

Mountain View District Cover Sheet to Holston Annual Conference Limited Church Closure Process for 2024

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REGISTRY PACKET

Holston Annual Conference Limited Church Closure Process for 2024

Your LCC Registry Packet Contains:

- 1. A Registry Form**
- 2. The Limited Church Closure ('LCC') Process document**
- 3. A Pastor's Declaration Form**
- 4. Introduction to the 'LCC Process' document**

If your Church Council formally approves the local church participation in the LCC process, the 'Registry' form should be properly completed and returned to your District Office along with all other items listed on the 'Registry' form.

If the District Office determines that the Registry Packet is not complete, it will be returned to you. If the District Office confirms that all documents are properly completed and included, and the fee is delivered, you will receive a 'Receipt' from the District Office confirming your inclusion on the official LCC Registry.

Introductory Information

Limited Church Closure Process 2024

Background

In November 2022, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees adopted a Resolution that stated in part:

“[T]he Holston Conference resolves that if there are changes made at the 2024 General Conference related to human sexuality that cause our local churches to believe it is untenable to continue as United Methodist churches, the Holston Conference and its trustees commit—within the parameters of the Book of Discipline—to seek a gracious, fair and non-punitive separation process for such local churches at least through December 31, 2024.”

Following General Conference, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees stated that it would honor its promise to seek a fair, gracious, and non-punitive process to allow churches who find it untenable to be associated with The United Methodist Church to disassociate in a way that does not violate The United Methodist Book of Discipline.

This commitment replaces the ‘disaffiliation process’ that was in place through par. 2553 of The United Methodist Book of Discipline which was added at the 2019 General Conference and expired on December 31, 2023. This was the only provision in the Book of Discipline that permitted a church to sever its ties to the denomination while securing full unencumbered ownership of its building, property, and assets.

Since there is no existing provision in The United Methodist Book of Discipline that currently permits a local church to disaffiliate as described above, the Board of Trustees is utilizing the ‘Church Closures’ procedures found in par. 2549.2 in The UM Book of Discipline to provide a limited opportunity for qualifying churches to sever their relationships with The United Methodist Church under certain circumstances in compliance with The UM Book of Discipline.

Upon closure of a church, the property vests in the Holston Conference Board of Trustees. Thus, to accomplish a disassociation similar to the limited opportunity in the former par. 2553, once a church is ‘closed’, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees may then convey the property back to the local church under certain terms and conditions.

Because there is no dedicated process for disaffiliation in The Book of Discipline, this process would necessarily require a ‘case-by-case’ analysis as established by the existing provisions of the Book of Discipline.

Questions for Consideration before Submitting a Registration Form

1) Is this the right process for our congregation?

This process is specifically for churches desiring to explore the possibility of exiting from The United Methodist Church. The local church must prove that the change in language in the Book of Discipline relating to human sexuality is the sole reason that the church could no longer function in ministry while associated with The United Methodist Church.

The disciplinary requirements include a church assessment and approval by district and conference boards. This process is intended to assist discernment of the right next step for a

congregation who is considering their future relationship with The United Methodist Church. If a church chooses to register, it is expected that they will participate fully in the process with the prayer that they will be better prepared for future ministry regardless of the ultimate decision and relationship with The United Methodist Church.

The process will be time-consuming. Congregations are asked to prayerfully consider whether participation in this discernment process will strengthen their relationships within the congregation and their witness in their communities and will serve as the best use of their resources of time and ministry focus.

2) What if we have other concerns that are driving our desire to exit from The United Methodist Church?

The Holston Conference values the ministries of all of its congregations. Representatives of the conference are available to offer support and answer other questions or concerns. Questions related to appointments, local church property or cemeteries, or consideration of church closure without exiting can be directed to your district superintendent. Your superintendent can also help you connect with our conference staff and other resources to support your ministry. For example, if you desire to strengthen your outreach to your community or your ministries with children and youth or you have a desire to strengthen your mission ministries or your personal or congregational prayer focus, please contact the conference congregational development office or connectional ministries staff. The Holston Conference is committed to strengthening passionate spiritual disciples in our congregations and the communities they serve and districts are developing resources to assist each congregation in discipleship. Misinformation has been part of the past experience. Resources such as copies of our Social Principles as revised and approved at the recent General Conference and clarification about theological stances can be helpful for your congregation to have accurate information as you consider your participation. Speaking confidently and accurately about our United Methodist witness and commitments helps you in your representation of your congregation in your communities. Your superintendent or conference staff can assist you with these questions.

