

Answered Questions

New:

Should it be the whole church, and not just the Church Council, that votes whether to enter into a "Season of Discernment" regarding disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church?

Dr. Elijah Stansell, the District Superintendent of the Central South District, has clarified that it is the Church Council, as the administrative and governing body of the church (*Discipline* ¶252), that determines whether to enter into a season of discernment leading to a Church Conference vote of all the members to consider disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. Additionally, that Church Conference can be called by the pastor or the District Superintendent, or by a petition of 10% of all professing members of the church, currently 8742 members. (*Discipline* ¶248)

1. *If the "conservative" wing of the denomination has already won at the last general conference, why are they the ones that are leaving?*

There are two main reasons. First, there is concern that the UMC may change its stance on human sexuality and allow same-sex weddings and the ordination of self-avowed practicing gay and lesbian persons in the future. The earliest that could possibly happen is 2024 at our next General Conference. Second, even though the UMC does not permit same-sex weddings in our churches or our clergy to conduct them, and even though the UMC does not permit the ordination of self-avowed practicing gay or lesbian persons, there are annual conferences that have chosen not to follow these restrictions as a matter of civil disobedience in defiance of church law. Much of the civil disobedience is happening in our Western Jurisdiction, which includes the western annual conferences of the U.S., with a membership comprising only 2% of the United Methodist Church. Our annual conference, the Texas Annual Conference, has not experienced this civil disobedience. Some conservative churches and clergy are choosing to separate from the UMC as a matter of principle because the UMC in the western U.S. is not enforcing church law.

2. *Is this church leaning to a more traditional (no gay marriage) stance, or a more relaxed?*

St. Luke's abides by the doctrine and polity of The United Methodist Church as found in our *Book of Discipline*. We do not lean one way or the other. All of our pastors have agreed to uphold the *Discipline* and will not perform same-sex weddings.

3. *Is there any movement afoot by progressive congregations to opt out of the UMC?*

No, not currently. In the Texas Annual Conference, only one church has left for a more progressive denomination. After the General Conference held in 2019, there were some United Methodists who joined the Liberation Methodist Connexion, which, according to their website, is not a denomination but a "network of spiritual communities" that includes current, former, and non-UMC churches. For the most part, the progressive congregations in the UMC are currently remaining UMC.

4. *Are the majority of churches who have left or want to leave the current church structure more conservative or progressive churches.*

Generally, they're more conservative.

5. *We are constantly receiving emails and social media about Global Methodist Church. Could you help us understand how Global Methodist and United Methodist Church are different?*

[This comparison chart](#) published by the Texas Annual Conference offers an accurate side-by-side summary of the UMC and GMC.

6. *Will the UMC change organizational structure to have a President or CEO who will hold rogue Bishops and Clergy accountable to the book of Methodist Discipline? And serve discipline if they don't?*

It's not clear when or how the UMC will change its organizational structure. There are no current plans to appoint a President or CEO of the UMC. However, there are proposals submitted to the General Conference to restructure the UMC so as to provide adaptability to local contexts while preserving unity in doctrine and mission.

7. *Are the African UMC churches going to stay with the UMC?*

It's not clear what the UMC churches in Africa will do. However, most of the active UMC bishops in Africa have publicly issued their support for the UMC. You can read their statement [here](#).

8. *How will a Discernment process distract us from the Vision of St. Luke's UMC?*

A formal discernment process would involve, at least, town hall meetings, informational sessions with Sunday school groups and small groups, speakers representing multiple perspectives about the current situation in the UMC, and a church conference with a resolution to disaffiliate from the UMC that would have to be ratified by a 2/3 majority of professing members who are present and voting at the church conference. The discernment would consume the time and attention of our clergy, lay staff, and our lay leadership, and incur monetary expenses like additional media and housekeeping services to support the many extra meetings at our campuses. Churches that have chosen discernment have experienced email and letter campaigns dividing a church into camps. Further, the discernment process would undoubtedly distract our congregation from our vision of a city transformed by the love of Jesus.

