



# Discernment/ Disaffiliation

February 15, 2024

February 18, 2024

# A message from the Discernment/ Disaffiliation Subcommittee



We recognize that the current times in the United Methodist Church are characterized by intense contention and difficulties. These challenges have caused significant divisions and tension within the denomination.

In response to these circumstances, we call for:

- 1. Patience, kindness, gentleness, and love:** Let us approach one another with understanding and compassion, recognizing that people may hold differing perspectives and experiences. It is crucial to engage in respectful dialogue and foster an environment of empathy, where our actions reflect the love of Christ.
- 2. Openness to divine guidance from the Holy Spirit:** As we navigate this discord, it is vital that we remain open to the Holy Spirit. Let us humbly seek God's will, individually and collectively, relying on spiritual discernment and guidance to guide us through these turbulent times.
- 3. Prayers for each other, the church, and our ministry:** In the face of discord, let us turn to prayer as a means of seeking solace, guidance, and unity. Through heartfelt intercession, we can lift up one another, our beloved church, and our collective mission, asking for divine intervention and wisdom.

# Timeline To Date

- Dec 21, 2022 – Email from DS identifying discernment process and timeline.
- January 12, 2023 – Church Council – discuss discernment, set up special meeting for February
- Feb 9, 2023 – Church Council Meeting to discuss discernment, voted not to pursue, establish information meeting on February 26, 2023
- November 12, 2023 – Conducted follow-on Informational meeting
  - Discussed need for additional sessions
- Dec 2023 – Discernment Education Committee formed
  - Two Education sessions planned
    - Session 1 -UMC Organization – Jan 2024
    - Session 2 – Discernment/Disaffiliation Process – Feb 2024
    - Follow-on sessions as needed

*The* **BOOK** *of*  
**DISCIPLINE**  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**2016**

## The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church

- The Book of Discipline is the guiding document of the United Methodist Church. It contains our church history, constitution, doctrinal standards, church laws, organizational structure, processes/procedures, and social principles.
- Originally established in 1784 and has been published every 4 years thereafter following the meeting of the General Conference.
- Changes were made at the special called General Conference in 2019 but the last printed edition is 2016.

# BOD Current Language:

- ¶ 4 Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church

Inclusiveness of the Church: The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.

# BOD Current Language: Social Principles

- THE NURTURING COMMUNITY ¶ 161 (G):

We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

# BOD Current Language: The Ministry of the Ordained

- Qualifications for Ordination: ¶ 304 (J)

Be accountable to The United Methodist Church, accept its Doctrinal Standards and Discipline and authority, accept the supervision of those appointed to this ministry, and be prepared to live in the covenant of its ordained ministers.

- Qualifications for Ordination: ¶ 304.3:

The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.

- Qualifications for Ordination: ¶ 341.6:

Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

# The 4 Issues in the Debate Over Disaffiliation

1. Human Sexuality – The Primary Question Driving the Debate
2. Adherence to the Book of Discipline
3. Connectional vs. Congregational Governance
4. Fear of Changes to Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules



# 1. Human Sexuality, the Most Pervasive Issue

The current position of the UMC on Human Sexuality can be summed up in six statements, all from the 2016 Book of Discipline, the last printed version:

- All people are of sacred worth. (§161G)
- All people deserve equal rights. (§162J)
- The practice of homosexuality is not compatible with Christian teachings. (§161, §162G, §304.3)
- United Methodist pastors cannot officiate same-sex weddings and local churches cannot offer such ceremonies. (§341.6)
- The UMC will not ordain self-avowed, practicing homosexuals. (§304.3)
- Church agencies will not fund “homosexual causes”. (pro- or anti-) (§613.19, §806.9)

# 2. Adherence to the Book of Discipline



Lack of adherence to and enforcement of the Book of Discipline by the Council of Bishops in matters of homosexual ordination and gay marriages define this issue

Gay ordination and same sex marriages within the UMC are not rampant as some groups contend, but they have occurred/are occurring

The elections of a gay minister, Rev. Karen Oliveto to Bishop by the Western Jurisdiction in 2016 is the poster child

- South Central Jurisdiction challenged the election
- Jurisdictional Council ruled the election violated the Book of Discipline but left her in good standing pending further review/due process
- Six years later, Oliveto still serves as Bishop of the Mountain Sky Episcopal area
- Here bio reads “Oliveto has the distinction of being the first openly lesbian bishop in the United Methodist Church”



# Book Of Discipline – In Trust

- Trust is defined in Chapter 6, ¶ 2501

2501. All properties of United Methodist local churches and other United Methodist agencies and institutions are held, *in trust*, for the benefit of the entire denomination, and ownership and usage of church property is subject to the *Discipline*...