3) How do we know this process is for our congregation?

To initiate a formal discernment process of Limited Church Closure, the senior appointed pastor, the church lay leader, the chair of the church council, and the chair of the church board of trustees must sign the registration form to attest that there is a consensus from the congregation that it wishes to explore closure.

Experience has shown that even votes to test the interest of the congregation in exploring closure often lead to division within the congregation. There have also been congregations with particular individuals, small groups, Sunday School classes, or pastoral leadership that have been interested in considering closure when this is not representative of the entire congregation. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern whether this is a consensus of the congregation or whether there are a few strong voices that are leading this decision. Your decision to participate should consider whether this step will strengthen your witness in your community and your commitment to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

4) What will happen if our congregation requests to register for the process to explore possible Limited Church Closure from The United Methodist Church?

The Holston Conference Board of Trustees has approved a procedure that assures compliance with the provisions for church closure under par. 2549.2 and par. 213 of The Book of Discipline. The registration request is made to the district office. The Registry form, a copy of deeds to all property in the name of the local church, a copy of the Title Opinion for all property titled in the name of the local church, and a non-refundable registration fee of \$100 are required to register for the discernment process. A team of guides, including representatives from your congregation, will fulfill the necessary steps. At the completion of these steps, a report of the church assessment study will be submitted to the Conference Board of Trustees for their consideration and recommendations and further approval by the superintendent and the district board of church location and building. The resulting Limited Church Closure Agreement will be considered by the church council. If the council decides not to proceed, the process is concluded. If the council votes to proceed with the Limited Church Closure process, the church will request the district superintendent to call a church conference to consider the single question of: Does the church wish to sever its relationship with The United Methodist Church because of the change in language in the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality under the terms of departure set forth in the Limited Church Closure Agreement? A 2/3 majority vote is necessary to approve the proposed Limited Church Closure Agreement.

5) When can we begin and how long will it take?

Congregations can register with their district office beginning August 1, 2024-November 1, 2024. The process of completing the necessary discernment steps and the church assessment will open during this time period. Contact will be made with the church to determine the schedule for each setting. The church assessment and required steps of the disciplinary process, including the church conference if requested, must be completed by January 31, 2025. If the church votes to approve the Limited Church Closure Agreement, all documents must be submitted and completed no later than March 14, 2025 and all costs must be submitted by March 31, 2025.

Holston Annual Conference

Limited Church Closure Process for 2024

In November 2022, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees adopted a Resolution stating that it would seek a way to permit churches to sever their relationship with The United Methodist Church if the language in the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality changed. More specifically, the Resolution stated that:

“[T]he Holston Conference resolves that if there are changes made at the 2024 General Conference related to human sexuality that cause our local churches to believe it is untenable to continue as United Methodist churches, the Holston Conference and its trustees commit – within the parameters of the Book of Discipline - to seek a gracious, fair and non-punitive separation process for such local churches at least through December 31, 2024.” (Emphasis added)

This process, initially referred to as a ‘Disassociation’ process, was modified after General Conference terminated the ‘Disaffiliation’ process in ¶ 2553 and chose to not provide any new path for disaffiliation.

Consequently, in its effort to fulfill its promise, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees has created a procedure to allow a church to sever its relationship with the United Methodist denomination using certain provisions permitted by the United Methodist Book of Discipline ¶2549, *et al.* relating to church closures. Under the provisions of ¶2549, a church that qualifies for this Process will be closed, title to all real and personal property will go to the Conference Board of Trustees, and the Trustees will immediately convey the title to all real and personal property back to the local church under the terms set forth in an Agreement already in place between the local church and the Conference Board of Trustees. This process configuration is being offered for a limited time for the limited reasons set forth in its Resolution above.

For this reason, the Process is referred to as a ‘**Limited Church Closure**’ process, (or ‘**LCC**’ process).

