

Closing a Local Church under ¶ 2549

Practical pathway, role matrix, working checklists, and implementation forms

Based on the article: “Closing a Local Church under ¶ 2549: Theology, Law, and Process.”

This toolkit is designed for district superintendents, bishops, charge conferences, conference trustees, chancellors, and annual conference leaders who need a working guide to the closure process.

Core rule	Closure is not a disaffiliation pathway. It is an act within the connection.
Final authority	The annual conference closes the church and the conference trustees administer the property after conference action.
Critical correction	After JCD 1507, a church council may not bypass the charge conference and petition the annual conference directly.
Emergency rule	Ad-interim and exigent actions under ¶ 2549.3 protect property temporarily; they do not replace annual conference action.

Authority: Book of Discipline 2020/2024 ¶¶ 213, 229, 2501, 2549.1-7; JCDs 1282, 1444, 1461, 1490, 1507, 1512, 1517, 1518.

1. Quick-reference pathway

Use this as the working sequence for ordinary closure. The printed Discipline should be read subject to JCD 1507 and the later Judicial Council decisions discussed in the article.

Step	Action	Primary actor(s)	Required output
1	Confirm that one or both grounds in ¶ 2549.1 are actually present.	DS, bishop, DBCLB	Preliminary closure basis
2	Guide the congregational assessment required by ¶ 213 before treating closure as the right course.	DS	Assessment report
3	Obtain a legal opinion on title, reversionary clauses, rights of reentry, and other title restrictions.	DS, chancellor, trustees' counsel	Title memo or legal opinion
4	Develop the property disposition or future-use plan with the district board of church location and building.	DS, DBCLB	DBCLB plan or recommendation
5	Prepare the membership-transfer plan so pastoral care continues within the connection under ¶ 229.	DS, nearby pastors, local leaders	Member transfer plan
6	If discernment begins locally, route it through the charge conference. The church council may study and recommend, but it may not bypass the charge conference.	Church council, pastor, charge conference	Charge conference record
7	Obtain the required consents for the DS recommendation and take the matter to annual conference for action.	DS, bishop, majority of DSs, DBCLB, annual conference	Conference resolution and journal record

Local discernment note

- A church council may study closure, gather information, and recommend action.
- After JCD 1507, the church council may not petition the annual conference directly in place of the charge conference.
- The charge conference remains the proper connecting body between the local church and the wider Church in this process.

Authority: ¶ 2549.2(a)-(b); JCD 1507 (2024).

2. Roles and authority matrix

Use the matrix below to keep responsibilities clear and to avoid having one body absorb another body's role.

Body or office	Primary role	Do not do this
Church council	Studies the situation, receives reports, and may recommend action through the proper channels.	Do not bypass the charge conference and petition annual conference directly.
Charge conference	Provides the local body's formal oversight and conference linkage in closure discernment.	Do not treat its role as optional or merely ceremonial.
Pastor	Leads pastoral communication, local discernment, and membership-care planning.	Do not frame closure as a property exit or independent re-launch.
District superintendent	Directs the ¶ 213 assessment, title review, property planning, member transfer planning, and recommendation.	Do not skip the preparatory steps in ¶ 2549.2(a).
Bishop	Gives required consent and oversees connectional integrity.	Do not use emergency procedures as a substitute for conference action.
DBCLB	Helps evaluate the property and its future use or disposition.	Do not leave the property plan undeveloped.
Annual conference	Takes the final legislative action to close the church.	Do not convert closure into disaffiliation by resolution wording or side agreements.
Conference trustees	Receive vested title and administer property, records, funds, and proceeds as directed by law.	Do not ignore donor, deed, urban-center, or civil-law restrictions.

Authority: ¶¶ 229, 2501, 2549.1-.7; JCDs 1490, 1507, 1512, 1517, 1518.

3. Required documents and closure dossier checklist

The safest practice is to build a single closure dossier. Put the documents below in one packet so the annual conference record is clear and defensible.

Recommended closure dossier contents

- Written summary of the grounds for closure under ¶ 2549.1.
- ¶ 213 congregational assessment report.
- Legal opinion on title, deed restrictions, reversionary clauses, and rights of reentry.
- District board of church location and building property disposition or future-use plan.
- Membership-transfer plan under ¶ 229.
- Charge conference minutes or discernment record, where local action or recommendation occurred.
- Written consents required for the district superintendent's recommendation.
- Proposed annual conference resolution and effective date.
- Inventory of deeds, records, membership rolls, cornerstone contents, and archival materials.
- Insurance, utilities, security, and maintenance status report.
- Memo on gifts, endowments, later-accruing benefits, and any continuing legal restrictions.
- Sale-proceeds memo identifying whether the urban-center rule applies under ¶ 2549.7.