...The United Methodist Church is organized as a connectional structure, and titles to all real and personal, tangible and intangible property held at jurisdictional, annual, or district conference levels, or by a local church or charge, or by an agency or institution of the Church, shall be held in trust for The United Methodist Church and subject to the provisions of its *Discipline*. Titles are not held by The United Methodist Church (see ¶ 807.1) or by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, but instead by the incorporated conferences, agencies, or organizations of the denomination, or in the case of unincorporated bodies of the denomination, by boards of trustees established for the purpose of holding and administering real and personal, tangible and intangible property...

# 4. Fear of Changes to Our Doctrinal Standard and General Rules



- Concerns over changing our fundamental beliefs as expressed in the Article of Religion, Confessions of Faith and General Rules exist.
- These doctrines have been constitutionally protected by restrictive rules requiring 2/3 vote of the General Conference plus supermajorities of votes of all annual conferences worldwide.
  - For the Articles on Religion and Confession, a  $\frac{3}{4}$  supermajority is required.
  - For the General Rules, a 2/3 supermajority is required.

It is unlikely that such a supermajority will be achieved.

# State of the United Methodist Church Today

	United States	SC Annual Conference
Total Churches (2019)	30,543	955
Disaffiliated - 2019	10	0
Disaffiliated - 2020	57	0
Disaffiliated - 2021	123	1
Disaffiliated - 2022	1,827	1
Disaffiliated - 2023	5,642	113
<b>Total Disaffiliated</b>	<b>7,659</b>	<b>115</b>
Remaining as of December 2023	22,884	840



Data from:  
[www.umnews.org](http://www.umnews.org)

# “A Faithful Step Forward”

- To ensure congregations are equipped to make decisions that enable them to best live into their disciple-making mission, South Carolina Conference leaders have adopted a process through which a local church can discern whether it will continue in ministry within The United Methodist Church or separate from the denomination.
- The Local Church Discernment Process is designed to help local churches determine whether they can function as a United Methodist church if they firmly believe that the denomination has not consistently upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality. It will provide an opportunity for church members to engage in dialogue, to allow every voice in the congregation an opportunity to be heard, and to discern the congregation’s sentiment regarding separation.

# Entering the Discernment Process

1. Church Council votes to enter process and designates a 30-day discernment period
2. Church Council requests and the District Superintendent sets a Church Conference Date
3. Church Council obtains a property appraisal and provides the Conference with value of real property and liquid assets
4. Annual Conference provides unfunded liability, unpaid direct bill and apportionments
5. All paperwork must be submitted to the SC Annual Conference no later than December 1st



# Disaffiliation Process

1. Church holds church-wide information sessions concerning separation and the finances involved
2. Church Conference must be held by March 1 requiring 2/3 professing members **present** to vote for disaffiliation
3. District Superintendent submits certification of local church vote
4. Local Church/Conference/New Entity enter into an agreement
5. Funds be placed in escrow by 5/29. Annual Conference votes to accept in June Session
6. Transfer of all property to the new entity prior to June 28
7. Local church closes June 28. Local church provides list of all remaining UMC members to SC Conference

# Discernment/Disaffiliation Timeline

- No sunset clause for SC Conference
- For 2025 SC Annual Conference consideration the following must be met:
  - Notify SC Conference and provide host of documents by 1 December 2024 to be considered for Annual Conference in 2025
  - Church votes to separate NLT 1 Mar 2025
    - Requires **2/3 majority** of all professing members **present** at the church conference
  - **Fully funded** escrow account completed NLT 31 May 2025

