

UMC Mythbusting

1) Is it true the UMC will no longer believe in the Trinity, the Resurrection, the Lordship of Jesus, or the authority of the Bible? No. As Bishop Jones has stated, disaffiliation is about sexuality. Differences of opinion and interpretation regarding sexuality is not a convincing enough reason for many folks, so those leaving have found a few stories over decades (out of millions of Methodists) of folks with outlier positions, and stated that this is the real reason for the divide. That is misleading. It is zeroing in on less than 1% of the church, and saying that's 100% of what will be left. The beliefs of the UMC, found in our Articles of Religion and Confessions of Faith, cannot and will not be changed. **TIP:** Find and print the Articles of Religion and Confessions of Faith of the UMC online, and hand them to every member of the church who shows up for an informational meeting or disaffiliation vote. It's a lot of paper, but it really gets the point across.

2) Is it true that if we're going to disaffiliate, we need to do it in Fall 2022? No. The disaffiliation paragraph found in the Book of Discipline, Paragraph 2553, does not expire until December 31, 2023. TWMB0 is looking into whether we as an annual conference could vote on a resolution to extend it even longer to give churches more time to make such an important decision. Any attempt to use Paragraph 2548.2 to disaffiliate should be abandoned immediately; the UMC Judicial Council is currently considering whether it is legal, and it would be disruptive to a church to begin one process and have to switch to another. Further, there is questionable wisdom in leaving a known and beloved church that has not changed any position in order to join an unproven and inexperienced denomination. Most churches would find it helpful to wait until the GMC holds its Convening Conference in the Fall of 2023, when they will set their doctrines, church structure, and leadership, before making a decision. In an effort to create momentum, some leaders are encouraging fear about our incoming bishop making disaffiliation harder in 2023; please note, it is not the bishop that sets our disaffiliation policy, but our conference Board of Trustees, which will have the same membership in 2023 that it has had in 2021-2022.

3) Is it true that if our church is set on leaving, the GMC is the best option for us? That can only be decided on a church-by-church basis. For context— out of 90 churches that just disaffiliated in the Georgia conferences, only 4 churches chose to go GMC. Some have chosen to join the Free Methodist Church, which has the same theological positions as the GMC, but 160 years of church leadership. **ONE TIP:** If your church votes to leave, and is about to vote on which church to affiliate with, it could be helpful to bring this as a viable option: <https://fmcusa.org/resources/affiliate>. AME Zion, CME, Wesleyan, Nazarene, are other good denominational options.

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4) **If we stay in the UMC, will our congregation or pastor be forced into allowing weddings, performing weddings, or receiving queer clergy?** No. Church Trustees committees set wedding policies. Pastors always have the ability to choose which weddings they will officiate. Bishops have no desire to hurt a church or a pastor by appointing someone who would not be received well. This has been true for women clergy and clergy of color for decades.

5) **Will a liberal wave soon take over the UMC?** No. Setting aside an unhelpful political term that doesn't belong in the body of Christ, the deeper question is whether the UMC will abandon the core teachings of the faith and focus instead on being an issues-based church. The answer is no. Any church that takes Jesus away from the center, and places any social issue in Jesus' place, always declines. Are there outliers who are doing this? Yes. But they do not have strength or momentum.

6) **What about all these stories we're hearing?** A single person's off-the-cuff statements or actions do not speak for the church as a whole. Compare this to any business, school, organization, or family. This is a fear-mongering technique that is used when data doesn't support a position.

7) **There is nothing that a congregation must do in response to denominational turmoil.** There is no mandate from our bishop or from any District Superintendent to enter into discernment. The best and healthiest option for many local churches is to stay the course. Conservatives (both locally and nationally) are insisting that churches must act to disaffiliate now because we don't know who the next bishop will be or what General Conference will do in 2024. This is false urgency that aims at sowing fear among pastors and churches.

8) **The formal discernment process that churches can choose to enter is not a neutral process.** Discernment, as a general concept, is an important practice for Christians and for churches, and some have asked, "What's the harm in starting this formal discernment process?" Here's the answer: the "formal discernment process" is designed **not** for churches that want to learn about or discuss difficult issues but for churches (or pastors) that **already** want to leave the denomination. It's also designed to culminate in a yes/no vote that necessarily creates a division and undervalues the possibility of unity and common mission in a local church.

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7) What practical steps can I take to influence my church's disaffiliation vote?

- When in a public forum, it could be helpful to read scripture, such as John 17:21, 1 John 4:18, if it becomes applicable 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, Matthew 7:1-5, and remind people that there are many scriptures worth considering in this decision, not just a couple.
- Request that your church's leadership council host informational sessions with representatives from both positions. If this is denied, ask for the UMC video available at the link below to be shown, and host watch parties of UMC resources for church members.
- Do everything you can to get as many church members present to vote as possible. It should not be a small percentage of a congregation making such an important decision.
- Attend the annual conference's Future Discernment Task Force meeting in your district. Review the Supporting Documents available at www.txcumc.org/FDTF, especially the "Questions and Answers from District Meetings".
- **Make sure to speak up** in public meetings, Sunday school classes, discernment process gatherings, etc. It can be uncomfortable for some people to speak in public (especially if it's into a microphone), but the loudest voices are often on the extremes, and the worst thing is for the "silent majority" to stay silent. Prepare to have several folks speak up about different aspects of this, including: Scripture (such as Acts 10), local church family, losing members, finances, evangelism, erring on the side of grace and love, etc.
- Remind folks in private conversations that when the car salesman tries to sell you something fast, it's sometimes more for his advantage than yours. Remind folks that they walk through a house before buying it. Remind folks that they're being asked to make a decision to go into something unknown, based on fear of something that is not present in your church.

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8) If your church votes to leave the UMC, we encourage the following:

- Be confident in the Lord. Our God is a God of provision. Stay committed to the body of Christ, don't give up on church.
- Create a list of church members who want to remain UMC. Get a ballpark figure of how many people will be looking for a new church home.
- Contact your District Superintendent and ask which nearby UM churches he or she recommends. Please ask your DS how that recommendation will be shared with the whole church body.
- If there are none close by, contact Rev. Morris Matthis at the Conference Office to ask about church planting plans in your area.