As described herein, some LCC terms bear resemblance to the former Disaffiliation process, but because ‘Disaffiliation’ no longer exists, there are also differences. For example, during the Disaffiliation process, many other United Methodist Conferences required additional fees to cover the administrative costs of carrying out the process; because Holston Conference did not include these fees, it incurred significant expenses in assisting churches through disaffiliation.

Under the LCC process, some of these costs will be required to help offset the financial burden it will incur in assisting churches through the new LCC process. You will also note that the LCC process does not set a specific ‘discernment’ period as before. However, in accordance with ¶213 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline, an ‘Assessment’ process will be conducted. It is expected that this will be a fruitful and productive process for any church, regardless of outcome. Furthermore, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees has extended the deadline into 2025 to allow churches more time to complete the process.

Finally, it should be clear up front that the Holston Conference Board of Trustees has crafted this process to be in compliance with the United Methodist Book of Discipline. However, several Conferences within the denomination have requested a ‘Declaratory Decision’ from the United Methodist Judicial Council seeking a ruling on whether such a church closure process under ¶2549 is permissible.

It is not known when the UM Judicial Council will issue a ruling, although there is some anticipation that it might be sometime in October, 2024. The Holston Conference Board of Trustees has taken this possibility into consideration when setting up timelines. However, to avoid the possibility that the UM Judicial Council Decision will invalidate and/or rescind the actions that Holston Conference will have taken to assist churches in their separation from the United Methodist denomination, there will be a ‘pause’ in the process, if necessary, to allow the Judicial Council to issue a Decision before finalizing a church closure.

No church closure under this LCC process will be finalized unless the United Methodist Judicial Council rules that this Process is permissible under the United Methodist Book of Discipline.

The Holston Conference Limited Church Closure Process is explained in greater detail below.

PROCEDURE

Summary

A congregation that shares a consensus that it would like to explore separation from The United Methodist Church will act through its Church Council to seek inclusion on an LCC ‘Registry’ kept by its District Office.

The District Superintendent of the local church shall appoint a ‘Conference Guide Team’ (‘CGT’) to guide the church through an Assessment and help develop a plan for closure in cooperation with the church in accordance with ¶213 of The UM Book of Discipline. At the conclusion of the Assessment, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees will draft an ‘LCC Agreement’ based upon the findings of the Assessment and deliver it to the District Superintendent for review.

If the ‘LCC Agreement’ is agreed to by the District leadership, it will be forwarded to the local church for review. If the local church agrees, a Church Conference will be held – at which time a vote will be conducted to decide whether to proceed with the church closure. If the local church votes affirmatively by a 2/3 majority, the church closure will come before a Special Session of the Annual Conference to be held at the end of April or early May.

If the Annual Conference votes to close the church, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees will be prepared to immediately deliver title to all real and personal property back to the local church.

PROCESS STEPS

I. Registry

To begin the Limited Church Closure process a church must first indicate its desire to explore its possible separation from the UMC by submitting a ‘Registry’ form completed by the local church that simply attests that the local church congregation desires to explore the possibility of ending its relationship with the UMC.

This is done by a vote of the local Church Council confirming that it desires to enter into a process to explore whether to sever its relationship with the United Methodist denomination on the basis of a change in the Book of Discipline related to human sexuality.

If there is an affirmative vote of the Church Council, the ‘Registry’ form must then be signed by the following persons attesting that there is a *consensus* of the local church congregation desiring to initiate a formal assessment process:

- i. The [senior] Appointed or Assigned Pastor
- ii. The Church Lay Leader
- iii. The Chair of the Church Council/Administrative Board
- iv. The Chair of the Church Board of Trustees

- *All signatures are required on the Registry Form that simply attests that there is a consensus from the congregation that it wishes to explore the possibility of ending its relationship with the United Methodist Church; (the signature is simply an affirmation that there is a genuine consensus of the church; the signature is not a declaration of the individual that he /she necessarily wishes to disassociate.)*
- *A Registry Form that does not contain the signatures of all the parties will be rejected unless it is accompanied by a written explanation from the signatory explaining why he or she did not sign the Registration form. The written explanation will be considered by the District Superintendent in deciding whether or not to accept the church on the Registry.*

The Registry Form must be accompanied by:

_____ A copy of the **Deed(s)** to all property titled in the name of the local church;

_____ A copy of a **Title Opinion** for all property titled in the name of the local church;

_____ A non-refundable Registry **Administrative Fee** of One Hundred Dollars, (\$100)

_____ A Pastor Declaration Form

The Registry period opens on **August 1, 2024** and closes on **November 1, 2024**. Any church that is not on the official Registry by 5:00 p.m. on November 1, 2024 shall not be eligible to participate in this Limited Church Closure process.

