

Columbia First United Methodist Church
Discernment Team Frequently Asked Questions

1) Why is our church considering disaffiliation from the UMC denomination?

In 2022, an FUMC Sunday School class asked the Church Council to explore the ongoing schism regarding homosexuality within the United Methodist Denomination. A motion was passed to form the Discernment Team to inform and educate the members of our church. The United Methodist Church is a divided and hurting church, confronted with major disagreements on essential theological doctrines and the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture; in addition, the institution and polity of the denomination is dysfunctional, including clergy and ecclesiastical disobedience, and differing approaches on matters of mission and discipleship within the church such as the important issue of human sexuality. Contrary to what many believe, the reason for Disaffiliation is not solely due to the sexuality issue, though this is an important issue facing the church and a symptom of much deeper divisions. It is considered the “presenting issue” because of the public attention attributed to it.

2) How did we get to this point? Why is this happening now?

The United Methodist Church was created in 1968. Starting around 1974 the first discussions on homosexuality and the denomination’s positions for the Book of Discipline (BOD) began. This ongoing 50-year discussion culminated in 2019 when the General Conference created paragraph 2553. This amendment to the Book of Discipline allowed churches to have a grace filled exit from the UMC.

3) What are the main differences between the progressive and traditional UMC theological beliefs?

For the purposes of discussion regarding homosexuality, the progressive caucus is requesting UMC pastors to be able to conduct marriage ceremonies for homosexual couples. Progressives are also asking for the ability to let UMC clergy who are homosexual to openly profess their sexual orientation. The traditional caucus requests that marriage should be held strictly between a man and woman or a heterosexual marriage. Traditionalists are requesting the UMC to not change and to enforce the current BOD.

4) Does not having a disaffiliation vote essentially endorse the increasingly progressive UMC denomination?

To date, around 2,000 UMC churches have left the denomination since 2019. Most of these churches have taken a traditional movement stance as to why they disaffiliated. Should additional churches decide to leave, by statistical inference, the traditional movement would continue to have less votes available at General Conference.

5) Will disaffiliating from the UMC denomination give us more opportunity to grow our church after years of membership decline?

No one knows for sure. Christianity in general has seen declines in membership the last 30 years regardless of denomination. We believe it will take a focused, unified Church that is on fire for Jesus to grow both spiritually and in membership.

6) Who makes the decision on whether our church will disaffiliate from the UMC and when will that happen?

Our congregation can decide whether to disaffiliate or not based on a congregational vote by April 3, 2023 (to be considered for approval by the TNWK Annual Conference Zoom meeting on May 22, 2023) or by Oct. 2, 2023 (to be considered for approval of disaffiliation by the TNWK Annual Conference Zoom meeting on Nov. 13, 2023). Disaffiliation is not final until approved by one of these UMC Annual Conference’s

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special called meetings. The vote by our church must be in-person and all requirements set forth in Paragraph 2553 must be fulfilled before the voting can occur.

7) If we don't vote in 2023, will we be given another opportunity to vote for disaffiliation in the future? Are there any other provisions to disaffiliate after 2023?

It is unknown what provisions for disaffiliation will be available after Dec. 31, 2023 when Paragraph 2553 expires. The UMC General Conference will make decisions regarding new disaffiliations when it meets April 23-May 8, 2024.

8) What will change at Columbia First United Methodist Church if we vote to disaffiliate?

If our church votes to disaffiliate, the church property and assets would be deeded to our local church by the TNWK Conference, the name of the church would change, and all signs and symbols of UMC would be removed. The church would adopt new structures for leadership, finance, and missions and a new doctrinal statement of faith would be defined. UMC resources/trainings would no longer be available. Pastors would no longer be assigned to our church through the TNWK Conference. All historical records would be removed as a part of the history of the church.

9) What are the requirements to disaffiliate in the TN Western Kentucky Conference? Are there specific deadlines that we must meet?

If our church desires to disaffiliate, Paragraph 2553 requires a letter of intent signed by 4 officials of the church sent to DS Rev. Vona Wilson and Rev. Scott Aleridge (who is in charge of disaffiliation for the TNWK Conference), completion of Exhibit B, copies of deeds, and a new church name. Also, a list of all professing members of the congregation must be provided to the DS and Rev. Aleridge. Then a Church Conference date will be set within 120 days of the date called by the DS, and all professing members will be notified of the date. The cost to disaffiliate will be provided by Rev. Aleridge and will have to be paid before the effective date of disaffiliation. (See question 6 for the specific deadlines for voting.)

10) How many churches have voted to disaffiliate in the TN Western Kentucky Conference, Southeastern Jurisdiction, and the United States?

The number of UMC churches approved by Annual Conferences for disaffiliation in 2022 were: TNWK- 57, Southeastern Jurisdiction 923, and U.S 2003. The UMC does not have numbers for approved disaffiliation in 2023 because various Annual Conferences have not been held yet. Churches across the country that have voted to disaffiliate since their 2022 Annual Conferences have not received final approval at this time, so they cannot be included in these numbers.

11) What is the financial impact on our church if we vote to disaffiliate?

The exact amount is unknown. Our local church would be required to pay: any unpaid apportionments for the year of the disaffiliation as well as an additional year, the church's portion on unfunded pension liability, any past due Direct Bill pension and/or health insurance payments, prorated share of the pastor's planned compensation if the church does not want to continue to use the pastor between the Church Conference vote and the Annual Conference disaffiliation vote, and any grant money such as equitable compensation received from the Annual Conference within 2 years prior to the disaffiliation date. Rev. Aleridge will provide the congregation with the total amount to be paid before the Church Conference vote. The total amount will have to be paid before the effective date of disaffiliation or the disaffiliation

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will not take place.

12) Will the church retain our buildings and property if we disaffiliate?

Yes. Completing the disaffiliation process from the United Methodist Church ensures Columbia FUMC will leave the denomination with unincumbered ownership of its properties, buildings, and other material assets.

13) What is the trust clause and how does this affect our church?

All properties of United Methodist local churches are held in trust for the benefit of the entire denomination (see Book of Discipline paragraph 2501). If we disaffiliate from the UMC denomination, the deed for the Columbia FUMC property would be transferred to the local church.

14) If we vote to disaffiliate, will we get to keep our current pastors?

Pastors (Elders) credentialed by the United Methodist Church are loyal to The United Methodist Church, accepting and upholding its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline, defending it against all doctrines contrary to God's Holy Word (excerpts from the BOD). Pastors who choose to leave the denomination will lose the credentials required to serve United Methodist Churches. That choice is a personal one to them. Pastors without credentials with The UMC would not be allowed to serve a church any longer in the UMC denomination.

15) Will the decision to join another denomination be made after the vote if we decide to disaffiliate?

It is not required that we join another denomination when if we disaffiliate from the UMC. We could at first be an independent Methodist Church and later decide to join another denomination. Leaders will evaluate the options available to our church regarding affiliating with another denomination. That information will be brought to our congregation for their consideration and a vote.

16) Will the Columbia FUMC join another denomination if we vote to disaffiliate?

That would be a decision made by the congregation.

17) Will we change our church name if we vote to disaffiliate?

Yes. We will no longer be able to use UNITED in our name. Thus, we could be Columbia First Methodist Church.

18) How will my church membership be affected by disaffiliation?

If the Church disaffiliates from the UMC, your membership would go with the new church, either independent or another Methodist denomination. You could also move your membership to another UMC.

19) Does the TN Western Kentucky Conference leadership have to approve if we decide to disaffiliate?

YES. Bishop McAlilly has set up two dates for special annual conference sessions to deal with churches wanting to disaffiliate. These will be ZOOM meetings. May 22, 2023 or November 13, 2023.

20) If the church disaffiliates, will the church Kingdom Fund investment account be released for management by our local church?

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Yes. We will be able to maintain control of the Kingdom Fund Investments. It is currently in the United Methodist Foundation for the Tennessee-Western KY Conference, managed by the Colony Group. We moved our investments to that Foundation and we have the ability to move out and use another management firm.

21) The following questions are specific to the disaffiliation voting process.

a) Who is allowed to vote and who is disqualified from voting?

Only members at CFUMC are eligible to vote. It is expected that you will be required to sign your legal name to the ballot, as well as print your name on the ballot. If your current legal name is different than your name as shown on the membership roll of CFUMC (e.g. married name as compared with maiden name), please contact the church office to advise them accordingly. Should you be uncertain if you are a duly recognized member of CFUMC, please call the church office.

b) Is there a minimum age limit to vote?

Eligible minors must be a professing member to vote.

c) Does the church member have to be present to vote?

Yes. There will be no absentee ballots. The United Methodist Church set the voting requirements as described in the Book of Discipline, including the rule that absentee ballots are not allowed in the vote for Disaffiliation.

d) How do we vote? Is there a standard ballot or do we use a unique ballot for Columbia FUMC?

A paper ballot will be provided from the Conference Office.

e) Will there be multiple things on the ballot or just one question?

A single question will be on the ballot.

f) When would we vote (day of week, time of day, time of year)? Concern that the timing and weather could really impact who votes, particularly for our elderly members.

All these considerations will be taken into account when deciding the specific date.

g) Who counts the votes?

As ballots are turned in, they will be carried to the "counting room". No one is allowed in the counting room except the District Superintendent, TWKC representative, and two trusted agents who will count all the votes. The two trusted agents will not release the names of any persons or how they voted. The two trusted agents will be selected by and approved by the pastor, lay leader, and administrative council chair.

22) Is the practice of homosexuality the only reason we're considering disaffiliation?

Book of Discipline, paragraph 2553, provides limited provisions for separation. There are only two reasons that a congregation may use to disaffiliate. Churches must choose ONE of the two reasons.

a) "Reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference,

b) Or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues..."

23) Are LGBTQIA+ persons welcome at our church?

Yes, LGBTQ+ members and guests are welcome at CFUMC, because of our beliefs that all people are of sacred worth and value, and the teachings of Scripture that "welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Rom 15:7). We pray that everyone will feel welcome at CFUMC. We believe that there is no one

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that is beyond the gracious and redeeming love of Jesus Christ.

24) Why shouldn't we wait until after the 2024 General Conference to consider disaffiliation? The current Book of Discipline already includes restrictions on gay marriage and ordaining gay clergy.

Some members have expressed concern that the current terms of Paragraph 2553 will expire December 31st, 2023; and we do not know if there will be any future terms available. Though the BOD does currently restrict both ordaining gay clergy and performing gay marriages, some Jurisdictions have openly dismissed the Book of Discipline in these two practices.

These answers are to questions our congregation has asked. The Discernment Team did the research using what we believed to be reliable sources. As more information becomes available this document will be updated or revised as needed. It will be updated on the "Discernment" portion on our churches website. You are encouraged to read and study from the resources the Discernment Team recommends. We also encourage you to refer to "Discernment" on the Website for other updates. If you have a follow up question please send it to us at discernment@columbiafumc.org