Insert a new paragraph 2556 as follows and renumber any succeeding paragraphs.

¶ 2556 – *Pathways to New Denominations of United Methodism*

1. *Preamble* – The 2019 special General Conference of the United Methodist Church highlighted the depth of the irreconcilable differences present in The United Methodist Church. Rather than continuing the quarrel over homosexuality at the 2020 General Conference, a group of Progressives, Centrists, and Traditionalists present these proposals as a possible pathway to amicable separation in The United Methodist Church.

We envision a new future for the people of The United Methodist Church to avoid further harm to one another, to United Methodists around the world, to the church universal, and to those with whom we strive to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We seek to move away from the caustic atmosphere that has often marked conversation in The United Methodist Church into a new season where we bless one another as we send each other into our respective mission fields to multiply our witness for Christ.

We envision an amicable separation in The United Methodist Church that would provide a pathway to new denominations of the United Methodist movement so we can all make new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. These new denominations, though separate, will continue the rich heritage of the Methodist movement while being free to share their respective witnesses for Christ unhindered by those with whom they have been in conflict. We will release one another to joyful obedience to Christ’s call on our lives.
2. New Denominations – The United Methodist Church hereby creates a pathway for the development of new denominations of United Methodism as set forth below. The United Methodist Church shall continue as a convention or association of churches, as a successor, for the constituent units that realign by choice or default with the Centrist UMC. (Names used in this paragraph are placeholders and descriptive; each new denomination would choose its own name and may use “United Methodist Church” with an appropriate modifier if they so choose.)

a. The Traditionalist UMC shall be a global denomination that will maintain the current stance of the Discipline regarding the practice of homosexuality. It would emphasize unity around doctrine, mission, and standards, leaner denominational structure, greater local flexibility, and accountable discipleship.

b. The Centrist UMC shall be a global denomination that will remove from the Discipline the “incompatibility” language and prohibitions against same-sex weddings, ordinations, and appointments. Centrist Annual Conferences and local congregations would make their own decisions regarding the ordination and appointment of homosexual persons and performing same-sex weddings in their conferences and congregations. It would practice faith with a generous spirit, emphasizing greater local flexibility within a deep commitment to connectionalism, social justice, and missional engagement that transforms the world for Jesus Christ.

c. A Progressive Denomination may be formed as a separate denomination under 2.d that includes church-wide protection against discrimination based on race, color, gender, national origin, ability, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or economic condition and that practices full itinerancy of LGBTQIA+ pastors and same-sex weddings in all their churches.
d. **Other Denominations** may be formed by a group of 50 or more local churches or by one or more annual conferences. It shall be the responsibility of the leaders of any group of churches or an annual conference desiring to form another denomination to develop and promote the vision of that denomination.

3. **Name and Logo** – Each denomination forming under this paragraph shall be permitted, but not be required, to continue to use the name “The United Methodist Church” with an appropriate modifier to distinguish itself from other denominations formed hereunder, and to protect the intellectual property of The United Methodist Church and its successors. Each denomination forming under this paragraph shall be permitted, but not be required, to use the cross and flame logo with modifications to distinguish itself from other denominations formed hereunder. The General Council on Finance and Administration shall have the continued responsibility to administer the name “The United Methodist Church” and the trademarks of The United Methodist Church. To effectuate this intent, prevent confusion and protect the intellectual property, the General Council on Finance and Administration shall ensure that the names chosen by the new denominations do not conflict with another denomination’s name, and that logo modifications are sufficient to distinguish each logo from another.

4. **Default Alignment** – Unless otherwise specified herein, if a central or annual conference does not vote on alignment by the date specified, then that conference shall align by default with the Centrist UMC.