Authority: ¶¶ 213, 229, 2549.1-.7; JCDs 1282, 1461, 1517.

High-risk omissions

- No ¶ 213 assessment or an assessment done after the conference action instead of before it.
- No legal title review before property is transferred or sold.
- No clear record showing how local discernment related to charge conference oversight.
- No membership-transfer plan, leaving members disconnected from pastoral care.
- No written analysis of donor restrictions, later-accruing benefits, or the urban-center proceeds rule.

4. Compliance checklist by phase

Phase	Required checks	Primary evidence
Discernment	Confirm real grounds, start ¶ 213 assessment, identify local concerns, and preserve charge conference oversight.	Grounds memo, assessment plan, local meeting notes
Preparation	Complete title review, DBCLB plan, and membership-transfer plan before recommendation.	Legal opinion, DBCLB memo, member transfer worksheet
Recommendation	Collect required consents and finalize the closure dossier.	Signed consents, final packet, proposed resolution
Conference action	Adopt the closure resolution, note vesting, and record the action in the journal.	Conference minutes, journal record, effective date
After closure	Secure property, remove insignia as needed, transfer records, and handle funds and proceeds lawfully.	Trustees' checklist, archives receipt, proceeds memo

Authority: ¶¶ 229, 2549.1-.7; JCDs 1490, 1507, 1512, 1517, 1518.

5. Ad-interim and exigent-action quick sheet

Use this page when immediate property protection is necessary between annual conference sessions.

Procedure	When it applies	Non-negotiable reminder
Voluntary transfer under ¶ 2549.3(a)	The local church wants title transferred to conference trustees between conference sessions using the required property-transfer procedures.	Title may transfer, but the annual conference still must later decide whether to formalize closure.
Exigent vesting under ¶ 2549.3(b)	Immediate protection of the property is required and the bishop, a majority of DSs, and the DBCLB act by written consent.	Exigent action is custodial, not conclusive; it does not replace annual conference action.

Emergency documentation checklist

- Written explanation of the facts creating immediate risk to the property.
- Written consent of the bishop, a majority of district superintendents, and the DBCLB for exigent vesting.
- Property security plan: locks, insurance, utilities, inspections, and occupancy status.
- Communication plan for affected members and local leaders.
- Calendar note for presentation to the next annual conference session.

Authority: ¶ 2549.3(a)-(b); JCD 1490 (2023).

6. Post-closure obligations

- Secure and insure the property, preserve utilities as needed, and document condition and liabilities.
- Remove Christian and United Methodist insignia and symbols insofar as reasonably practicable or necessary.
- Collect deeds, records, legal papers, membership rolls, and cornerstone contents for the conference archives and history process.
- Transfer members under ¶ 229 so pastoral care continues within the connection.
- Review gifts, endowments, later-accruing benefits, and any continuing restrictions before disbursing funds.
- Analyze whether sale proceeds are subject to the urban-center rule in ¶ 2549.7.

Authority: ¶¶ 229, 2549.4-.7; JCDs 1282, 1461.

7. Common red flags

- Using closure language to accomplish disaffiliation, separation, or a sale-back to departing members.
- Treating the church council as a substitute for the charge conference.
- Assuming emergency vesting equals final closure.
- Moving too quickly to property disposition without reviewing title restrictions or donor limits.
- Failing to create a clear record that closure was grounded in ¶ 2549.1 and completed in the order required by the Discipline.

Authority: JCDs 1490, 1507, 1512, 1517, 1518.

8. Working forms

These forms are intentionally brief so they can be adapted to conference practice without changing the legal sequence.

Form A. Closure dossier cover sheet

Local church / charge	
District / annual conference	
District superintendent	
Grounds asserted under ¶ 2549.1	<input type="checkbox"/> No longer serves its purpose <input type="checkbox"/> Property no longer used or maintained as a United Methodist place of worship
Local discernment record	<input type="checkbox"/> Church council review <input type="checkbox"/> Charge conference action or record attached
Recommendation packet includes	<input type="checkbox"/> ¶ 213 assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Title opinion <input type="checkbox"/> DBCLB plan <input type="checkbox"/> Membership transfer plan
Conference action	Effective date: _____ Journal reference: _____
Trustees / archives follow-up	Property received: _____ Archives completed: _____ Proceeds memo completed: _____

Form B. Annual conference closure action record

Church name	
Conference session and date	
Resolution adopted	
Title vested in conference trustees	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes Date: _____
Member transfer plan implemented	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes Receiving congregation(s): _____
Records delivered under ¶ 2549.4	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes Date / receipt: _____
Funds and proceeds review	<input type="checkbox"/> Donor restrictions reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Urban-center rule reviewed <input type="checkbox"/> Final memo attached