

https://www.mississippi-umc.org/2549ClosureProcess?fbclid=IwAR0g3590qOzhNprL2NaaJuqwJi4QjBGV3_ep69wyxEfEdr_bgGUjE_dVzU-Q

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This is not a fair and forthright process from the MS annual conference. This process and the deadlines were released YESTERDAY. The deadline to enter the closure process to be able to leave for 2024 or 2025 is January 31st of THIS year. (Less than a month away).

The early deadline is because MS conference trustees cannot guarantee that the extended closure process they created would pass judicial muster if a church entered it after General Conference of 2024. Therefore, they have no other option than to have churches enter and have a church wide vote by March 15th of 2024.

This leaves churches less than two months to make these decisions. The timeline is hugely problematic because of the communication coming from the annual conference over the last year. Last year, when the conference was challenged on this very possibility (that the trustees did not have the power to extend the 'disaffiliation by another name' process into 2025) they (Conference Treasurer, David Stotts) continued to insist that 1) they did have the authority to enact this plan and 2) to disaffiliate before 2024 was foolishly rushing a decision. Now, the churches who listened and trusted the MS annual conference (and thought they would have another year to make this decision) have less than 30 days to enter the process.

Obviously the conference trustees/admin didn't realize this problem and make this timeline/process in the last month. They have known this for a while. The conference did not release the details of the extended closure process until after churches opportunity to disaffiliate was closed (Dec 31,2023). This is significant because MS had one of the last called conferences to vote on disaffiliations (Dec 9). Had this process been released in the Fall, in all likelihood many more churches would have opted to disaffiliate.

There are churches who have voted to not even discuss the possibility of leaving until after General Conference 2024, because, they are under the false impression they have another year and half to make this decision. They will be stuck no matter what happens.

So no, this is not something for which the MS annual conference and Bishop Lewis should be commended.