



The United Methodist Church

VERMONT DISTRICT – NEW ENGLAND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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Senator Mullin, Chair

The Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs

IN RE: H565

As the District Superintendent for the Vermont District of the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church, I oversee all the United Methodist churches and those federated churches in the state that are part of the United Methodist denomination, a total of 112. Part of my oversight entails advising on matters related to property purchase and sale. My approval and that of the District Committee on Church Building and Location is needed for any property conveyance. It is in this capacity that I write this.

I worked closely with the White River United Methodist Church as they met and planned for what seemed to be a wonderful option for them in selling their building for a new, smaller building that would better meet their needs for mission and ministry in this time. I advised them on all things Methodist and we followed the Book of Discipline to the letter in order that this sale happen. It was quite a blow to find that the Vermont State Statutes had this obscure sub-chapter which singled out one denomination, requiring United Methodists to have a 2/3 majority. This had never been seen before by me or my Buildings and Location chairperson in all the real estate dealings that had been completed over the years. It had never come up.

We consulted several lawyers, including one who had attended several conferences for United Methodist chancellors. No one had ever heard of this and, frankly, they couldn't believe that something like this was even legal. They didn't think it could stand up in court but fighting it would be costly and time consuming. One attorney even consulted with a denominational lawyer who said that even though it seemed discriminatory, state law trumped the Book of Discipline.

This was very disheartening for the members of the White River Junction United Methodist Church and the developer who had who had worked so hard on this proposal. Two votes had been taken at duly warned Church Conferences where the motion to sell passed but not by a two thirds majority. The Title Insurance Company was not willing to insure the title with the law on the books and the project was scrapped.

The entire story was reported on several times in The Valley News and several other newspapers in Vermont and New Hampshire. I even heard it on the news on VPR one morning. This has caused undue stress on other United Methodist churches in the state who are working on building sales. They wonder whether the same thing could happen to them. Could longtime members who have not been involved in

the life of the church for years come and vote against a plan that those who are currently attending, supporting and working for the church to downsize to meet their needs show up to vote thus preventing a two thirds majority vote? I have suggested that they contact their legislators. Many churches want to get out from under old, inefficient buildings that are too big for them and often votes on building sales are unanimous but not in all cases.

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church states that a vote to sell church property needs to be passed by a majority of those present and voting at a properly warned meeting. It seems that according to the Vermont States, this is true for other denominations. A simple majority is all that is needed. I urge you to correct this in regards to United Methodists as soon as possible. I am currently working with several other churches on building sales and have asked them to hold off on voting for the time being until this has been rectified.

Thank you for considering this change. Please do not hesitate to call for more information if you need it.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brigid Farrell".

The Reverend Brigid Farrell, District Superintendent