

“New Wineskins National Conversation”
DISCONTINUATION OF A LOCAL CHURCH*
2012 Book of Discipline

Yellow--- DS requirements Red—Commentary Green--- Next sequential steps

**The made up example of “Lone Hope UMC” a declining church in a growing area. To better reach the fast-growing mission field, the Cabinet discerns the best course is to close “Lone Hope” and re-open it as a satellite of vibrant larger church in the area, “Best Hope UMC,” which would love the opportunity!*

Paragraph 2549.2

2. Prior to a recommendation of the DS, in consultation with [Center for Congregational Transformation], that a local church be discontinued, the DS shall guide the congregation in an assessment of its potential as outlined in paragraph 213

- Recommendation of discontinuance includes plans for future use of property and where the membership, and property titles shall be transferred
- On such recommendation that a local church no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized and incorporated, with the consent of the presiding bishop and a majority of the DS’s and the district Board of Church Location, the annual conference may declare any local church within its bounds discontinued.

If the Bishop and cabinet determine Lone Hope church should be discontinued, that local church does not have to agree with the action, nor is it required that the church votes to discontinue (although if the church does, it makes the whole process better and more strategic). Often, however, the church may even fight against the action...especially if there is some historical suspicion/resentment of “Best Hope”.

“Plans for the future use of the property” is critical. The cabinet action should not result in a mission field ‘being abandoned’ but rather that there is a better plan in place to meet the needs of the mission field.

**BEFORE DS officially recommends Lone Hope be discontinued by cabinet action, She/ he would develop strategy plan with two options to be presented to and considered by Lone Hope, Best Hope, , and the cabinet:
Strategy Plan to Reach the Fast Growing Mission Field**

(1) To meet the fast growing mission field, Lone Hope would consider the strategic advantages of “Giving themselves away in ministry and service” and becoming a multi-site extension campus of Best Hope, and vote to enter into such a relationship, whereby Best Hope would apply its experience and growth practices and take over full responsibility and authority for ministry coming out of the Lone Hope Church.

OR

(2) To follow the Book of Discipline procedures and discontinue Lone Hope UMC for the purpose of re-opening the facility for mission field reasons as a multi-site extension campus of Best Hope.

This plan of strategic options should presented to Lone Hope, and to Best Hope within the designated period of time; this can be done rather soon. It can be presented to the cabinet via conference call or at next called meeting. Wording would be perfected and would include Paragraph 213 provisions. This should be done asap.

Plan STARTS WITH the Cabinet request sent to Best Hope to consider this strategic plan. As a multi-site extension campus for the purpose of aggressively reaching the fast-growing population in the area, the facility and assets would be transferred to Best Hope. Best Hope would be totally in charge of any ministry happening at that location from now on.

Assuming Best Hope agrees, then necessary steps are put in motion to discontinue Lone Hope church.

Paragraph 213

A. “upon the request of the congregation the DS shall appoint a study task force”

B. “Alternatively, the DS may appoint such a task force when the future or viability of the congregation is in question or whenever he or she deems it necessary for other reasons” Even if the church does not request or does not want such a study, it can still happen.

- Task force shall be composed of equal number of lay and clergypersons and shall include persons from that congregation I would recommend something like this: Clergy -- (a) Pastor of nearby church with a missional heart; (b) Congregational Developer; (c) Pastor who has some positive relationship with Lone Hope church or with its current pastor. Laity – (a) active lay person from nearby church with a missional heart; preferably who has been through HCI; (b) Recognized lay leader within AC with a missional heart; (c) a real estate developer, if possible, who is active in area church. **AND** any three laity from Lone Hope Church to be invited.

Note that the Lone Hope laity may not actually choose to participate, but they are invited and as such, included.

1. study shall include: a) unique missional opportunities; b) present ministries of the congregation; c) number of leaders and style of leadership; d) growth potential of surrounding community; e) fiscal and facilities needs; f) distance from other UM churches; g) number and size of other non UM churches; h) other items that may impact church's ability to fulfill mission.

There is no time line requirement for such a study. Often the AC Development office will have all the necessary demographic data in hand; other times, this data will need to be collected. Could probably be done in 2 meetings, over two weeks, but sometimes much longer.

DS would announce task force at Lone Hope within the month... and establish an appropriate schedule that would be implemented in weeks, not months.

Board of Church Location convened to apprise of the study, and of the cabinet proposal

2. Findings shall be published and presented to congregation with recommendations: may include options for serving the community as an organized church....or cooperative parish...or ecumenical shared ministries... or give special attention to redevelopment, relocation, or *discontinuance*.

All church meeting called for 3 weeks to present plan [Example:]

Recommendations would be the plan that Lone Hope be discontinued and after an appropriate period of dormancy, be re-opened as a multi-site extension campus of Best Hope. If the existing Lone Hope congregation sees the missional strategy and importance of this approach to reach the fast-growing population, and agrees to the plan, then the Conference would ask Best Hope to (a) allow the continuation of the current worshipping congregation in the facility at its present time for at least one year. (b) assume the pastoral needs of the existing members.

If Lone Hope does not willingly agree to the plan, the church would be either (a) closed and the DS would arrange for the church's membership roster to be transferred to another local church for worship and pastoral care....or possibly (b) worship to be suspended (while church title, deed, and other legalities cared for.

- Invited to presentation shall include: members of the congregation, pastor, DS, and members of the District Board of Church Location and Building.

3. Members of the Lone Hope church shall consider the recommendations and develop goals and ministry action plans in response. **The DS shall report the results of the study and the congregation's response to the cabinet.**

Paragraph 229

If a local church is discontinued, **the DS shall select another UMC and transfer its members thereto**, or to such other churches as the members may select.