9. *And how will our church vote on this in the years to come? Are the pastors making the decision without members' church wide vote?*

It's unclear when, if ever, St. Luke's must take a vote on allowing same-sex marriage. A vote at the level of the local church could only happen if the General Conference of the UMC enables a change to our *Book of Discipline* that would permit same-sex weddings in our churches and clergy to perform same-sex weddings. To date, General Conference has not done so, and it's impossible to know when, if ever, such a change would occur. If General Conference votes to permit same-sex weddings in our churches and clergy to perform same-sex weddings, then St. Luke's would have the option to allow same-sex weddings on our campuses or not. The pastors cannot make this decision for the church. No one can force St. Luke's to conduct same-sex weddings. No one can force our clergy to conduct same-sex weddings. Our church and our clergy have always had the right to decline to officiate any wedding.

10. *If a church had a more progressive view, would they stay or would they go?*

Some churches will choose to stay, and others will choose to go, depending on what changes come in the years ahead. Currently, many are staying in the United Methodist Church.

11. *If the conference went more traditional, why would a progressive church mindset stay?*

Annual Conferences may not separate from the UMC in entirety. The decision to disaffiliate from the UMC is a decision that individual members and clergy may make or local churches may make under Paragraph 2553 of the *Book of Discipline*.

12. *What is our church? From Tom's earlier personal statement, I thought I understood that he (and therefore our church) is more on the progressive side? (If that is the simplified way of saying that we'd lean towards accepting gay marriage and ordination of gay ministers).*

St. Luke's upholds the *Discipline* of the UMC. The current *Discipline* does not permit same-sex weddings in UMC churches, our clergy to officiate at same-sex weddings, or the ordination of non-celibate homosexual persons. Our clergy have agreed to uphold the *Discipline*. While several of our clergy, including Dr. Pace, disagree with the official UMC stance, that does not mean St. Luke's takes the stance of our clergy. As a congregation of the UMC, St. Luke's takes the stance of the UMC. Our clergy are allowed to disagree with the stance of the UMC, just like our members are allowed to disagree with that stance, so long as disagreement does not lead to deliberate defiance of the *Discipline*. St. Luke's is not a "progressive" church or a "traditional" church. St. Luke's is a United Methodist church that welcomes and accepts persons of diverse theological perspectives.

13. *What does it mean to say the pastors stay UMC?*

If St. Luke's enters a discernment process, and if at the end St. Luke's decides to disaffiliate from the UMC, our clergy have said they will remain in the UMC. That means they would be appointed to other UMC churches and St. Luke's would search for new pastors.

14. *It's my understanding that the Global Methodist Church formed in May of this year and it was sort of an outgrowth of the Wesleyan Covenant Group. Is this accurate? Thanks!*

Correct. The GMC launched as a denomination on May 1, 2022. The GMC was formed by the Wesleyan Covenant Association, a caucus group within the UMC.

15. *Under the Book of Discipline, is it necessary that the United Methodist Church be one international body rather than separate subgroups for continents — North America, Africa, Asia, and South America? So that the cultures of different continents can be recognized and respected*

The United Methodist Church is the largest worldwide Protestant denomination. It is necessary per the *Book of Discipline* that United Methodists around the world remain in connection; that is, we agree on and live by the essentials of what it means to be a United Methodist according to the *Discipline*. The UMC outside of the United States is already allowed to adapt sections of the *Discipline* for their local context. Essentially, all of the *Discipline* that governs matters of the local church and clergy credentialing may be adapted for contexts outside the United States, for the simple reason that doing ministry is different in Africa than it is in the Philippines than it is in the United States. The UMC in the United States is currently not allowed to adapt parts of the *Disciplines*. However, there are proposals to the General Conference that would restructure the UMC and allow for adaptation of the *Discipline* in the United States, yet it's not clear if or when those proposals would be ratified.

