

Navigation Team Questions and Answers Information Document

Q: How is FUMC connected to the larger United Methodist Church for decision making and voting based on the 2016 Book of Discipline?

A: **General Conference** – The top policy making session for the global-wide United Methodist Church which meets every four years resulting in the updating and publishing of the United Methodist Book of Discipline. The latest edition was published in 2016. Note: The General Conference did not meet in 2020 due to the world-wide COVID pandemic and has been delayed until 2024.

Annual Conference – This session meets annually, usually in May as the Susquehanna Annual Conference where assigned bishops, clergy, and two lay members from each of the 926 local churches gather to conduct business. Currently there are two temporary bishops assigned to our Conference, Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball from the West Virginia Conference and Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi from the Northeast Conference.

Charge Conference – Within the pastoral charge the basic unit in the connectional system of the United Methodist Church is the Charge Conference. Membership shall be all members of the Church Council and the Pastor(s). It shall meet annually as called by the District Superintendent to conduct business.

Church Conference – Local churches may convene annually or by need as a Church Conference extending a vote to the Church Council, Pastor(s), and all Church Members present. This conference shall be authorized and conducted by the District Superintendent or a designated representative. Notice of said meeting shall be made 10 days in advance.

Note: This year District Superintendent Rev. Catherine Boileau has called a joint session with the five churches in the Hanover Cluster starting at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 11, 2022.

Q: What does the current 2016 Book of Discipline say about human sexuality?

A: At the present time based on the latest 2016 Book of discipline United Methodists are to accept and love all people who want to worship with us and join us in membership. United Methodist pastors are not allowed to marry anyone other than a man and woman and practicing homosexuals are not allowed to be ordained.

Note: During the last several years there have been UMC pastors who have married same sex couples and practicing homosexuals who have been ordained. However, Methodist Bishops have allowed this to happen in some Annual Conferences nation-wide with no accountability to the Book of Discipline.

Q: Why now is there so much separation between the progressives and traditionalist within the United Methodist Church?

A: Over the years there has been dissent in the Methodist Church causing division and often separation. For example, in 1864 when First Church was being dedicated the corner stone reads "First Methodist Episcopal Church". Slavery issues at that time period caused the split between the Methodist Episcopal Church North and the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Then in 1939 the two denominations merged as The Methodist Church. In 1968 the church was renamed First United Methodist Church as a result of the union of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church. Although we at the local church level did not perceive any problems, there have been some disagreements since that union based on human sexuality and other theological issues.

Since the General Conference in 2016 an ad hoc group of a broad range of United Methodist leaders met in 2019 to formulate a plan of amicable separation called a Protocol of Grace and Reconciliation through Separation. At that time the world-wide UMC had a majority of traditionalist members and the progressives were in the minority. However, their plan recommended that the traditionalists must separate and that the progressives will continue on as the United Methodist Church. Now after the global pandemic and three General Conference postponements later the Protocol seems to be "dead". The next General Conference will not be held until 2024 and the future direction of the United Methodist Church is unknown.

Therefore, some churches are exploring the "possibility of disaffiliation" from the United Methodist Church based on Article 2553 that was approved in 2019 allowing local churches to leave the world-wide church.

Q: What are the details in Article 2553 “Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality”?

A: Copies of the article are available from the Navigation Team, but the following synopsis gives the highlights important to First Church:

1. Time Limit: The provisions of 2553 expire on **December 31, 2023** and shall not be used after that date.
2. Decision Making Process: The decision to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3 or 67%) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the Church Conference.
3. Apportionments: The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as additional 12 months of apportionments. (Current estimate is \$148,282).
4. Property: The local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property. [Note: Based on the Trust Clause in the Book of Discipline all local church buildings and properties belong to the connexional Conference]. Based on the Susquehanna Conference “current mandate” the cost of releasing property from the Trust Clause shall be 1% of the real estate value of the church building, parsonage, Walnut Street house, parking lots and playground. (Current estimate is \$37,200).
5. Pension Liabilities: The local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. (Current estimate is \$149,000).
6. Other Liabilities:
 - a. Property & Casualty Insurance Premium: (Current estimate is \$12,500).
 - b. Health Insurance Payments: (Current estimate is \$3,950)
 - c. Church Auto Insurance: (Current estimate is \$100).
 - d. Potential Attorney Fees: (Current estimate is \$25,000).
7. Payment Terms: Payment shall occur prior to the effective date of departure. (Current total estimated cost is \$376,032).

Q: What is the timeline should any local church in the Susquehanna Conference choose to disaffiliate?

A: The timeline is as follows:

1. Church leadership (Navigation Team) in consultation with the pastor contacts the District Superintendent. The DS contacts a member of the disaffiliation team who has responsibility for assuring the process is followed.

Note: Done

2. The first meeting is held with only the elected Church Council, the DS and member of the Conference disaffiliation team. That meeting is held to explain the process and outline the requirements and steps for disaffiliation.

Note: Completed on 10/16/2022 with DS Rev. Cathy Boileau and Conf. Rep. Rev. Kathy Kind.

3. Navigation Team starts discussions with the congregation about the pros and cons of disaffiliation. Leadership is expected to clearly articulate the requirements including issues with the Trust Clause.

Note: This information may be shared with suggested videos, town hall style meetings, reference literature & books, letters, and/or e-mail blasts.

4. After the Navigation Team has held meetings with church members and there is a significant number of members that want to disaffiliate, they inform the District Superintendent, requesting a Church Conference. At that Conference only members who are present may have a voice and vote. There will be an opportunity to ask questions before voting. There is a process to ensure that only members may vote. For the disaffiliation process to be approved there must be a 2/3 or 67% YES vote.

5. If there is a majority YES vote, then the Navigation Team works with an attorney to solve legal issues of deed transfers, church name change, removal of all United Methodist signage, etc. to complete the agreement. At this time, March 31, 2023 is the deadline.

6. It is the Conference Board of Trustees who makes the motion to the Session of Annual Conference for the church to disaffiliate. They make the motion after the Disaffiliation Agreement is complete. This motion must be printed in the Annual Conference Agenda Booklet prior to the May meeting.
7. Disaffiliation of the church is not complete until it is voted on at the Annual Conference. The 2023 Annual Conference is scheduled for May 18-20 in Williamsport, PA. Therefore, any church that wants to disaffiliate may not complete the process until the vote is approved at Annual Conference.
8. The Pastor's decision regarding disaffiliation or staying with the UMC is completely separate from the local church's decision.