Recommendations to the 2016 Annual Conference

Recommendation
Create New Rule #86 in GNJ Rules of Order

Create Rule 86 to read as follows:

XIV. CHURCHES WISHING TO CONSIDER WITHDRAWAL FROM THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Only the Church Conference of the local church can formally express a desire to withdraw from the Annual Conference by presenting to the Conference Secretary a written detailed explanation of the reasons for their desire to consider withdrawal by the deadline for legislation to be presented to Annual Conference. That Church Conference shall provide adequate time for the Bishop or the District Superintendent to communicate with members of the congregation the full implications of their withdrawal including that the financial obligations of Conference billings, Shared Ministries, and any denominational loans must be fully satisfied. Any discussion or negotiations by the Conference Board of Trustees regarding the ownership of any United Methodist Church property or assets with that local church must await authorization and direction by the Annual Conference.

Rationale: Last year, the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference was confronted with the desire of one of their local churches to withdraw from the congregation because they perceived that denominational leadership was not enforcing the Book of Discipline. Unfortunately, this was one of the churches that was a “bright spot” and rapidly growing. There were also questions of transparency and what process should be followed in situations like this. This rule would provide for an open process that requires a formal declaration by a Church Conference and not a smaller group within the church. It also requires the knowledge and involvement of Annual Conference which may help the discernment process of not only the local church but the members themselves to avoid mass departures from a congregation. Hopefully, it will also prevent local churches from trying a “poison pill” approach like the former Wesley UMC in Quarryville, Pennsylvania used. Reasoning together is preferable to a suicide pact. This rule embodies the steps required in the resolution adopted by Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference last year.

Submitted by:
Creed Pogue, Lay Member
West Side UMC, Millville
609/774-0634