16. *How did the process work to allow the ordination of women?*

The UMC has been ordaining women since 1956. Technically, it was The Methodist Church that began ordaining women in 1956, since the UMC was formed later in 1968. The process was different because it was the General Conference that ratified changes to our *Discipline* that authorized the ordination of women. Local churches could not decide whether or not to ordain women: it had to be General Conference, the one body in the UMC that can speak for the entirety of the UMC. In the current situation, the General Conference has not adjusted the *Discipline* to reflect a change in stance on human sexuality. If our church council elects to enter a discernment process, we would be discerning whether or not to disaffiliate from the UMC as a local church. It would be a local church decision.

17. *How was Church Council chosen?*

The St. Luke's Church Council is voted on by the Church Conference. In the Fall, the Lay Leadership Committee accepts nominations for the Church Council. People can nominate those they feel are well suited for the role and/or self-nominate. The Lay Leadership Committee prepares the governance slate which is then presented to the Church Conference for approval.

18. *What is the threshold for the council meeting vote to enter the discernment process? Is it also 67%?*

The Church Council vote will have a threshold of 50% + 1.

19. *How can you ask people to give millions of dollars to our capital campaign when we might have to leave this Church and not get to enjoy it.*

Any concerns any member has about commitments made to the campaign can be discussed with the Finance office and can be changed if necessary.

20. *Why are we discussing only homosexuality as sexual sin, when there are others such as adultery and remarriage after divorce that are in the Bible?*

We do not accept sin. The United Methodist Church reached consensus on whether remarriage after divorce is biblical, and adultery continues to be understood as breaking the covenant of marriage. Whether monogamous homosexual marriage is prohibited by Scripture remains an issue about which beliefs among church members and even within families differ. Our hope is that even if we have differences of opinion on this topic we can still be in community together and love one another.

21. *So by choosing to stay with UMC they believe homosexual clergy and marriage are ok? Am I understanding correctly?*

No. Today, UMC pastors may not be self-avowed, practicing homosexuals and may not conduct ceremonies that celebrate same-sex weddings or unions.

22. *What is the United Methodist stance on divorce?*

The United Methodist position is found in Paragraph 161.d of the Discipline of the UMC. It reads, in part, "When a married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel, divorce is a regrettable alternative in the midst of brokenness. [...] Divorce does not preclude a new marriage. We encourage an intentional commitment of the Church and society to minister compassionately to those

in the process of divorce, as well as members of divorced and remarried families, in a community of faith where God's grace is shared by all."

23. *When was female ordination accepted, and what was the pushback like at St. Luke's? Is this comparable?*

In 1956, the United Methodist Church approved ordination of women. Some believe this is a comparable situation, while others do not. St. Luke's has, over the years, had many women serve as beloved clergy.

24. *UMC sounds like they support gay marriage and gay clergy. How does scripture support this?*

The United Methodist Church does not allow same-sex marriage, or self-avowed homosexual persons to be ordained. If you would like more conversation about what Scripture says about homosexuality, you can read more [here](#).

25. *Confirming - this consideration of the issue of discernment now by our church council — applies to our denomination's current situation. As situations change in the future with the denomination, we expect to have opportunities to address the situation at that time. Is the October meeting premature given that the UMC hasn't voted yet on the issue?*

While the current paragraph in the Discipline allowing churches to exit the denomination expires at the end of 2023, it is possible that it will be extended at General Conference in 2024.

26. *What have the conservative churches that have left done? Have they become stand alone or joined other denominations?*

Many have joined other denominations, while many of the larger churches have remained independent.

27. *Aside from ordination and homosexual marriage, does the church have a position on fluidity of gender?*

The Discipline mentions gender identity only one time, as part of the social principles on equal rights for all in Paragraph 162: "Because all people are of sacred worth and certain basic human rights are due to everyone, we are committed to supporting the equal rights, liberties, and protections of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity."