

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“The church is splitting.”

No, the term “split” applies when there is a negotiated agreement within the denomination to divide assets and resources. No such agreement has been made in The United Methodist Church. The earliest point at which such an agreement could be made would be at the next General Conference to be held in 2024.

What is happening is that some traditionalist leaders have decided to create their own denomination (the Global Methodist Church). Leaders of that denomination and other unofficial advocacy groups, such as the Wesleyan Covenant Association, which created it, are encouraging like-minded United Methodist congregations and clergy to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and join their denomination instead.

“Traditionalists are being asked to leave the denomination.”

No. The North Texas Annual Conference leadership does not desire for any church to disaffiliate and believes that there is room in the North Texas Conference for all churches – traditional, progressive, and everything in between.

“The UMC intends to change the Bible.”

No. The United Methodist Church has no official translation of the Bible and has never sought to alter the Bible at all. United Methodists have always had a variety of views about how to interpret specific passages of Scripture and likely always will.

“The UMC is allowing congregations that exit the denomination to continue to offer the same pension and health benefits programs to their clergy and staff.”

No, The Book of Discipline does not permit non-UMC entities to be plan sponsors of the Clergy Retirement Security Program. Only a General Conference can change this. Churches that disaffiliate will face changes to the benefits they can offer their clergy. Individual congregations and clergy that join the Global Methodist Church (GMC) will be eligible to participate in a retirement plan offered by the GMC, which will be a Wespath defined-contribution retirement plan similar to a United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP).

Active Elders and Deacons who disaffiliate under Discipline ¶1360 will have all assets accrued in CRSP and previous programs in which they may have participated (defined benefit and defined contribution) converted into a cash equivalent and placed into their United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP). Active Local Pastors, Provisional Members, Associate Members and Retired Clergy who disaffiliate under Discipline ¶1360 will experience no impact to their account balance. Future retirement plan contributions may be made to the new retirement plan described above which, like UMPIP, is a personal retirement account subject to the effects of the stock market and other investments on its value.

At this time, it is not possible for individual congregations (whether in the GMC or in The UMC) to be plan sponsors for the HealthFlex health insurance programs Wespath offers, unless a congregation has more than 50 eligible employees. United Methodist annual conferences are the

plan sponsors for congregations with fewer than 50 eligible employees. This means individual congregations with fewer than 50 eligible employees currently participating in these programs that exit The United Methodist Church can no longer offer these benefits to their clergy and employees effective with the date of disaffiliation. Clergy currently covered by HealthFlex, who choose to disaffiliate are eligible to continue on the health insurance plan by paying 100% of the costs themselves for up to 18 months. At that point, the HealthFlex plan is no longer available to them. Individual congregations and clergy who join the GMC may participate in the health benefits selected by the GMC, which may include HealthFlex.

Retired clergy who surrender their credentials will no longer be eligible for the Conference funding through the health reimbursement account at Via Benefits. If there is funding already on account with Via Benefits, it will remain in place until it is gone, but no additional annual funding will be added to the clergy's account. The same applies for any non-clergy spouse of a retired clergy surrendering credentials. No additional funding will be made available

Active clergy who are eligible to receive benefits provided through the Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP), including but not limited to disability and death benefits, will lose them. Retired clergy who are eligible for death benefits will retain them.

For additional information, [see the latest from Wespath](#).

“The Bishops aren’t enforcing the Discipline.”

The Council of Bishops, like the broader church, holds a range of opinions on how best to live into and uphold *The Book of Discipline*. As such, enforcement of the Discipline has varied from conference to conference. In the North Texas Conference, the Bishop and the Cabinet remain committed to upholding *The Book of Discipline* and following the complaint procedures as outlined in ¶1362 and ¶12701.

“The church is too political/liberal/progressive.”

Regarding spiritual formation, we are non-partisan; as Christians, however, we cannot be apolitical. The church is political, a word derived from the Greek word *polis*, literally “a city” or a gathering of people. Jesus’ overturning tables in the temple was a political act.

As United Methodists, we recognize the vital function of government in ordering society, and our Social Principles remind us that “The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶164.B)

In our current political climate, politics can cause tension and stir strong emotions. But politics are not intrinsically bad. “Political” doesn’t have to mean “divisive.”

“General Conference 2019 has already spoken, so why are the traditionalists the ones that have to leave? Conservative pastors and congregations feel persecuted.”

It is important to remember that no one is being asked, forced, coerced or otherwise made to leave or to remain in The UMC. In 2021, the Council of Bishops released their vision of a future for The UMC that makes space for all perspectives to co-exist and continue working together for the transformation of the world. Their vision document is entitled "A Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church." The bishops envisioned "a denomination rooted in Scripture, centered in Christ, and welcoming to all churchgoers – however they identify."

“This really doesn’t have to do with sexuality. This is our chance to get out with our building.”

Paragraph 2553 of *The Book of Discipline* states the basis for a church to disaffiliate from The UMC as follows:

“Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for 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, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.”

Reasons such as connectional giving or property are not related to the basis for ¶ 2553 and would not be applicable to disaffiliation under this provision.

“The Council of Bishops has already decided that homosexuality will be condoned at the next General Conference.”

The only body with the authority to set policy for The United Methodist Church is the General Conference. Bishops do not vote at General Conference. While bishops certainly have preferences individually for the future of The United Methodist Church, the General Conference will ultimately make decisions on changes to *The Book of Discipline*.

“Our pastor can retire from the UMC and then lead our GMC congregation.”

Retired and active UM clergy cannot serve as clergy in a disaffiliated church, while maintaining membership in the UMC. In order to serve a disaffiliated church, UM clergy must disaffiliate to unite with another denomination (per paragraph 360.1 of *The Book of Discipline*), surrender their conference membership and be credentialed through an entity other than the UMC.

THE NORTH TEXAS CONFERENCE

“All of the churches with conservative pastors are leaving.” OR

“All of the churches with progressive pastors are leaving.”

No, since our formation in 1968, The UMC has always been a “big tent” denomination where progressive, conservative and moderate believers are welcomed and respected.

“The Conference cares more about the Conference than the local church.”

While there are certainly pressing concerns at the Conference level, the leadership of the North Texas Conference cares deeply for and seeks to support the life and ministry of all of the local churches in our connection. After all, there is no North Texas Conference without our local churches. The Conference leadership is focused on serving and supporting the local church and is keenly aware of the purpose of the annual conference as defined in *The Book of Discipline*: “equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God.” (§ 601). Here is just a sampling of some of the ways that the Conference is supporting and tending to local churches:

- Clergy coaching and resources
- Missional and congregational support grants, especially during the pandemic
- Camping and retreat ministries at Bridgeport and Prothro camps
- Small group study resources like Wesleyan Roots, which explores Wesleyan beliefs and practice
- Staff support in the areas of evangelism and disciple-making, vitalization, new faith expressions, ministry with neighbors and leadership development for children, youth and adults

“The Conference owns our building but doesn’t help us fix it.”

This question is directly related to the trust clause defined by *The Book of Discipline* and used in titles for property and assets. This requirement is a “fundamental expression of United Methodism whereby local churches and other agencies and institutions within the denomination are both held accountable to and benefit from their connection with the entire worldwide Church.” (§ 2501)

The trust clause has been a part of Methodism since the beginning and is based on the belief that the key question is, “What is best for the whole connection?” and not “What is best for my congregation or me?” In 1750, John Wesley worked with lawyers to craft deeds for existing Methodist properties that helped ensure they would continue to be used in support of the Methodist movement. The clause was first approved by the General Conference for American Methodists in 1796 and included in *The Book of Discipline* in 1797.

Local church property is held by the local church Board of Trustees. The property is held “in trust,” which means the local church holds the property with an obligation to maintain and protect the property so it can continue to be used as a United Methodist Church in the future.

All North Texas Conference churches participate in a connectional property insurance program. Over the past two years alone, dozens of local churches have benefitted from the program, undergoing major renovations and repairs related to the 2021 winter storm and flooding in Dallas County.

“If you stay, the Conference will appoint a gay pastor to your church.”

In the appointment-making process, the needs and theological understanding of the local church are always considered by the Cabinet. The Cabinet will not send a pastor to “convert” a congregation or force an agenda.

The Bishop and Cabinet work from a set of core values and commitments as they discern appointments:

- We will listen for and submit to the Holy Spirit's leading through prayer, scripture reading, and holy conferencing.
- We believe the church is the Body of Christ and the work we do is the work of God.
- We will prepare ourselves spiritually, physically, and mentally for this discernment process while relying on Christ to do "more than we could ask for or imagine".
- Our appointment considerations will include the church and the larger community
- We will consider the needs/opportunities of the church and gifts/strengths of the pastor with both a present and a post-pandemic framework in mind.
- We will name and claim the missional rationale for new appointments.
- We will engage in ongoing critical and constructive self-reflection on how we can improve the appointive process and best support clergy & congregations in transition.

"If you stay, the Conference will force pastors and churches to perform same-sex marriages."

No pastor is ever forced to marry anyone, nor will they be in the future. Pastors currently make their own decision about their willingness to marry a couple. They have autonomy; they can – and do – decline to marry people and will retain this discretion.

"Every church has to take a vote on this."

Every church is **not** required to vote on disaffiliation. Churches staying United Methodist can continue doing ministry as before; no vote is needed to affirm their remaining United Methodist.

"If we disaffiliate, we have to send the Conference all our UMC hymnals."

Hymnals have been deemed to be property that will be released from the trust clause under a fully executed Disaffiliation Agreement. As such, hymnals will not be required to be sent to the Conference as part of the agreement. If a church chooses to affiliate with another denomination, they may, however, choose not to continue using United Methodist hymnals.

THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

"The Conference doesn't believe in scriptural holiness."

It is important to note that the North Texas Conference (like all annual conferences) does not have the authority to speak on behalf of the denomination on any topic. That is an inherent part of our denomination's structure. Our scriptural, theological understanding is defined as part of *The Book of Discipline* and further clarified in *The Book of Worship* and *The Book of Resolutions*.

We believe in the authority of scripture and that "Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation." The United Methodist Church is founded on a Wesleyan theology of grace, anchored in Scripture, and based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the continuing movement of the Holy Spirit.

In our polity, we emphatically state: "Faith is the only response essential for salvation." United Methodists affirm that through Jesus Christ, God has made salvation available to all persons. That does not mean we believe that all persons will be saved. John Wesley (and we) teach that Christ's

death creates the possibility that all may be saved. We believe salvation is God's response and offer of love, and that love does not compel people to accept it. We do not believe that God predestines some to salvation and others to condemnation. We embrace the fundamentals of the Wesleyan tradition and dedicate ourselves to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

“The UMC is more focused on social justice than sharing the saving grace of Jesus. Why should I continue to give to a denomination that is going to prioritize social justice over the gospel?”

We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world. In joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing.

We remember that in Matthew 22, Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment. He says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

“Leaving The UMC will give your local church the revival it needs. The North Texas Conference and The UMC are causing your church to die.”

Revival begins with a transformation of the heart and mind, which compels us to move beyond the walls of the church into the world to be the hands and feet and voice of the Body of Christ. Every church has the power to do this.

“The UMC is about to alter its doctrine to deny the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus Christ or salvation through Christ alone.”

All of these positions are bedrock in the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church, more specifically in the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith. These cannot be altered without a two-thirds vote of the General Conference followed by a three-fourths aggregate approval of all annual conferences of The United Methodist Church worldwide. There is no basis to conclude such majorities could be achieved to alter the Articles and Confession for any reason; moreover, we are not aware of any proposed legislation for General Conference 2024 that would introduce these sorts of changes.

Read more on this topic and others at [“Is the UMC Really...”](#) from [umc.org](#)

**“People who want to leave The UMC do not believe the Bible.” OR
“People who want to stay in The UMC do not believe the Bible.”**

Statements such as these have been made about persons with differing opinions on several matters. The United Methodist denomination remains committed to the authority of scripture.

One person having a different interpretation of the scripture from another on a given topic does not support either of these claims about a person's scriptural beliefs. These claims might be better

expressed by saying that there are varying opinions within the body of Christ, but broad claims such as these are not based in fact and cannot be applied to large groups of people.

For more information on The UMC's position on scripture, see Articles V and VI in the Articles of Religion and Article IV in the Confession of Faith.

FINANCIAL CONCERNS

“We are tired of paying a ‘tax.’”

Any church organization that seeks to collectively care for God's children will have expenses. Sharing in and providing the means for that care is a distinctive way United Methodists live into our call. This connection is at the core of what it means to be a United Methodist.

United Methodists today join the generations of our forebears who built and sustained the church, hospitals and universities so United Methodist ministry will continue into the future. The opportunity to participate in funding our connectional ministries is not a “tax,” but rather, a way that we join other United Methodists in providing a system of support to care for God's children.

Apportionments started with John Wesley when he recognized that people in the small faith groups (class meetings) he helped organize could do more with their combined resources than they could as individuals in reaching out to the poor and in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Connectional giving was developed to support the mission and ministry of the church. Both clergy and laity have a voice and a vote in setting those financial goals. Our shared giving has made it possible for the people of The UMC to share the gospel and care for all of God's children throughout the world. Every United Methodist church is part of a larger connection of shared purpose and mission that has been in existence for hundreds of years.

“The Conference is planning to redistribute apportionments from churches that disaffiliate to churches that stay, so expect your apportionments to increase.”

The budget is set at Annual Conference, so the churches that remain will be the ones who set the budget. That budget is then allocated to churches as apportionments. The Conference leadership is aware of the budget implications of disaffiliating churches and plans to run several scenarios of how ministry will continue when they are no longer supporting connectional giving. There is no intention to reallocate the same Conference budget to the remaining churches to cover disaffiliating churches.

“The UMC is an ever-increasing bureaucracy with a ballooning budget.”

The UMC has worked diligently to be a good fiscal steward. Over the last decade, all general agencies have embraced steep budget cuts in an effort to be an asset and not a liability to the work of the local church. Specifically in the North Texas Conference, the 2022 apportionment budget was \$10,874,849. In 2023, the projected apportionment budget is reduced by 1%, to a total of \$10,765,727. A portion of the North Texas Conference budget also supports clergy through the ordination process, training, benefits on Clergy Medical Leave and moving expense reimbursement.