

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is part of the Discernment Committee?

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What is Disaffiliation?

At the 2019 General Conference in St. Louis, the Book of Discipline was amended to allow congregations to leave the denomination with their property based on “reasons of conscience” related to the actions surrounding the decisions of that Conference.

What does this mean, “leave the denomination with their property”?

Usually, a congregation cannot leave the denomination and retain their property because of the “trust clause” which is a part of every UM congregation’s deed. The local church doesn’t actually own their own property that they paid for, but rather it is held “in trust” by the denomination. Normally if a church tries to leave the denomination, they lose their buildings and property. The 2019 amendment to the Book of Discipline allows a church to leave and retain their property. This amendment expires at the end of 2023.

Why is our Congregation considering disaffiliation?

Since the end of last year, our Discernment Committee has read countless articles (including [this one from Bishop Hayes](#)), watched a multitude of videos, and did research into every perspective surrounding the issues. After many hours of meetings and prayer, the 11 Lay members of the Committee voted unanimously to recommend that we disaffiliate from the United Methodist denomination. The Ad Council of our church voted unanimously to proceed with the discernment process for the entire congregation. Our Board of Trustees and our Finance Committee voted unanimously to endorse the recommendation. A summary of the Discernment Committee’s findings can be found [here](#).

What is the timeline for our disaffiliation process?

1. On July 15 at 9:00 AM, a team from the Annual Conference including our District Superintendent and possibly our Bishop will make a presentation urging us to remain in the UM denomination.
2. Following that presentation, the Administrative Council will be asked to vote on whether or not to request the District Superintendent to schedule an All-Church Conference to vote on disaffiliation.
3. There is a 10-day waiting period after this request before a vote can be taken. The vote will probably be set between early August and mid-September.
4. If the vote is Yes, then an attempt must be made to contact all congregation members about the decision to see if they want to remain as members of our church.
5. A vote to ratify the request for disaffiliation will be held at a special Annual Conference in October. (NOTE: This is the deadline for the disaffiliation process.) If the request is approved, there will be a 2-week waiting period during which the conference will use Quit Claim deeds to transfer property.

How will this decision be made?

The decision to remain UMC or to disaffiliate will be made by a vote of all full members of the congregation who attend the church vote meeting. The voting process is conducted by the Oklahoma Conference representatives. Two thirds (66.7%) of our attending membership must vote to disaffiliate for the vote to pass.

What are the benefits of remaining a UMC congregation?

The Oklahoma Annual Conference has produced a series of videos that answer this question – they can be found [here](#).

What are the risks of remaining a UMC congregation? We run the risk of much higher Apportionments, since so many other large UM churches have left or are leaving. We believe that will put the finances of the Oklahoma Annual Conference at serious risk. Higher apportionments would necessitate a cut in our staff and programs. A number of members have stated they will leave if we remain UMC.

What are the benefits of disaffiliating from the UMC?

If we disaffiliate, we will most likely unite with another Methodist denomination that does not face widespread disobedience to its own rules. We will own our own buildings, hire our own clergy, and decide which mission organizations we will support, rather than the current Apportionment system which mandates much of our mission giving.

What are the risks of disaffiliating from the UMC?

We will need to secure our own insurance and pension plans for clergy and staff. We will need to hire our own clergy, rather than have one appointed by the bishop.

What are the financial implications of leaving or remaining?

If we leave, we will need to pay an extra year of Apportionments (approx. \$137,000 a year) and a fee for unfunded pension liabilities and retiree benefits.

Where will the money come from if we choose to disaffiliate?

The Finance Committee has determined that we will be able use some designated funds to meet the “exit fee.”

Will we still pay Apportionments if we disaffiliate?

No. If we leave, we will no longer pay Apportionments to the Annual Conference (approx. \$137,000 a year), but we will be able to continue to support some UM ministries like Restore Hope and UMCOR if we choose. It will be entirely up to us whom we support.

What will change if we disaffiliate?

Very little will change in our week-to-week ministry. Our name will probably change from “First United Methodist Church” to “First Methodist Church.” The cross and flame logo will no longer be used as a logo. We will own our buildings. We will no longer pay Apportionments (fees to the Oklahoma Annual Conference). We will be able to choose new clergy when needed (for example, when Larry retires in the future). We will continue choosing materials for VBS and other education programs as we currently do.

What will change if we do not disaffiliate?

Our Apportionments will most certainly rise. Our next pastor will be chosen by a new bishop to be elected in 2024, when Bishop Nunn retires. Some recently elected bishops have indicated they will not enforce the current Book of Discipline.

Will we join another denomination if we disaffiliate?

The consensus for now is yes, we *want* to affiliate with another Methodist denomination. That is to be decided by the congregation. There are many other Methodist denominations. Some we plan to consider include the Wesley Methodist Society, the Methodist Collegiate Church, and The Foundry (named after John Wesley's church in England).

Are our pastors' pensions secured if we disaffiliate?

Yes.

How many churches have disaffiliated?

Over 6,100 Methodist congregations in the U.S. have already disaffiliated. ([Click here for the latest total.](#)) Last year, 29 Oklahoma congregations left the Conference. On April 22, 2023, 55 more were approved to disaffiliate. Others, like our church, are still in the discernment process. The last opportunity to have the request for disaffiliation approved will be at a conference held in October. [Click here to see a list of all the approved Disaffiliation requests for the Oklahoma Conference.](#)

What is the background for the current splintering of the UMC?

Since the formation of the United Methodist Church in 1968, there has been tension between Conservative/Traditional Methodists, Moderate Methodists, and Liberal/Progressive Methodists. There have been disagreements about biblical interpretation, theology, social issues, and sexual ethics as well as many other issues. This tension has almost led to a split in the denomination several times. In 2019, a Special General Conference (a meeting of UM pastors and lay people from all over the world) was held in St. Louis to try and settle the issues of allowing clergy to perform same sex weddings in UM churches, and the ordination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer clergy. In a close vote, the General Conference upheld the current Book of Discipline prohibition against same sex weddings and the ordination of "self-proclaimed practicing homosexuals." Around half of the Annual Conferences in the U.S. disagreed with the vote and announced that they would not follow the Book of Discipline. Same sex weddings have been performed in many UM churches, including some in Oklahoma UM churches, and many LGBTQ people have been ordained, including two bishops. This has led to confusion and anger across the denomination. Pastor Larry Varvel has produced a video which goes into detail about the background of this "splintering" – it can be found [here](#).

Why are some congregations disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church?

Many congregations are concerned about a number of issues – Doctrinal and Theological disagreements about biblical interpretation and doctrine, financial issues, structural issues and more. But the amendment to the Book of Discipline added in 2019 states that the "reasons of conscience" must be related to the issues debated at the 2019 General Conference. Ironically, some churches are leaving because they disagree with the current prohibition against same sex weddings and LGBTQ clergy, (like St. Luke's UMC in OKC) and some churches are leaving because they anticipate that those prohibitions will be lifted in 2024 at the next General Conference (like Asbury UMC in Tulsa) Many others are leaving because they are upset that the Book of Discipline is being broken and openly disobeyed by nearly half of U.S. Annual Conferences, which creates chaos and ill will around the denomination.

Haven't we always been a United Methodist Church?

No, we have been a part of three different denominations in our 120 years: The Methodist Episcopal Church (1903-1939), The Methodist Church (1939-1968), and the United Methodist Church (1968-present).

Does our church welcome and accept gay and lesbian people?

Yes, we welcome and accept all people. We currently have LGBTQ members and visitors at our church.