# Cost Estimate of Separation

- 10% Appraised value of church property (220,000 – 950,000)
- 10% of liquid assets (90,000)
- Remaining Apportionments for year (27,000)
- Additional year of apportionments (60,000)
- Unpaid salary and benefits due clergy appointed to church (50,000)
- Withdrawal liability for church's proportional share of unfunded pension obligations (15,000)
- Disposition of all debts, loans, leases, endowments, foundations, cemeteries – satisfied or transfer to new entity (200,000)
- Legal Fees (50,000)
- Rebranding (10,000)
- **All costs are estimates-** conference will provide final costs for separation during Discernment/Disaffiliation Process
- **All funds** required for disaffiliation need to be in escrow ready for disbursement by 31 May

Estimate between \$722,000 and \$1,442,000

# Other Points to Consider if Disaffiliation is Pursued

- Pastor
- Organization to affiliate with
- Church organization structure
- Access to UMC camps and facilities
- Training provided by conference is no longer available
- Certification for Lay Servant Ministers is no longer valid
- Connectional relationships change

# Final Thoughts

- Be Patient
- Be Prayerful



# Questions and Answers

# Resources

- Is The United Methodist Church Really...?: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-series-is-the-umc-really>
- BeUMC: <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/our-people/beumc>
- Committed to The UMC: <https://www.UMC.org/committed>
- UMC's Discipleship Ministries: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>
- Fresh Expressions, a subset of Discipleship Ministries: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions>
- Resource UMC: <https://www.resourceumc.org>
- That We May Be One: <https://twmbo.org/>
- Adam Hamilton: A Future with Hope: <https://vimeo.com/734455031>
- Beginning Again, A Guide for Remaining in the UMC: <https://www.umc.org/-/media/umc-media/2023/02/17/21/27/beginning-again-guide-v3.ashx?la=en>

Backup



# Human Sexuality | Primary Question Driving the Debate

**Whether or not the church should fully include and affirm LGBTQ+ individuals in all aspects of its life and ministry.**

*Question revolves around the understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity within the context of Christian faith and the interpretation of Scripture.*

🕒 **Traditionalists emphasize the preservation of the church's historical teachings**

*Maintain that certain sexual practices, particularly same-sex relationships, are incompatible with Christian teaching*

🕒 **Progressives advocate for full inclusion and affirmation of LGBTQ+ individuals**

*Seeking to remove barriers to their participation in ministry and marriage within the church*

# 2024 Apportionments

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Annual Pledge</u>	<u>Monthly Pledge</u>	<u>Receipts To Date</u>	<u>Receipts This Month</u>	<u>Pledge Remaining</u>
Apportioned Funds					
1110 Conference Benevolences	\$8,280.00	\$690.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,280.00
1115 Retiree Health Insurance/Grants	\$795.00	\$66.25	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$795.00
1120 District Superintendent Compensation	\$5,135.00	\$427.92	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,135.00
1125 Equitable Compensation	\$1,451.00	\$120.92	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,451.00
1130 District Administration	\$2,968.00	\$247.33	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,968.00
1135 Conference Administration	\$5,706.00	\$475.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$5,706.00
1140 Congregational Development	\$3,398.00	\$283.17	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,398.00
1145 Campus Ministry	\$2,384.00	\$198.67	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,384.00
1150 Senior College Scholarships	\$3,378.00	\$281.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,378.00
1155 Spartanburg Methodist College	\$1,939.00	\$161.58	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,939.00
1160 Methodist Homes Residents' Assistance	\$1,490.00	\$124.17	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,490.00
1165 Camps & Retreat Ministries	\$1,129.00	\$94.08	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,129.00
1310 World Service	\$7,351.00	\$612.58	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,351.00
1315 Episcopal Fund	\$2,177.00	\$181.42	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,177.00
1320 General Conference Administration	\$873.00	\$72.75	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$873.00
1325 Ministerial Education Fund	\$2,483.00	\$206.92	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,483.00
1330 Interdenominational Cooperation	\$194.00	\$16.17	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$194.00
1335 Black College Fund	\$990.00	\$82.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$990.00
1340 Africa University	\$222.00	\$18.50	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$222.00
1345 Jurisdiction Mission/Ministry	\$117.00	\$9.75	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$117.00
1540 District Pars./Ofc. - Marion	\$2,032.00	\$169.33	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,032.00
Totals:	\$54,492.00	\$4,541.01	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$54,492.00