

First United Methodist FAQ on Discernment

WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES?

3-6-23: The deadline for submission of the completed disaffiliation paperwork along with the required payment.

4-22-23: A called special session of the Holston Annual Conference to process qualified requests for disaffiliation under ¶2553 of the UMC Book of Discipline (BOD).

5-29-23: The date disaffiliation becomes effective, if approved by the Annual Conference.
12-31-23 Disaffiliation with property using ¶2553 expires.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T MEET THE MARCH 6TH DEADLINE?

The Holston Conference sent a document Sept 27, 2022 stating; "A subsequent called Special Session of the Holston Annual Conference in the last quarter of 2023 will be considered for the purpose of processing qualifying requests for disaffiliation under ¶2553 if there are churches that are not able to complete the disaffiliation process prior to the April 22, 2023 Special Session."

If a 4th quarter Special Session is scheduled, a new timeline would be established so that the Dec 31st deadline can be met.

If a Special Session is not scheduled in the last quarter, then there is no opportunity to separate with our property because ¶2553 expires December 31st.

At that point we would have to wait for the results of the April 23, 2024 General Conference.

If we disaffiliate, then what happens?

The first action would be to legally establish ourselves as a non-profit 501(c)3 entity with a new name – not including the word "Methodist." (This is so that the deed to our property can be passed back to us from the Conference) Also all things referencing United Methodist has to be taken down and removed – all flame and crosses, names, etc.

Next to be decided - what are we going to become?

ANOTHER DENOMINATION

The Easiest to explain is another denomination. If that is our choice, that denomination will have their own practices and theology that we will have to follow.

INDEPENDENT

After removing all reference to United Methodists, we will need to decide our belief (can no longer use the Book of Discipline). We will need to find a minister(s). Decisions will have to be made about who will lead or be in charge of the congregation, who will make various decisions about the running of the church, what will be our financial structure be, what missions we will support, etc. In other words, all of the questions about the running of the new church will need to be determined and put into practice.

GLOBAL METHODIST

We will have to follow the Discipline of the Global Methodist Church. They will provide a list of acceptable ministers from which we may interview and hire (kind of a hybrid itinerate system).

Why aren't we waiting till General Conference votes on the Book of Discipline?

Paragraph 2553 was created specifically to allow a local church to disaffiliate from the UMC in a thoughtful, grace-filled manner to ensure that the separation sets the foundation for continued, if separate, fruitful and productive missions and ministry for all involved. Paragraph 2553 is the only provision in the Book of Discipline that provides a formal process for disaffiliation.

The deadline/expiration date for disaffiliation is Dec. 31, 2023. Any local church wishing to disaffiliate must complete the process prior to 12/31/23.

Brief background as to how our church arrived at decision to begin Discernment process: As issues facing the United Methodist Church began surfacing among our congregation and following the launching of Global Methodist Church in the spring of 2022, our Conference and our church started discussions regarding the Discernment process. After long discussions and prayerful consideration, our Church Council decided to begin the Discernment process. The Council felt that proceeding with this process was the most appropriate way to learn more and prayerfully consider God's will for our church.

From the beginning of this decision, a primary focus has been to communicate and educate our church about the Discernment process and what is happening in our Conference and the UMC as a whole.

Is there a "push" or "no push" for disaffiliation?

No, there is not a push or an "under-current" for our Church to disaffiliate or not to disaffiliate. Although, there was a push to learn and discuss what was going on in our denomination. Many members of our Church thought our Church should be more openly and formally discussing the issues facing the United Methodist denomination.

The Church leadership determined the best process for learning more was to begin a process of discernment. In the beginning there seemed to be some misunderstanding between discernment and disaffiliation.

It does not appear that there is a "PUSH" in in one direction or the other.

What do we do to protect ourselves legally [from being appointed a gay pastor]?

Currently, the BOD doesn't allow for ordination of practicing homosexuals. Although they may claim to be celibate which means they are not practicing.

Also, part of the appointment process is knowing the church culture and appointing a pastor according to the needs and culture of that church. Churches are protected by the BOD.

There has been news of Shiloh UMC in Rutledge having a gay pastor and lawsuit. The pastor claims to be celibate and she is actually suing the church for defamation of character and is not openly gay.

To date, this team is not aware of a pastor being forced onto a church that the church doesn't want. If there is an issue, there is a formal process that goes through the District Superintendent to help resolve.

What are some of the other issues facing UMC besides the homosexual issue? Have heard that some UMC are saying Jesus is just a prophet.

UMC refutes that. Paragraph 18 in the BOD called Articles of Religion which outlines certain core beliefs are never to be changed i.e. the virgin birth etc.

If I do not want a gay minister or gay marriage performed in this church, do I vote to disaffiliate?

Presently, the BOD doesn't allow for this practice even though there is news of it occurring. Our conference Bishop and cabinet have been vocal about strict adherence to the BOD. General Conference in spring of 2024 may or may not change the BOD on this issue. For perspective, this issue has been raised at every General Conference is 1972.

If we disaffiliate, where will the funds come from especially with a budget shortfall?

Some money would come from our operating account reserve (6 months), our savings account and a portion from our endowments. Only earnings from the endowments would be used - not principle.

The annual budget is a separate matter and is not directly affected by these dollars. What about the balance of the stained glass restoration to which we are committed? We still have 10 months to raise more money. If we fall short, we can use our Line of Credit

What are the estimated costs to disaffiliate?

Pension Liability - as of October 2022 (subject to change) **\$253,837**
Conference tithe - \$108,371 plus \$9,031/mo for current month **\$117,402**
District apportionment - \$17,444/ yr, paid quarterly **\$4,361**
Title Search, Quit Claim Deeds, Recording Fees etc. for six properties \$342 each, **\$2,052**

Total due when submitting completed disaffiliation paperwork. **\$377,700**

Do we have the funds to disaffiliate?

Yes.

Does the UMC supplement the cost of building operations?

No, we support the UMC with our 10% tithe.

What is our total property value?

\$15,078,000 - Building and contents as of 1/1/23 plus land value.

If we disaffiliate, do we keep all property?

Yes, for buildings, contents and land.

What do we not keep?

Cross and Flame on signage, articles with the same symbol, our accounting program and some historical records.

Who actually has a vote at Annual Conference on the fate of a church that seeks disaffiliation?

The delegates of the Annual Conference vote on the disaffiliating churches. The delegates for Annual Conference are both lay and clergy. According to the Book of Discipline:

“The annual conference shall be composed of clergy and lay members. The clergy membership shall consist of deacons and elders in full connection, provisional members, associate members, and local pastors under appointment. The lay membership shall consist of professing 56 lay members elected by each charge, the diaconal ministers, the active deaconesses, and home missionaries under episcopal appointment within the bounds of the annual conference, 57 the conference president of United Methodist Women, the conference president of United Methodist Men, the conference lay leader, district lay leaders, the conference director of Lay Speaking Ministries, conference secretary of Global Ministries (if lay), the president or equivalent officer of the conference young adult organization, the president of the conference youth organization, the chair of the annual conference college student organization, 58 and one young person between the ages of twelve (12) and seventeen (17) and one young person between the ages of eighteen (18) and thirty (30) 59 from each district to be selected in such a manner as may be determined by the annual conference.”