

# Merger of Local United Methodist Churches (§ 2546): Toolkit

## Purpose

A merger under § 2546 of the *Book of Discipline 2020/2024* allows two or more United Methodist local churches to become one successor church in order to more effectively fulfill their ministry (§§ 201–204). A merger is not a closure, does not dissolve the Trust Clause, and must follow church law and civil law.

## Essential Workflow:

### 1. Discernment and Consultation

Churches engage in shared missional discernment and consult early with the district superintendent. Civil-law implications (corporate status, property, debt) should be identified at this stage.

### 2. Written Merger Plan

A written resolution stating the terms and conditions of the merger is prepared for each church. The plan should identify the successor church, governance and pastoral arrangements, and treatment of property and finances (§ 2546.1).

### 3. Congregational Approval

Each merging church must approve the merger:

- by charge conference, or
- by church local conference for each church where a charge conference includes multiple congregations (§ 2546.2; § 2527).

### 4. District Superintendent Approval

The merger must be approved by the district superintendent(s) of the district(s) in which the churches are located (§ 2546.3).

### 5. Civil-Law Compliance

All applicable state and local merger laws must be followed. Where civil law conflicts with the *Discipline*, civil law prevails and the *Discipline* is modified as necessary (§ 2546.4).

### 6. Implementation and Records

All archives and records of the merging churches become the responsibility of the successor church (§ 2546.5). The merged church continues as a United Methodist church subject to the trust clause (§ 2501).

## Compliance Checklist

- Written merger plan and resolution completed
- Proper conference approval obtained for each church
- Church local conferences used where required (§ 2527)
- District superintendent(s) approval secured in writing
- Civil-law requirements satisfied (corporate, property, debt)
- Membership and sacramental records transferred
- Trust-clause obligations acknowledged and retained

## Key Clarifications

- A merger under § 2546 is not a church closure (§ 2549 does not apply).
- Property does not revert to the annual conference; it continues under the trust clause.
- Interdenominational mergers follow § 2547, not § 2546.
- Merger is invalid if congregational approval, superintendent approval, or civil-law compliance is missing.