5. **Formation in the United States** – The following shall be the process for churches in the U.S. aligning with the new denominations.

   a. **Annual Conferences** – Annual conferences may by simple majority vote of those members present and voting at a regular or called session choose to align with the Traditionalist
UMC, the Centrist UMC, or form or align with another denomination formed under this paragraph. The annual conference shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor or may do so through its normal processes. The annual conference may also call a special session upon motion from the floor. When an annual conference considers more than two options, with none receiving the required majority vote, the annual conference shall hold a run-off vote of the two options receiving the most votes, so that one of them receives a majority.

i. If the annual conference does not vote on alignment by January 1, 2021, it shall by default align with the Centrist UMC for the purpose of representation to the inaugural General Conferences of the new denominations. Annual conferences may choose a different alignment until at least December 31, 2028, under the provisions of this paragraph.

ii. Pension Matters – Generally, annual conferences shall continue to be responsible for pension liabilities under the Clergy Retirement Security Program, which is reflected in ¶ 1504.1, as plan sponsors. If the annual conference agrees to continue to be legally responsible for such obligations, it shall not be required to make any payment of unfunded liabilities prior to alignment. The General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits shall manage pension obligations pursuant to other paragraphs of the Discipline that address pension matters. In addition, for future clergy benefits, annual conferences aligning with the Centrist UMC shall continue as plan sponsors of the Clergy Retirement Security Program or whatever mandatory retirement plan is approved by the 2020 General Conference. For future clergy benefits, annual conferences that align with the Traditionalist UMC or other denominations formed under this paragraph may sponsor retirement plans offered by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits designed to fit their polity and capacity.
iii. Lay Equalizing Members – For the purposes of this decision, all lay equalizing members shall be elected, as required by ¶ 32, and not appointed. The number of lay equalizing members elected by or from any one charge shall not exceed the number of regular lay members elected by that charge. The formula used by the annual conference in the election of lay equalizing members shall be made public prior to the annual conference session at which the decision regarding alignment is made.

iv. If an annual conference takes a vote on alignment, it shall not take a subsequent vote to consider changing its alignment until at least 42 months have passed since the previous vote.

b. Local Churches -- Local churches in the U.S. that disagree with their annual conference’s alignment may by simple majority vote of those professing members present and voting at a regular or called charge or church conference choose to align with a denomination not chosen by their annual conference or join with 50 or more other local churches in forming another denomination of United Methodism. Churches not taking a vote shall by default remain in their annual conference under whatever alignment the conference has chosen. Local churches withdrawing to become independent shall use the process established by ¶ 2553, which shall include the prepayment of its share of unfunded pension liabilities determined under ¶ 1504.23.

i. When a local church considers more than two options, with none receiving the required majority vote, the church shall hold a run-off vote of the two options receiving the most votes, so that one of them receives a majority.

ii. Local churches desiring to make an immediate decision on aligning with a new denomination may do so on or after July 1, 2020. Local churches may also make such a decision after their annual conference makes its decision. In order to be represented at the inaugural General Conferences of the new denominations, local churches must vote prior to July 1, 2021.
Churches may choose a different alignment until at least December 31, 2028, under the provisions of this paragraph.

iii. Regardless of other provisions of the Discipline that are not in the Constitution, the approval of the annual conference shall not be required for any church choosing to withdraw from the annual conference in order to align with a different denomination formed under this paragraph, nor shall the annual conference have the authority to hinder churches desiring to choose such a different denomination, as long as the conditions for withdrawal specified in this paragraph are fulfilled.

iv. Property – The local church shall retain all its property, assets, and liabilities (other than pension liability) in the denomination with which it aligns, whether by choice or default. The trust clause (¶ 2501) shall be suspended for purposes of these realignments, but shall continue to apply to local churches aligning by choice or default with the Centrist UMC. Application of any analogous clause to local churches aligning with the Traditionalist UMC or other denomination will depend upon the doctrine and church laws adopted by the denomination with which the church aligns.

v. Pension Liabilities – The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits will reassign pension liabilities related to realigning local churches, and clergy who have served in them, pursuant to the terms of other paragraphs in The Book of Discipline addressing pension obligations for realigning local churches and annual conferences (e.g., ¶ 2555), or through an administrative process by which the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits is able to reassign liabilities and assets based on local church and clergy transfers among continuing plan sponsors.
vi. If a local church takes a vote on alignment, it shall not take a subsequent vote to consider changing its alignment until at least 36 months have passed since the previous vote.

