the circuit conference has authority, and carry out and administer the decisions of the circuit conference (690).

532. Circuit Trustees. The circuit board of trustees shall consist of three to five members elected by the circuit conference. They shall organize themselves and carry on their work under the direction of the circuit advisory council in the same manner as the board of trustees for a local church (850-859), except that they shall have jurisdiction only over that property owned by the circuit, such as the circuit parsonage (cf. 4740-4750).

535. Circuit Committees. The circuit advisory council may appoint such committees as are necessary to the proper conduct of circuit affairs, including a nominating committee to nominate the circuit officers (cf. 820-823).

4. Mission

537. A special evangelistic, rescue or missionary work which cannot appropriately be organized as a developing church or church shall be carried on as a mission. A mission may be conducted by an established church subject to the approval of the district board of administration (655:15), by a district (1180:24; 1233:29) or by the General Department of Evangelism and Church Growth. It shall not maintain a membership roll nor receive members. A mission shall have no local boards, officers or committees except such as are appointed by the mission director, are amenable to the mission director, and can be replaced at the discretion of the mission director.

5. Local Churches in a Developing District

542. Missions, developing churches, churches and circuits located in developing districts shall be authorized, organized, and governed according to the *General Board Policy for Evangelism and Church Growth*, which shall be in harmony with *The Discipline* (cf. 4800).

6. Affiliate Church

548. An independent congregation of the Wesleyan tradition which seeks a less than full relationship with The Wesleyan Church may be recognized and listed as an affiliate church. This relationship shall exist to encourage fellowship, to include and involve the affiliated body in ministries and opportunities available to Wesleyan churches, and to eventually lead the affiliated unit into full relationship with The Wesleyan Church. Provisions and procedures to establish and govern an affiliate church relationship are located in Appendix H, paragraph 7900 et seq.