Once the District Office receives the above-referenced documents, the District shall determine whether the Registry Packet is complete. If all documents are properly included, the District will place the church on the Registry and then forward the Registry Packet to the Conference Office.

2. Assessment

¶ 2549 of the UM Book of Discipline requires an assessment of the prospective church closure in accordance with ¶213 of the UM Book of Discipline.

a. The DS shall appoint an Assessment ‘Study Task Force’ in accordance with Book of Discipline ¶213; it shall be known as the ‘Conference Guide Team’ (‘CGT’).

b. Each ‘Conference Guide Team’ shall be composed of:

- i. An equal number of clergy and lay persons;
- ii. At least two (2) members of the local church

c. The Conference Guide Team shall:

First:

- i. Determine whether the local church meets the Threshold Requirements based upon the Conference’s 2022 Resolution, namely, that the local church has a genuine conviction that the change in language in the UM Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality makes it untenable for the local church to continue effective ministry as a United Methodist Church.

Second:

- ii. Draft an Assessment Study based upon its engagement with the church that includes the analyses found in UM Book of Discipline ¶¶ 2549 and 213 to evaluate the cost to Holston Conference to fulfill the mission of the Church in that community in its absence.

This assessment will consider:

- a. Community Connection
- b. Worship & Evangelism
- c. Stewardship/Finances
- d. Church Vitality
- e. Mission & Ministry

- f. This will also specifically include an evaluation of the costs to establish a United Methodist presence in the community in the event of a church's departure.

Third:

- iii. Draft an Evaluation Report for submission to the Holston Conference Board of Trustees that contains:
 - A declaration stating whether or not the Threshold Requirements have been met by the local church;
 - A copy of the Assessment Study;
 - A Report that specifically states, among other things:
 - a. Whether another congregation of the United Methodist Church is viable in the community;
 - b. Approximate value of all local church property
 - c. Approximate cost of replacing the discontinued church ministry in the community (if applicable)
 - d. All of these factors will be taken into consideration by the Holston Conference Board of Trustees in calculating the costs to the local church for closure under this LCC Process.
 - The CGT will present a Summary of the Assessment Study relating to missional presence in the community to the local church, irrespective of whether the local church ultimately changes its relationship with The United Methodist Church.
 - The work of the CGT concludes upon submission of the Evaluation Report to the Holston Conference Board of Trustees.

Upon the Holston Conference Board of Trustees' receipt of the Evaluation Report from the CGT, the Limited Church Closure Process shall pause – and no other steps shall be taken in the process – unless or until the United Methodist Judicial Council rules on the Request for A Declaratory Decision regarding the permissibility of this church closure process as a means of allowing a local church to sever its ties with the United Methodist Church.

3. Limited Church Closure Agreement Process:

If the United Methodist Judicial Council Decision permits churches to sever their relationship with The UMC under the Church Closure Process set forth here, then the Process will proceed with the following steps:

- i. The Holston Conference Board of Trustees will draft a Limited Church Closure Agreement, ('**LCC Agreement**') that sets forth the terms, specifically including the cost, under which it would convey the title to all real and personal church property back to the church upon a vote of closure by the Annual Conference.

Specific Terms regarding Documents are provided in **Appendix A** to this Document.

Specific terms regarding corporate and property Costs are provided in **Appendix B** to this Document.

- ii. The Board of Trustees will submit the proposed 'Limited Church Closure Agreement' to the District Superintendent of the District in which the local church resides for his or her approval.
- iii. If the District Superintendent approves the proposed LCC Agreement, the DS will submit a copy of the proposed Limited Church Closure Agreement to the District Board of Church Location and Building for review.
 1. If either the DS or District Board of Church Location & Building rejects the proposed Agreement, they will return the proposed Agreement to the Holston Conference Board of Trustees with an explanation as to why consent is withheld.
 2. The Holston Conference Board of Trustees will take into consideration the explanation from the DS or District Board and decide whether to make additional revisions to the Agreement. Failure to reach a consensus on the proposed Agreement among the

DS, District Board of Church Location & Building and Holston Conference Board of Trustees, after due consideration, will result in the termination of the Process.

- iv. If the District Board of Church Location and Building consents to the LCC Agreement, the DS will present the Agreement to the local Church Council to decide whether or not to convene a Church Conference to vote on severing its relationship with The United Methodist Church.
 1. If after considering the proposed LCC Agreement the Church Council decides not to proceed with the Limited Church Closure process, the process is concluded and no further action shall be taken.
 2. If the Church Council decides to proceed with the LCC process, it will request the District Superintendent to call a church conference at which time all professing members in good standing of the local church who are present shall conduct a vote whether to accept the LCC Agreement.

The DS will prepare and monitor a vote on the following question:

Does the church wish to sever its relationship with The United Methodist Church because of the change in language in the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality under the terms of departure set forth in the Limited Church Closure Agreement.

A 2/3 majority vote of all professing members of the local church who are present and in good standing is necessary to approve the proposed Limited Church Closure Agreement.

3. The local church shall have until **Friday, January 31, 2025** to conduct a Church Conference vote on the Limited Church Closure Agreement. Failure to have a Church Conference vote on the Limited Church Closure Agreement by Midnight on this date will disqualify the local church from having its Closure Resolution brought to the Annual Conference for a vote.

- v. If a 2/3 majority vote of the local church's professing members in good standing present at the church conference approve the LCC Agreement:
 - 1. The local church shall have until **Friday, March 14, 2025** to provide all Closure Documents as provided for herein; failure to have all Closure Documents to the District Office by 5:00 p.m. on this date will disqualify the local church from having its Closure Resolution brought to the Annual Conference for a vote.
 - 2. The local church shall have until **Monday, March 31, 2025** to provide all Closure Fees as provided for herein; failure to have all Closure Fees to the District Office by 5:00 p.m. on this date will disqualify the local church from having its Closure Resolution brought to the Annual Conference for a vote.
 - 3. The District Superintendent shall draft a Resolution to close the church under BOD ¶2549.2 which incorporates the terms of the approved LCC Agreement. Written consent to the Resolution shall first be given by the Board of Church Location and Building before coming to the Bishop and a majority of District Superintendents for approval.

- vi. At the next meeting of the Holston Annual Conference, the Annual Conference will vote whether to approve the Resolution granting closure to the local church.

- vii. Upon approval of the referenced Resolution by the Holston Annual Conference, the Holston Conference Board of Trustees shall make the appropriate Deeds of Conveyance back to the local church available at the District Office.

-PROCESS COMPLETE-

IMPORTANT DATES

August 1 – November 1, 2024

- The ‘Registry’ officially opens on **August 1, 2024**
- Local Churches may request a ‘Registry Form’ from the District Office
- The ‘Registry’ officially closes on **November 1, 2024**. All properly completed Registry Forms must be received by the District Office by 5:00 p.m. on November 1, 2024.

January 31, 2025 –

Deadline for local Church Conference to conduct votes on the Limited Church Closure Agreement. Any church that has not completed a Church Conference vote by midnight January 31, 2025 will not be allowed to close under these terms.

March 14, 2025 - All church Closure Documents are received by the District Office. Failure to provide all Closure Documents to the District Office by 5:00 p.m. on Friday March 14, 2025 will result in a local church being disqualified for Closure.

March 31, 2025 - All church Closure Fees are received by the District Office. Failure to provide all Closure Fees to the Conference by 5:00 p.m. on Friday March 31, 2025 will result in a local church being disqualified for Closure.

April 2025 - Closure Resolutions will be presented to the Appointive Cabinet for approval.

Late April/Early May, 2025 – A Special Session of Annual Conference is convened to consider approval of eligible local church closures.