6. Formation Outside the United States – The following shall be the process for churches in the central conferences aligning with the new denominations.

a. Central Conferences – Notwithstanding the terms of ¶ 572 or other provisions of the Discipline not in the Constitution, central conferences may by simple majority vote of those members present and voting at a regular or called session choose to align with the Traditionalist UMC, the Centrist UMC, or form or align with another denomination formed under this paragraph. The central conference shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor or may do so through its normal processes. The central conference may also call a special session upon motion from the floor. When a central conference considers more than two options, with none receiving the required majority vote, the central conference shall hold a run-off vote of the two options receiving the most votes, so that one of them receives a majority.

If the central conference does not vote on alignment by March 31, 2021, it shall by default align with the Traditionalist UMC for the purpose of representation to the inaugural General Conferences of the new denominations. Central conferences may choose a different alignment until at least December 31, 2028, under the provisions of this paragraph.

b. Annual Conferences – Notwithstanding the terms of ¶ 572 or other provisions of the Discipline not in the Constitution, annual conferences that disagree with the decision of their central conference may by simple majority vote of those members present and voting at a regular or called session choose to form or align with a different denomination formed under this paragraph than that chosen by their central conference. The annual conference shall consider this decision upon motion from the floor or may do so through its normal processes. The annual
conference may also call a special session upon motion from the floor. When an annual conference considers more than two options, with none receiving the required majority vote, the annual conference shall hold a run-off vote of the two options receiving the most votes, so that one of them receives a majority.

i. If the annual conference does not vote on alignment by June 30, 2021, it shall by default align with the denomination or option chosen by its central conference for the purpose of representation to the inaugural General Conferences of the new denominations. Annual conferences may choose a different alignment until at least December 31, 2028, under the provisions of this paragraph.

ii. **Lay Equalizing Members** – For the purposes of this decision, all lay equalizing members shall be elected, as required by ¶ 32, and not appointed. The number of lay equalizing members elected by or from any one charge shall not exceed the number of regular lay members elected by that charge. The formula used by the annual conference in the election of lay equalizing members shall be made public prior to the annual conference session at which the decision regarding alignment is made.

iii. If an annual conference takes a vote on alignment, it shall not take a subsequent vote to consider changing its alignment until at least 42 months have passed since the previous vote.

iv. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits is directed and authorized to amend the Global Episcopal Pension Plan as necessary to account for the changes in alignment of central conferences and central conference bishops.

c. **Local Churches** -- Local churches in the central conferences that disagree with their annual conference’s alignment may by simple majority vote of those professing members present and voting at a regular or called charge or church conference choose to align with a
denomination not chosen by their annual conference or join with 50 or more other local churches in forming another denomination of United Methodism. Churches not taking a vote shall by default remain in their annual conference under whatever alignment the conference has chosen. Local churches withdrawing to become independent shall use the process established by ¶ 2553, which includes prepayment of certain liabilities, to the extent such is applicable outside of the U.S.

i. When a local church considers more than two options, with none receiving the required majority vote, the church shall hold a run-off vote of the two options receiving the most votes, so that one of them receives a majority.

ii. Regardless of other provisions of the Discipline that are not in the Constitution, the approval of the annual conference shall not be required for any church choosing to withdraw from the annual conference in order to align with a different denomination formed under this paragraph, nor shall the annual conference have the authority to hinder churches desiring to choose such a different denomination, as long as the conditions for withdrawal specified in this paragraph are fulfilled.

iii. Local churches desiring to make an immediate decision on aligning with a new denomination under this paragraph may do so on or after July 1, 2020. Local churches may also make such a decision after their annual conference makes its decision. In order to be represented at the inaugural General Conferences of the new denominations, local churches must vote prior to September 1, 2021. Churches may choose a different alignment until at least December 31, 2028, under the provisions of this paragraph.

iv. Property – The local church shall retain all its property, assets, and liabilities in the denomination with which it aligns, whether by choice or default. The trust clause (¶ 2501) shall
be suspended for purposes of these realignments, but shall continue to apply to local churches aligning by choice or default with the Centrist UMC, but only to the extent it applies under *The Book of Discipline* and local law. Application of any analogous clause to local churches aligning with the Traditionalist UMC or other denomination will depend upon the doctrine and church laws adopted by the denomination with which the local church aligns, and the unique laws of the countries and secular jurisdictions in which the local churches, annual conferences, and central conferences are located.

v. If a local church takes a vote on alignment, it shall not take a subsequent vote to consider changing its alignment until at least 36 months have passed since the previous vote.

7. *Interim Implementation* – Any conference or local church taking a vote on alignment shall specify as part of that action the date on which it will become effective. When central conferences, annual conferences, and local churches vote to align with a denomination, they may begin to function under the requirements and structure of that denomination on or after August 1, 2020, on an interim basis.

a. Annual conferences, local churches, and clergy choosing to align with a denomination other than the Traditionalist UMC shall be exempt during the interim period, following the adjournment of General Conference 2020 to the start of the new denominations, from the provisions in the *Discipline* prohibiting same-sex weddings and the ordination, appointment, or consecration of self-avowed practicing homosexuals.

b. The interim Traditionalist UMC shall function under the umbrella and authority of the leadership group that develops and promotes its vision.

c. The interim Centrist UMC shall function, as a successor to The United Methodist Church for the constituent units that realign either by choice or default with the Centrist UMC,
under the terms of The United Methodist Book of Discipline and its existing structures, except as provided under subparagraph 12, below, and except that it would be explicitly exempt from all restrictions related to self-avowed practicing homosexuals or same-sex weddings. Clergy serving in such churches or in such annual conferences would also be exempt. All complaints, administrative or judicial processes, or disciplinary actions related to these restrictions shall be suspended in the interim Centrist UMC, beginning on the date on which conferences, local churches, or clergy designate their alignment with it until January 1, 2022, the date on which the Centrist UMC becomes fully operational.

**d.** Any other denomination formed under this paragraph shall function during the interim under the umbrella and authority of the leadership group that develops and promotes its vision (¶ 2556.2).

**e.** Apportionments shall be paid to the new denominations by congregations and conferences aligning with them in the interim. General church apportionments shall continue to be paid by all denominations through December 31, 2020. The new interim denominations shall assume responsibility for connectional expenses within each denomination as of January 1, 2021.

**8. Clergy Alignment** – Clergy shall by default align with the denomination chosen by their annual conference. Clergy who wish to align with a different denomination than that chosen by their annual conference shall notify their bishop and the leadership of the denomination with which they desire to align. In order to be represented at the inaugural General Conferences of the new denominations, clergy must make such notification prior to July 1, 2021. Clergy may subsequently change denominations based on the processes adopted by their desired denomination.
a. Appointments – If the clergy person’s current local church appointment decides to align with the same denomination as the clergy person, it is recommended that appointment be continued where possible until at least January 1, 2022, the final effective date of the new denominations. Thereafter, the clergy person’s appointment shall be determined under the process adopted by the new denominations.

If the clergy person’s current local church appointment does not align with the same denomination as the clergy person, the clergy person’s current bishop and the leadership of the denominations involved shall consult regarding a possible appointment. With the approval of the leadership of the church’s chosen denomination and the clergy person’s chosen denomination, a transitional appointment may be set, either in the current local church or another outside the clergy person’s chosen denomination. When a clergy person serves a transitional appointment outside his or her chosen denomination, the clergy person shall be required to abide by and satisfy the standards and requirements of the denomination in which he or she is appointed to serve. Conversations shall continue among the relevant leaders with the aim of finding an appointment for the clergy person within their chosen denomination in order to ensure security of appointment where such is required.

b. Pensions -- Generally, pension benefits earned by clergy persons in The United Methodist Church for service in the United States shall remain intact through these realignments, reassigned by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits to annual conferences, or other organizations, in whatever denomination they affiliate with, subject, however, to the terms of the Clergy Retirement Security Program and other paragraphs of The Book of Discipline under which General Conference has directed and authorized for the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to administer pension matters. In the event annual conferences or episcopal areas
in the central conferences that are currently covered by the same pension plan should align with multiple United Methodist denominations, the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall assist these conferences or episcopal areas in allocating pension assets and liabilities based on their new alignments.

c. Candidates – It is recommended that candidates who are in process toward licensing, commissioning, or ordination be grandfathered into that point in the process in whichever denomination they want to align with, so that they would not have to repeat requirements for licensing or ordination. Boards of ordained ministry shall promptly forward the paperwork and files of candidates to the proper body in the new denomination when requested in writing by the candidate.

9. Alignment of Bishops – Active and retired bishops shall by default align with the Centrist UMC. Bishops who wish to align with a different denomination shall notify the president of the Council of Bishops and the leadership of the denomination with which they desire to align prior to July 1, 2021. Service as active bishops in each of the new denominations shall depend upon the provisions adopted by that denomination.

10. Election of Bishops in 2020 -- Mandatory retirement provisions for all current active bishops shall be suspended until September 1, 2022. Bishops desiring to retire may do so, but are not required to do so. Retired bishops shall be assigned by the Council of Bishops in accordance with ¶ 49 to provide residential and presidential leadership for annual conferences in the Centrist UMC where needed on an interim basis.

Jurisdictional conferences may choose not to elect bishops in 2020, reconvening for election of bishops in 2021 or 2022 as part of the Centrist UMC, governed by the provisions
established at the inaugural special General Conference for this denomination. This allows a proper match of the number of bishops with the need under the new conditions.

Central conferences may elect bishops in 2020-21 as needed and determined by the central conferences, based on the number of bishops allocated to each central conference by the 2020 General Conference.

Bishops in the other denominations, if those denominations choose to have bishops or an episcopacy, will be elected and assigned according to the provisions of those denominations.

11. Institutional Affiliation – a. Institutions or property owned or controlled by, associated with, or affiliated with an annual conference shall continue to be so owned, controlled by, or associated or affiliated with that annual conference in the denomination chosen by it, unless the institution is authorized to and changes its affiliation or acts to become independent according to its own bylaws.

   b. Institutions or property owned or controlled by or associated or affiliated with a jurisdiction or central conference shall belong to the denomination chosen by the majority of annual conferences in that jurisdiction or central conference, unless the institution is authorized to and changes its affiliation or acts to become independent according to its own bylaws.

12 General Church Agencies – a. Notwithstanding other paragraphs in The Book of Discipline, the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits (¶ 1501 et seq.), the United Methodist Committee on Relief (¶ 1315 et seq.), United Methodist Women, Inc. (¶ 1901 et seq.), the General Commission on United Methodist Men (¶ 2301 et seq.), and the United Methodist Publishing House (¶ 1601 et seq.) shall be authorized to take actions, to the extent necessary, to exist as nonprofit corporations in the state of their domicile, and as tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organizations with corporate ownership of all their assets and liabilities, notwithstanding ¶ 2501.
Each of these organizations shall be authorized and empowered to amend their bylaws to establish and form their own self-perpetuating boards of directors, no longer subject to paragraphs of The Book of Discipline that govern agency boards. They shall continue, at the outset, to carry out their mission as originally established by the General Conference, within their corporate tax-exempt purpose. These agencies shall be considered by the General Conference to be the legal successors of the agencies as they existed within The United Methodist Church, and it is the belief of The United Methodist Church that these organizations have associational, historical, and ecclesiastical ties with each other and with the historical United Methodist Church and its predecessors. Each organization is authorized to serve any denomination formed under this paragraph that desires to receive services from it. Each shall be encouraged to maintain ecclesiastical ties to all denominations formed hereunder, e.g., through establishing references to each in the governing documents of each new denomination, electing board directors who are professing members of each denomination, and maintaining other missional ties, to be considered an integrated auxiliary of the denominations it serves. Each shall remain accountable to the General Conference, but only for the services provided to the Centrist UMC, and shall be accountable to the highest legislative conference of other new denominations only for the services provided to each. The terms of the paragraphs of The Book of Discipline governing these agencies, under each’s respective section of the Discipline, and the ¶ 700s shall be amended to conform to and be in harmony with the terms of this paragraph.

b. The General Commission on Archives and History shall be renamed “The Institute on United Methodist Archives and History,” and shall be housed in a United Methodist institution (e.g., a seminary) as negotiated by the commission’s board and the institution, with the approval of the Council of Bishops. The commission shall retain all its assets and liabilities and shall
receive financial support through modest apportionment funding from all denominations formed under this paragraph, distributed proportionally among them.

c. All other general church boards and agencies shall continue in the Centrist UMC under the current Book of Discipline, subject to further possible reforms and restructuring by that new denomination. They shall be financially supported by, and accountable to, the Centrist UMC, but they may also contract to offer their services to other denominations formed under this paragraph.

d. Allocation of Assets – The General Conference hereby establishes the process for allocating general church assets among the denominations formed under this paragraph to fund the transition to new denominations and to be devoted to the missional purposes of each denomination thereafter. *(NOTE: different groups could submit different proposals for how the assets would be allocated, with General Conference making the final decision on the process.)*

13. Central Conference Funding – The General Conference hereby establishes the goal of maintaining current levels of funding for central conference operations and ministry through the 2021-24 quadrennium, funded by all denominations formed under this paragraph. The General Council on Finance and Administration shall compile a list of apportionment funding for central conference operations and ministry under the 2017-20 budget and shall apportion that amount to the various denominations annually throughout the quadrennium, adjusting for fluctuations in membership as the alignment process continues. These central conference apportionments shall be listed separately, so that each local church may determine how much of its apportionment is going to this central conference apportionment. Apportionment support for central conference bishops shall also be listed separately, even if it passes through the Episcopal Fund. General Council on Finance and Administration shall administer the funds received and
distribute them pro-rata or in such other manner as has been the historical pattern. In addition, all denominations are encouraged to continue supporting Advance Special and other mission projects in the central conferences.

14. Continuing Relationship – All the denominations formed under this paragraph may participate as members of the World Methodist Council and the Pan-Methodist Commission. The continuing relationship between and among the various such denominations may be memorialized in a covenantal concordat, or other form of ecumenical agreement negotiated on a bilateral or multi-lateral basis following the fully effective date of each denomination (January 1, 2022, or later).

15. Inaugural General Conferences – The Centrist UMC shall hold a special General Conference as its inaugural General Conference during the fall of 2021. Other denominations formed under this paragraph are encouraged to hold an inaugural General Conference to be scheduled during the fall of 2021. Denominations that are not ready to form at that time may hold an inaugural General Conference at a later date, with a fully effective date for the denomination set by that General Conference.

a. The Centrist UMC shall hold a special called General Conference to discuss the formal removal of all prohibitions related to LGBTQ persons and further define its stance related to ministry with and inclusion of LGBTQ persons. That special General Conference would also consider restructuring the Centrist denomination in light of the annual conferences and local churches that are no longer part of the Centrist UMC. The annual conferences of the Centrist UMC, including those that may be reformed by the jurisdictions after annual conference realignments, will elect delegates to the special session in 2021, under the terms of The Book of
Discipline, particularly to replace delegates who have lost eligibility through no longer being members of a UMC annual conference or local church as a result of realignments.

b. The Traditionalist UMC and other denominations shall hold their inaugural General Conference to adopt governing documents that would govern the work of those denominations. Representation shall be elected under its and their associational rules or adopted doctrine, for example by those annual conferences choosing to affiliate with the denomination and also by groups of local churches and clergy that form in areas where their annual conference affiliates with another denomination.

c. The fully effective date of the new denominations shall be January 1, 2022, or a later date determined by each denomination.

16. Legal Succession – For the purposes of legal issues such as pensions and assets, all denominations forming under this paragraph shall be considered legal successors of The United Methodist Church as relates to the portions thereof that are associated with the new denominations or organizations that align or associate therewith. The Centrist UMC shall inherit the current Book of Discipline with such modifications as it chooses to make. Other denominations may borrow provisions and language from the Book of Discipline without such borrowing being considered an infringement of copyright. Furthermore, all denominations forming under this paragraph have associational, historical, and ecclesiastical ties with each other and with the historical United Methodist Church and its predecessors.

17. Severability – If one provision of this paragraph is found unconstitutional, any other provisions not dependent upon that provision shall be severable and implemented as passed by General Conference.
18. **Precedence and Effective Date** – All provisions of this paragraph shall take effect upon the adjournment of General Conference 2020. All provisions of this paragraph shall take precedence over any conflicting provisions in the *Book of Discipline* not in the Constitution.

Date:

Signature of the Petitioner:

Identification of the Petitioner:

Phone:

City, State, Province, Country:

E-mail Address: