



Bishop LaTrelle Miller Easterling

EPISCOPAL LEADER

SOPHIE AMER, *Executive Assistant*

REV. ERICA ROBINSON-JOHNSON *Chief Administrative Officer*

September 20, 2026

Dear Clergy and Laity of the Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Area:

I greet you in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. It is with regret, but also with resolve, that I write to inform you that the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church has filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Northern District of West Virginia against a newly created corporation named Calvary Methodist Church, Inc. Calvary Methodist Church, Inc. wrongly claims to be the successor of Calvary United Methodist Church in Martinsburg, West Virginia, to hold full title to all of Calvary UMC's property, free and clear of express trust provisions in Calvary UMC's own deeds and in [*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*](#). The Trust Clause requires all church property—at every level of the denomination—to be held and used for the benefit of ministry and membership of The United Methodist Church and is subject to the *Discipline*.

It grieves my heart that we have arrived at a place where the Conference has no viable alternative but to pursue relief in our civil courts. It is always my preference to work collaboratively with congregations in a spirit of prayer, mutual respect, and holy conferencing to discern a faithful and viable path forward. Every reasonable effort is made to reach an appropriate resolution through conversation, transparency, and a shared commitment to the Church's mission. When those efforts prove unsuccessful, however, we will not hesitate to take the actions necessary to uphold the Trust Clause and the covenantal responsibilities that bind us together as United Methodists. Rooted in provisions first established by John Wesley, the Trust Clause is vital to ensuring that property entrusted to the Church remains dedicated to its shared mission and ministry.

Our regret in needing to take legal action is especially profound given Calvary UMC's nearly 250-year history in Methodism, with roots in the historic Berkeley Circuit, established in 1778 as the first Methodist circuit west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Importantly, the Conference's need to seek civil court protection in this case should be viewed against the backdrop of Calvary UMC's decision in 2023 to join 37 other local churches in filing their own lawsuit against the Conference, myself, and our Board of Trustees in the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County. The core of Calvary UMC's claims in that lawsuit was to ask the Court to terminate or modify the Trust Clause, openly acknowledging in their complaint that, absent the Court's intervention, the Trust Clause would prevent Calvary and its fellow plaintiff churches from "disaffiliating" from The United Methodist Church and retaining the church property.

The Circuit Court ultimately dismissed all of Calvary UMC's claims. Calvary and its fellow plaintiff churches appealed that result to the Appellate Court of Maryland, continuing to assert that they are legally entitled to "disaffiliate" and retain the church property, free and clear of the Trust Clause and without having to meet any of the preconditions to disaffiliation imposed by the now expired [terms of ¶2553](#) enacted by the 2019 General Conference.

BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON &
PENINSULA-DELAWARE AREA



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Calvary UMC's appeal in its Maryland lawsuit remains pending, yet Calvary has since altered course. On March 30, 2026, the law firm representing Calvary in the Maryland lawsuit sent the Conference Chancellor a letter that Calvary UMC's counsel characterized "as formal notice that Calvary United Methodist Church has separated from . . . the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church . . . and the denomination." The law firm's letter stated further that "the Church unequivocally rejects any further actions by the Conference related to its beliefs, teachings, or clergy appointments," and that "[a]ny attempt by the Conference to access Church property will result in a request for immediate departure, followed by removal by law enforcement for trespassing if necessary."

We subsequently learned that Calvary Methodist Church, Inc. had been incorporated on March 9, 2026, and that a "Quitclaim Deed" purporting to transfer all of Calvary UMC's property to the newly established corporation was executed and recorded with the Berkeley County Clerk just four days later.

In light of these actions, including executing and recording deeds that purport to transfer all of the church's property to an unaffiliated corporation, Conference leadership determined that these exigent circumstances required the Board of Trustees to act under [¶2549.4\(b\) of The Book of Discipline](#) to protect the interests of the Conference and The United Methodist Church in Calvary UMC's property. The lawsuit filed in West Virginia seeks the court's protection of those interests and enforcement of the trust provisions under which the property has long been held.

As conference leaders, we bear a sacred responsibility to uphold the Trust Clause and faithfully steward the resources that generations of Methodists, through The United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations, have entrusted to the mission and ministry of the Church. These resources exist to further our shared mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. That responsibility requires us to protect our resources and ensure they remain dedicated to the purposes for which they have been consecrated.

As I shared when Calvary UMC and other local churches filed their lawsuit in Maryland in 2023, our connection is strengthened by our ability to remain united in Christ even amid differing theological beliefs. That conviction remains unchanged. As this matter now moves forward, I invite you to join me in prayer for all involved, that we may conduct ourselves in ways that honor God and remain faithful to the mission and ministry to which we have been called.

Blessings and peace,

Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Area

The United Methodist Church

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*The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit,
love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.*