

## Frequently Asked Questions

Based off the most asked questions at the August laity town hall meetings

### **What is to be expected for the UMC in the future? What will it look like?**

It is impossible for anyone to accurately answer this question. However, our desire is to have a United Methodist presence in each community, even if a current UM church departs. Conferences could merge in the coming year, and we anticipate a leaner general church. Today, tomorrow and in the coming years, we will strive to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Even in seasons of unrest, there will still be great diversity in the United Methodist Church; which makes us unique.

### **Why should a church stay UMC and if it does stay, how will conferences be organized?**

We're currently organized as the Alabama-West Florida Conference and share a bishop with the South Georgia Conference. Conferences could merge in the coming years, depending on how many churches leave a conference. Churches should consider wanting to be a part of a church that has such richness and diversity that it multiplies. If one group leaves a church and the other group stays, it becomes representative of a siloed voice which weakens our witness to the world. We have a great opportunity moving forward. Instead of living on assumptions and fears, we must live on faith.

### **Are traditionalists welcome in the future UMC?**

ALL are welcome in the UMC. We need the far left, far right and everyone in between. This intentional theological diversity is what makes United Methodist churches unique. Just like we need traditionalists and progressives, we need intentional efforts for racial diversity so that our churches are better reflections of their communities.

### **Our *Book of Discipline* hasn't changed. General Conference hasn't changed the *Book of Discipline*. Why the discord? Jesus accepted all. Why can't we?**

Nothing has changed in Alabama-West Florida Conference. There has been disobedience around the *Book of Discipline* by some in other parts of the country. We are focusing our attention narrowly on those who break the discipline around human sexuality, but there are other infractions happening in every conference; such as churches not paying 100% of their apportionments. The *Book of Discipline* is and will be followed in the Alabama-West Florida Conference.

**Why have some that have not followed the *Book of Discipline* not been held accountable?**

The General Conference used to oversee and appoint all bishops. In 1939, when the Methodist Church North and the Methodist Church South merged to form the Methodist Church, the southeast wanted to establish jurisdictions. The southeast pushed this because 1) they did not want a northern bishop and 2) they did not want a black bishop. After this request was granted, jurisdictions were formed across the Methodist Church. The Southeast Jurisdiction did not want outside interference. In our current structure, only jurisdictions can hold their own people accountable (bishops, clergy, and laity). Prejudice and racism have its consequences and some of that history has us in our current situation.

**If the majority vote was for the *Book of Discipline* to remain as is, why should the ones who agree with it be the ones to disaffiliate?**

Nobody is being asked to leave. Those leaving are choosing to do so. Page 85 in the *Book of Discipline* talks about the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and theological perspectives. We have different opinions, but we've gotten away from our unified purpose and are spending an inordinate amount of time debating one aspect of our church's theology. The Bible was written for the unity of God's people.

**If a church remains in the UMC and in our conference, will they be expected to accept an openly gay pastor, and will churches be expected to host same-sex marriages on their property?**

The *Book of Discipline* has not changed and we do not know if it will anytime soon. As the cabinet already does, they seek to align pastoral leadership with the local church. There is harm, not only to a church, but also to a pastor, in making appointments where someone is not welcome. UMC pastors don't have to marry anyone, ever. The decision to hold weddings is in the hands of the pastor and the local church's board of trustees.



### **What happens to churches that disaffiliate regarding their pastoral leadership? Do they become independent?**

At the point of disaffiliation, all current UMC churches become independent churches. Most churches that disaffiliate do remain independent. A church needs to enter into the discernment process before that critical decision is made. Many things need to be considered such as finding a pastor should their current one leave; pensions and establishing a 501c3 since a church would no longer be under the UMC umbrella.

### **Does our church have to take a vote?**

No. No vote is needed unless a church completes a discernment process and chooses to vote to disaffiliate via a duly called church conference chaired by the district superintendent. A 2/3rd majority is required if a church takes that step. Voting and conducting straw polls simply to sense the general feelings of the church's membership can cause great harm and unnecessary division.

### **What happens when paragraph 2553 sunsets on December 31, 2023?**

This decision was made at the 2019 General Conference before knowing a pandemic would delay the next General Conference. At this moment, the AWF Board of Trustees is working on a fair and equitable recommendation for churches to use who wish to disaffiliate after this date. We hope that this proposal will be presented to the June 2023 Annual Conference for approval. Such a plan would allow churches to continue to "wait and see" until after the 2024 General Conference before making any final decisions regarding disaffiliation.

### **If our church disaffiliates, do we get to keep our property?**

Yes. Our AWF Trustees, in concert with paragraph 2553 of the *Book Of Discipline*, require churches to pay two years of apportionments (and any outstanding apportionments due since 2019), as well as their share of the annual conference's unfunded pension liability and post-retirement medical liability. Pastors can access these calculations using their church's dashboard.



**After the election of bishops in November, will Bishop Graves remain the bishop of our annual conference?**

The SEJ delegates will elect three to five bishops at the November 2022 Southeast Jurisdictional (SEJ) Conference. Once elections take place, the SEJ committee on episcopacy will make assignments of bishops to each annual conference. On November 4, 2022, we will know if Bishop Graves will return.

**How can the laity be more positive in bringing about a change in the church?**

The laity make up the church. We are a priesthood of believers and God is moving us back to the laity believing and embracing their priesthood of discipleship. Everyone is involved in rebuilding the church.

**If our pastor doesn't leave with a disaffiliating church and remains UMC, what will happen to the pastor?**

The cabinet will seek a new appointment for them. Disaffiliating churches will be responsible for paying the full salary and benefits of their pastor until a new appointment can be made or through the end of the current appointment year (June 30). This salary/benefits amount will be included in the disaffiliation agreement for churches whose pastors are remaining in the UMC. There is a shortage of pastors across all denominations so there will be opportunities for them.

**What happens to UMC members who are left without a congregation if their church decides to disaffiliate?**

We are looking at several options, especially in underserved areas, to start new UM churches there. It could be house churches, appointing a pastor to that area, etc. We know that once we move into the 2023-2024 appointment cycle, we'll be appointing pastors where they're creating new expressions of United Methodism.



**Is our doctrine in jeopardy?**

No, that is simply false. The UMC holds fast to the historic and traditional doctrines of the Christian church.

**Will the AWF Board of Pension and Health give a recommendation to the fair use of funds by the end of the year?**

They will give a recommendation at the 2023 session of Annual Conference in June.