

2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church

Paragraph 2544

¶ 2544. *Planning and Financing Requirements for Local Church Buildings*

If any local church desires to:

- a) build a new church, a new educational building, or a new parsonage;
- b) purchase a church, educational building, or parsonage; or
- c) remodel an existing church, an existing educational building, or an existing parsonage where the cost of the remodeling will exceed 25 percent of the value of the existing structure or require mortgage financing, then the local church shall first establish a study committee to:
 - (1) analyze the needs of the church and community;
 - (2) project the potential membership with average attendance;
 - (3) write up the church's program of ministry (¶¶ 201-204); and
 - (4) develop an accessibility plan including chancel areas.

The information and findings obtained by the study committee shall:

- (a) form the basis of a report to be presented to the charge conference (¶ 2544.3);
- (b) be used by the building committee (¶ 2544.4); and
- (c) become a part of the report to the district board of church location and building (¶¶ 2544.5, 2521.1).

1. After the study committee finishes its work, the local church shall secure the written consent of the pastor and the district superintendent to the building project, purchase proposal, or remodeling project.

2. In the case of a building project or purchase proposal, the local church shall secure the approval of the proposed site by the district board of church location and building as provided in the Discipline (¶ 2520.1).

3. The charge conference of the local church shall authorize the building project, purchase proposal, or remodeling project at a regular or called meeting. Notice of the meeting and the proposed action shall have been given for not less than ten days prior thereto from the pulpit of the church, and in its weekly bulletin, newsletter or electronic notice or other means if required or permitted by local law.

- a) After approving a building project or a remodeling project, the charge conference shall elect a building committee of not fewer than three members of the local church to serve in the development of the project as hereinafter set forth; provided that the charge conference may commit to its board of trustees the duties of the building committee.
- b) After approving a purchase proposal, the charge conference shall be deemed to have authorized and directed the board of trustees to proceed with the purchase. In the case of the purchase of a parsonage, the board of trustees shall either:
 - (1) purchase a parsonage that has on the ground-floor level:
 - (a) one room that can be used as a bedroom by a person with a disability;
 - (b) one fully accessible bathroom; and
 - (c) fully accessible laundry facilities; or
 - (2) purchase a parsonage without the accessible features for persons with disabilities specified above and remodel it within one year's time, so that it does have those features.

4. The building committee shall:

- a) use the information and findings of the study committee and any other relevant information to estimate carefully the building facilities needed, as the case may be, to house the church's program of worship, education, and fellowship or to provide for the present and future pastors and their families;
- b) ascertain the cost of any property to be purchased; and
- c) develop preliminary architectural plans that:
 - (1) comply with local building, fire, and accessibility codes;
 - (2) clearly outline the location on the site of all proposed present and future construction; and
 - (3) provide adequate facilities for parking, entrance, seating, rest rooms, and accessibility for persons with disabilities, but providing for such adequate facilities shall not apply in the case of a minor remodeling project;

- d) provide on the ground-floor level of a newly constructed parsonage:
 - (1) one room that can be used as a bedroom by a person with a disability;
 - (2) a fully accessible bathroom; and
 - (3) fully accessible laundry facilities;
- e) secure an estimate of the cost of the proposed construction;
- f) develop a financial plan for defraying the total cost, including an estimate of the amount the membership can contribute in cash and pledges and the amount the local church can borrow if necessary.

5. The building committee shall submit to the district board of church location and building for its consideration and preliminary approval:

- a) a statement of the need for the proposed facilities;
- b) the preliminary architectural plans, including accessibility plans;
- c) the preliminary cost estimate; and
- d) the preliminary financial plan.

6. After preliminary approval by the district board of church location and building, the pastor, with the written consent of the district superintendent, shall call a church conference, giving not less than ten days' notice (except as local laws may otherwise provide) of the meeting and the proposed action from the pulpit or in the weekly bulletin.

At the church conference, the building committee shall present:

- a) the preliminary architectural plans;
- b) the preliminary cost estimate;
- c) the preliminary financial plan; and
- d) the building committee's recommendation.

A majority vote of the membership present and voting at the church conference shall be required to approve the preliminary architectural plans, cost estimate, and financial plan and the building committee's recommendation.

7. After approval by the church conference, the building committee shall develop detailed plans and specifications and secure a reliable and detailed estimate of cost, which shall be presented for approval to the charge conference and to the district board of church location and building.

8. After approval by the charge conference and district board of church location and building, the building committee may begin the building project or remodeling project. Written documentation substantiating the approvals of the charge conference and the district board of church location and building shall be lodged with the district superintendent and the secretary of the charge conference.

9. In metropolitan areas, the building committee shall ensure that adequate steps are taken to obtain the services of minority (nonwhite) and female skilled persons in the construction in proportion to the racial and ethnic balance in the area. In non-metropolitan areas, the building committee shall ensure that racial and ethnic persons are employed in the construction where available and in relation to the available workforce.

10. The local church shall acquire a fee simple title to the lot or lots on which any building is to be erected. The deed or conveyance shall be executed as provided in this chapter. It is recommended that contracts on property purchased by a local church be contingent upon the securing of a guaranteed title, and the property's meeting of basic environmental requirements of lending institutions and of local and state laws.

11. If a loan is needed, the local church shall comply with the provisions of ¶ 2540 or ¶ 2541.

12. The local church shall not enter into a building contract or, if using a plan for volunteer labor, incur obligations for materials until it has cash on hand, pledges payable during the construction period, and (if needed) a loan or written commitment therefor that will assure prompt payment of all contractual obligations and other accounts when due.

13. Neither the trustees nor any other members of a local church shall be required to guarantee personally any loan made to the church by any board created by or under the authority of the General Conference.

14. It is recommended that a local church not enter into a binding building contract without the contractor being properly bonded or furnishing other forms of security, such as an irrevocable letter of credit approved by the conference, district, or local church attorney.