APPENDIX A

CLOSURE DOCUMENTS

Due by March 14, 2025

1. Evidence that the local church has created a new corporate entity to conduct ministry
2. Corporate and/or financial documents reflecting the total assets and indebtedness of the local church
3. A Quitclaim Deed (TN) or Deed of Release (VA) provided by the local church drafted to convey all its real property from Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church, Inc. to the new corporate entity of the local church
4. Other documents reflected in the LCC Agreement relating to insurance and other obligations of the local church.

APPENDIX B

CLOSURE COSTS

Due by March 31, 2025

1. Tithes to Holston Annual Conference covering the 12 months prior year [as of the date the Holston Conference Board of Trustees submits the proposed LCC Agreement] + additional 12 months.
 - a. The Tithe will be based upon 2023 tithe calculations;
 - b. The District Superintendent may calculate additional apportionments when justified due to a closing church's history of non-payments;
2. All District Apportionments due – calculated in the same manner as the Conference Tithes above;
3. Administrative & Legal expense surcharge \$2,750 to help offset Conference expenses in administering the Limited Church Closure process
4. Payment to cover salary and benefits for the remainder of the Conference year of any appointed Pastor in the local church who chooses to remain in the UMC;
5. Assessment value of church presence as described in §2.c.iii.d of the LCC Process and in view of the CGT Evaluation Report; (this is a case-by-case analysis).
6. The local church's portion of the Unfunded pension liability;
7. Other reasonable Costs as set forth in the LCC Agreement

The total fees for church closure shall be calculated as of the date the Holston Conference Board of Trustees submits the LCC Agreement to the DS for consent. The amount stated in the Agreement shall be fixed as of that date notwithstanding possible future changes – positively or negatively – in the unfunded pension liability amount.

REGISTRY FORM

Holston Annual Conference Limited Church Closure Process for 2024

This will confirm that the Church Council of _____
United Methodist Church, acting on behalf of its congregation, has approved a motion for the church to enter into a process to explore whether to sever its relationship with The United Methodist Church for reasons relating to the change of language on human sexuality in the United Methodist Book of Discipline, and in compliance with the terms set forth in the Limited Church Closure Process provided by Holston Annual Conference.

The referenced decision of the Church Council took place on the ____ day of _____, 2024.

Chair of the Church Council/Administrative Board

The following persons attest that there is a consensus of the local church congregation desiring to initiate a process to explore whether to sever its relationship with The United Methodist Church for reasons relating to the change of language on human sexuality in the United Methodist Book of Discipline:

Church Lay Leader

Date

Chair of the Church Board of Trustees

Date

Appointed or Assigned Pastor

(If the church has multiple appointed pastors, signed by the Senior Pastor)

Date

Chair of the Church Council

Date

- *All signatures are required on the Registry Form that attests that there is a consensus from the congregation that it wishes to explore this process; (the signature is not a declaration of the individual that he /she necessarily personally wishes to disassociate.)*
- *A Registry Form that does not contain the signatures of all the parties will be rejected unless it is accompanied by a written explanation (below) from the signatory explaining why he or she did not sign the Registry form. The written explanation will be considered by the District Superintendent in deciding whether or not to accept the church on the Registry.*

Explanation provided by anyone not signing the Registry Form (if applicable):

This Registry Form must be delivered to your District Office accompanied by:

_____ A copy of the **Deed(s)** to all real property titled in the name of the local church;

_____ A copy of a **Title Opinion** for all property titled in the name of the local church;

_____ A non-refundable Registry **Administrative Fee** of One Hundred Dollars, (\$100)

_____ A Pastor's Intent Form

The Registry period opens on **August 1, 2024** and closes on **November 1, 2024**. Any church that is not on the official Registry by 5:00 p.m. on November 1, 2024 shall not be eligible to participate in this Limited Church Closure process.

PASTOR'S DECLARATION FORM

Holston Annual Conference Limited Church Closure Process for 2024

The assigned or appointed pastor of a local church that has sought to enter into the Limited Church Closure process must complete this Form and initial his or her decision on the appropriate line below.

Pastor Name: _____

Church: _____

Church Mailing Address: _____

District: _____

Please initial on the appropriate line:

_____ I intend to remain in the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church and I would like to receive an appointment for the upcoming appointment year.

_____ I intend to leave The United Methodist Church and therefore do not request an appointment for the upcoming appointment year.

Pastor's Signature

This the _____ day of _____, 2024.