

# Q&A

## **Answering Questions About The United Methodist Church** *The Future of The Church*

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### **Q Is The United Methodist Church splitting at this time?**

**A** 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 2019 General Conference did create a limited-time agreement for churches to leave 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.” Annual Conference Boards of Trustees, in alignment with that Book of Discipline paragraph, are facilitating that process.

At the same time, some former United Methodist leaders have created a new denomination. The leaders of that denomination are encouraging traditionalist clergy and United Methodist congregations to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and join their denomination.

Some churches that disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church in this season will join that new denomination, others have indicated that they will be independent churches, and some will join other pan-Methodist denominations.

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### **Q Are traditionalists being asked to leave the denomination?**

**A** No. No one is being asked to leave The United Methodist Church. All United Methodists (members, clergy, congregations) regardless of what label may be used to describe them (and recognizing no label is adequate) are welcome in The United Methodist Church. Our diversity is essential to our mission and ministry.

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### **Q Does each church have to vote?**

**A** No. No church is required to vote or required to consider voting to disaffiliate.

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### **Q Why would a church choose to leave The United Methodist Church?**

**A** If the vast majority of members, for matters of conscience, no longer wish to be United Methodist, this is a moment in time when there is a specific path to disaffiliate. While the decision is contextual, the exact language is that churches may leave: “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.”

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### **Q Has the Book of Discipline changed regarding LGBTQ inclusion?**

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**A** No. The policies of The United Methodist Church are set by the General Conference. The General Conference is the only body that can change them.

### **Q Why would a church not consider disaffiliation?**

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**A** There are many reasons a church would not consider disaffiliating from The United Methodist Church. Among them are:

- The United Methodist Church and her predecessors have been home since the beginning of most every local congregation. There are deep and trusted ties of The United Methodist connection. For example, when disaster struck a North Georgia community, GEMA reached out to the North Georgia Conference. Twenty-five teams from the North Georgia Conference responded. An active layperson sat on the recovery board. Three area UM churches became centers of the response. This is just one example of how the United Methodist connection shines.
- The United Methodist Church makes a difference locally, regionally, and globally. Together we do more than we could do alone. From how we practice stewardship to camp ministry to communion, the connection is at the core of what it means to be The United Methodist Church.
- The United Methodist Church is a force for global health, the education and welfare of children, care of the environment, and disaster relief. Because of our long commitment to missions, and because of the collaborative partnerships we have nurtured over decades, we are able to provide services that impact lives on just about every continent.
- The United Methodist Church provides diversity of understandings that is needed for true Christian maturity. No church needs to be comprised of persons who all agree and think alike. We are stretched, challenged, and given opportunities for sanctification through differences in understandings and thoughts.
- The Cross and Flame are recognizable all over the world as the sign of a people and partners who offer the love and compassion of Christ through tangible ministries.
- A decision to disaffiliate from one's denomination is of such magnitude that it should not be made without extreme cause, in haste, under pressure, or out of fear of an unknown future. There has always been and will always be a way to leave the denomination for those who wish to do so.
- In this season, churches are concentrating their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness on mission and ministry. Taking a vote and then following through on the disaffiliation would be a distraction for some from "the main thing."
- In 2024, the North Georgia Conference will see the fruits of our Conference's values and areas of focus, fruits of the Barnes Fund's faithful, sustainable investment in ministry innovations, and more. Why would a local church want to miss such?

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### **Q What is expected to happen at the next General Conference?**

**A** The 2020 General Conference has been twice delayed and is now set for May 2024. Hundreds of pieces of legislation on all topics relevant to the church and our world are before the United Methodist General Conference for consideration.

### **Q Will the UMC drop all prohibitions related to human sexuality?**

**A** There were legislative submissions in 2020 from both traditionalist and progressive members which would have altered the Book of Discipline on issues of human sexuality. A range of legislation on this topic will also be before the 2024 General Conference. It is hard to speculate on whether the Book of Discipline will change, and if so, how it will change.

### **Q Will General Conference require clergy and clergy candidates to agree to offer same-sex weddings as a condition of candidacy, status, or appointment?**

**A** There are no proposals before the next General Conference to do so, nor have there ever been such proposals.

The United Methodist Church only has two sacraments: baptism and communion. No clergy person is compelled or required to perform any wedding and local church trustees oversee the wedding policy of the local church.

### **Q Will the Bishop and Cabinet uphold the Book of Discipline?**

**A** Yes. We are currently operating under the 2016/2019 Book of Discipline and will until another session of the General Conference.

### **Q What is my role in the future of The UMC?**

**A** The UMC is YOU! There is dispersed power and responsibility in The United Methodist Church. The Annual Conference session has an equal number of lay and clergy members, representing every UMC in the Conference, all with vote. There is an open and thorough nominations process for volunteer leadership roles on conference boards, committees, and commissions. If you feel called to a ministry area there is very likely a training opportunity available, including Disaster Response training, FreshExpressions Vision Days, children's ministry network, and much more.

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### **Q I'd like to read some good news about The United Methodist Church.**

**A** There is enough good news to fill a book! At Annual Conference 2022, we adopted 5 Areas of Focus to guide us the next few years:

- Scriptural Literacy and Imagination
- Health and Wellbeing
- Community Engagement
- Racial Justice and Healing
- New Faith Opportunities and Communities

We came out of Annual Conference 2022 with momentum and enthusiasm! (Watch a wrap-up video and read the written report at [www.ngumc.org/AC2022](http://www.ngumc.org/AC2022))

We are a connectional church, so no congregation stands alone. This summer, churches were busy welcoming new pastors (including the 40 clergy who were licensed, commissioned, or ordained this year), feeding the hungry, traveling for mission trips, hosting Vacation Bible Schools, and more.

We've celebrated some big news: This year we have already invested more than \$1 million through the Barnes Fund Grant in innovative or transformative mission and ministry in North Georgia. We celebrate having donated more than \$800,000 to the Emory Eye Care Center for urgent and important procedures that, left untreated, would result in blindness in people without the financial means to afford the procedures.

Read stories of United Methodists like you in action at [www.ngumc.org/beingUMC](http://www.ngumc.org/beingUMC).

### **Q What are trusted sources if I'd like to stay informed.**

**A** Primary sources are always an excellent starting point.

- Cokesbury offers a free digital copy of the Book of Discipline or you can order a print copy from Cokesbury. Visit [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com).
- Visit [www.ngumc.org](http://www.ngumc.org) regularly and subscribe to e-newsletters at [www.ngumc.org/subscribe](http://www.ngumc.org/subscribe).
- Find information on the General Conference at [www.ngumc.org/GC2020](http://www.ngumc.org/GC2020).
- Find information on the Disaffiliation Process at [www.ngumc.org/disaffiliation-process-and-information](http://www.ngumc.org/disaffiliation-process-and-information).
- The Annual Conference Journal is our historic and guiding document, Find it at [www.ngumc.org/journal](http://www.ngumc.org/journal).
- North Georgia Conference News and information is shared steadily at [www.ngumc.org/news](http://www.ngumc.org/news).
- If you receive information that you'd like to verify, reach out to your District Superintendent.

#### **Sources for this document:**

Produced by the North Georgia Conference Communications Office. Answers were adapted from The United Methodist Church State of the Church Report, "Ask the UMC" at [www.UMC.org](http://www.UMC.org), [www.NGUMC.org](http://www.NGUMC.org), [www.NGUMC.org/BeUMC](http://www.NGUMC.org/BeUMC), [www.UMC.org/BeUMC](http://www.UMC.org/BeUMC), and quoted from the 2016 Book of Discipline.