

WHO ARE WE & THE UMC

What Does It Mean To

Disaffiliate

And

How Do United Methodists

Make Decisions?

When a church votes to disaffiliate,
they choose to sever all connections with the United Methodist Church.

When a church withdraws from its denomination
What does that mean?

In terms of Leadership, Structure, Guidelines, Training, Support or Resources

- The church would have to adopt its own structure for leadership:
 - This could mean groups/committees and how they are elected.
- No more annual leadership training provided.
- No more access to resources
 - Like the Conference Resource Center or events/programs to train local leaders
 - No more resource people to call on for questions/guidance (like District Vitality Specialists)

Ministry Connections:

The church would not have a guaranteed appointment or a process to assess credentials, theology and background. Church no longer has continuous supervision of pastor or annual reviews of appointment.

Theology Foundation:

The disaffiliated church would need to adopt a doctrinal statement of faith.

History of the Church:

Disaffiliated churches have to pack up their historical records for the years prior to disaffiliation. With disaffiliation, those records belong to the Western North Carolina Archives and History.

Church Property:

The United Methodist sign would have to be removed from all property at the church's expense.

Financial Guidance/Support:

- No longer belong to a long-standing respected denomination with financial institutions.
- No longer has the UMC careful financial guidelines for handling contributions.
- No longer has financial resource people to call when there are questions.
- Is no longer eligible for program grants or financial support from UM programs or resources (like Duke Endowment or Duke interns) for expanding programs/missions or facilities.
- Would no longer receive financial support to receive benefits during difficult times (like the pandemic).

World-Wide Missions:

Disaffiliated churches will no longer be part of the educational, medical, evangelistic and relief missions around the world (like Ukraine and disaster relief) of the UM connectional ministries.

Advantages of Disaffiliation:

- Allows churches to make their own decisions without the process and approvals required in the UMC.
- Disaffiliation allows churches and members not to be associated or worried with UMC controversies.
- Allows churches to own their own property.



Disaffiliation adds these responsibilities to churches:

- Developing a leadership structure and guidelines for running the church.
- Recruiting and vetting ministers on their own. Taking complete responsibility for the accountability and ongoing supervision of the clergy.
- Each church has a financial payout to disaffiliate based on appointment giving for 2 years and the projected pension liability for previous pastors of each church.
- Disaffiliating churches need to establish their own 501c3 and petition again to be exempt from property taxes.
- Each church would need to develop a doctrinal statement of beliefs to know and share the basic Christian beliefs of the church.
- Each church would have to determine its mission giving.
- Each church would have to send its historical records to the WNCC Commission on Archives and History.
- Each church would have to assume full financial responsibility for property development and expansion without financial resources available through the denomination. That would also include disaster relief should that be needed.
- UM Members who want to stay UM will be invited to move their membership to the conference. Disaffiliated churches will need to reassess their member and financial base.

Is this the only chance UM Churches will have to disaffiliate???

NO

How Do United Methodists Make Decisions?

- How are people held accountable?
- Who speaks for the United Methodist Church?

The United Methodist Church is organized around its basic biblical beliefs:

1. Everyone is born with the image of God imprinted within us.

We are God's children. We are capable of doing the right thing, making mature decisions and offering Christ to the world. People grow best when they are in the company of others growing toward perfection. The wisdom of others moves us to the goal of mature decision-making and moving ever closer to perfection. In spiritual growth and church governance, the UMC is organized around groups. Because even groups make mistakes, the UMC is organized to be an ever-reflecting, ever-learning and constantly correcting church. Except in matters of doctrine (which cannot be amended), the UMC is structured for continuous improving.

2. Everyone is prone to sin.

John Wesley believed that even the best of us can get off track. "To imagine that anyone is incapable of mistakes or failing into diverse temptations" is, in Wesley's opinion, a terrible miscalculation not substantiated in Scripture. Based on this fundamental belief, accountability is built into every level of United Methodist life. Our theology is the basis of our organization.

Accountability in UM life is not done by public denunciation or public highlighting of people's sins or mistakes.

Accountability is carried out under the biblical guidelines of the Golden Rule, loving others as Jesus loved us, speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4) and the General Rules of the Church: First Do No Harm, Do Good and Stay in Love with God. Accountability is firm but with an eye to redemptive outcomes.

Everybody is accountable to somebody!

Accountability is imperfect because it is carried out by imperfect people. But the system is also built for correctability. There are restraints and boundaries and responsibilities for everyone. No one gets to just do their own thing.

Here are the hallmarks of UM accountability:

- UM accountability takes place in confidential settings. This allows people to speak freely and get the whole story.
- The people who know the whole story are the people who settle on the resolution/remedy/punishment. This often means that people who only know part of the situation misunderstand what happens or even question that accountability has taken place.
- This means that more accountability takes place than people know.
- Accountability is imperfect because it is administered by imperfect people.
- UM accountability has no choice but to follow the guidelines of the Discipline and the structure of the church.

Everybody is accountable in the UM structure:

- Local church officers are accountable to the nominating committee for their actions.
- Pastors are accountable to their Staff Parish Relations Committee, to their District Superintendent and Bishop and to the Order of Elders.
- District Superintendents are accountable to the Bishop and cabinet and their Committee on Superintendency.
- Bishops are accountable to the College or Bishops and to their Conference Committee on Superintendency.
- The College of Bishops are accountable to the Council of Bishops.
- The General Conference is accountable to the Judicial Council for actions that are in compliance with the UM Constitution.
- The Judicial Council members are elected by the General Conference
- The Bishops are accountable to enforce the Discipline and accountable to the Judicial Council to whom episcopal rulings can be appealed.

Who Speaks for the UMC?

GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ONLY GENERAL CONFERENCE SPEAKS FOR THE UMC.

1

This means it is hard to change things in the UMC. **Until the General Conference speaks on a position, there is no change.** Change takes time (often a very long time).

2

Change to the Discipline takes a majority vote of the General Conference (no more fewer than 600, no more than 1000 delegates. Half lay and half clergy with delegates from every conference around the world - which is 54 conferences in the US and 80 in countries outside the US). The bishops preside but have no vote - so many different people have to agree on any action of the General Conference.



No one has the right to contradict the Discipline. If the General Conference passes something that violates the constitution of the UMC, the Judicial Council can rule General Conference actions out of order. Things the Judicial Council rules against cannot be enforced. They can be amended at a future General Conference but not enforced until then.

How do we handle people who violate the Discipline?

HISTORY TIME

The idea of everyone being bound by the Discipline is bedrock to Methodism.

History will show us that throughout Methodist history, people have disagreed with the Discipline including defying its standards.

Differences of opinions started at the beginning of American Methodism. At the founding Conference, the Christmas Conference of 1784, Southern Methodists said they would not live up to Mr. Wesley's firm stand that no Methodist could own a slave. Southern Methodists continued to defy the Discipline for 60 years! It was a very contentious, ongoing controversy until, in 1844, the Southern Methodists broke away from the Methodist Episcopal Church and formed a new denomination: the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

The South Defies the Discipline on Slavery

The ME Church South adamantly claimed their position on slavery (and later, after the Civil War, segregation) was based on the Bible. They were, in their view, being faithful to what the Bible taught. The division by any measure was detrimental to the Methodist witness.

Methodist Churches Re-Unite

The ME Church South stayed independent until 1939 when a special "uniting conference was called" to hope that the ME Church South, the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) and the Methodist Protestant Church would merge to be one Methodist Church again.

The arguments were passionate. Negotiations were difficult. They almost did not come to an agreement. The Southern Methodists were absolutely determined to have control over their bishops and unmoveable in their position that they would never accept a black bishop.

The Creating of Jurisdictions

How did the stalemate break? The establishment of jurisdictions was what broke the deadlock between the north and the south. With the compromise of establishing jurisdictions, the historic merger took place.

Since 1939, the Discipline has specified that the election, assignment and accountability of bishops was to take place within each individual jurisdiction.

(So when people ask, "Why can't somebody do something about the gay married bishops in the Western Jurisdiction?". It is because, according to the Discipline, the Western Jurisdiction has sole authority for their bishops. And when they appealed to the Judicial Council for a ruling on this unprecedented situation, the Judicial Council reviewed the consecration and sent the case back to the Western Jurisdiction, which has not taken additional action. Due to the 1939 Disciplinary provision, the Western Jurisdiction has sole authority for action.

Just as Jurisdictions were established by General Conference (1939), this authority could be amended by General Conference. Because of the pandemic, no regular General Conference has been held since her election in 2016. The next General Conference will be April/May 2024).

Most of the time, when people have had passionate differences with the denomination, people have defied the Discipline and it has not led to a breakup of the denomination:

Most of the time, when people have had passionate differences...

- 1884 - 1928: Clergy who performed a wedding for anyone with a living spouse was defying the Discipline.
- 1880 - 1968: Clergy who smoked were defying the Discipline.
- 1888, 5 Annual Conferences defied the Discipline by electing women as General Conference delegates. (they were not seated)
- 1960, there were churches who defied Discipline by refusing admittance to African American worshippers.
- 1968 - 1978, Annual Conferences in the South openly and passionately defied the Discipline to end the racially segregated Central Jurisdiction (an all black Methodist Church structure overlapping the white church boundaries). The racially segregated church was also part of the 1939 compromise for union with the ME Church South.

The movement for full clergy rights for women began decades before the General Conference passed it in 1956. Contrary to the Discipline, there are still churches today that refuse to accept a woman pastor.

Currently, some pastors defy the Discipline by refusing to baptize infants, defy the Disciplinary covenant that pastors go where they are sent or withhold apportionment giving.

Except for the position of slavery - and now the issue of human sexuality - the many different opinions (often deep differences) have been able to be handled by respectfully working through our differences (even passionate differences) anchored by a common love for Christ, a desire to grow in grace and the General Rules of Methodism:

FIRST DO NO HARM. DO GOOD. STAY IN LOVE WITH GOD.

The boundaries of the Discipline and our theology helps us navigate differences.

SO WHO SHOULD WE TRUST?

Back to basic principles, ANYONE and EVERYONE can make mistakes. People who are accountable, however, are less likely to make mistakes and more likely to correct them. The dependability of the source is directly related to whether or not there is accountability.

If you read anything on a United Methodist source, it is either true or it will be corrected as soon as it is noticed as incorrect.

There are significant contributors to today's divisions that come from organized groups that have active voices but no accountability in their structures:

- *Good News Magazine* — began as an outreach of the Good News caucus at the 1972 General Conference.
- *The Institute on Religion and Democracy* — started in the late 1970's to critique mainline denominations (not just Methodism).
- *The Wesleyan Covenant Association* — started in 2016 explicitly for the purpose of founding a break-away new denomination.

All of these groups are accountable only to themselves.

All of these groups receive direct financial benefit and supporters from the unchecked things they publish. All of these groups have histories consistently characterized by exaggerations, distortions, and misinformation.

With no accountability and with financial benefit dependent on their writing, they have no incentive or history to correct misinformation.

Join us for future sessions:

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| <u>Sunday, February 5th:</u> | Gay marriages, gay pastors and all the controversies people are hearing about. |
| <u>Sunday, February 12th:</u> | United Methodist Beliefs and Doctrine - Is it changing?
Do UM ministers have to believe/adhere to doctrine?
Where/how would we get ministers if we disaffiliate? |
| <u>Sunday, February 19th:</u> | What is the Trust Clause and what does it mean?
What will it cost to disaffiliate and how would it be paid? |

These sessions are for information, not controversy or debate.

Questions will be welcome.

These sessions will equip people to make a decision for the Church Conference tentatively scheduled for February 26th, 2023.

BELIEVE, BELONG, BECOME

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