



Many of you are aware of the strife within the UMC since the last General Conference in 2019. We offer the following recap of the events that have led to the current conflict, and an update on FUMC's perspective.

Prior to the specially called 2019 General Conference, the denomination commissioned a task force to create a path forward for the church around the issue of human sexuality. The commission recommended the "One Church Plan" which would allow congregations to choose how they would live out their theology on ordination and same gender weddings. The plan was rejected by General Conference voters. Instead, the "Traditional Plan" passed by a very narrow margin. The Traditional Plan retained the prohibitions on ordination and same gender weddings while adding severe consequences for clergy and churches that did not follow the rules. A second proposal was passed that gave churches an option to disaffiliate from the United Methodist denomination if they did not believe they could live under the Traditional Plan.

The General Conference was to meet again in 2020 and a proposal was created called the "Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation." It would allow Traditionalists to start their own denomination that churches could join without following the disaffiliation requirements adopted in 2019. COVID postponed the 2020 General Conference and again in 2021. When the 2022 Conference was postponed, a group of traditional churches and pastors decided they were done waiting and launched the Global Methodist Church on May 1, 2022.

With the launch of the new Global Methodist Church, some churches across the U.S. have used the disaffiliation process passed in 2019 to vote to leave the United Methodist Church. A 2/3 majority vote in favor of disaffiliation is required of a congregation. As of now in the Mountain Sky Conference, 41 churches have begun the disaffiliation process (or just under 10%). While the process is still underway, clergy and lay delegates will vote on these disaffiliations during the 2023 Mountain Sky Annual Conference. (Disaffiliation must be approved by a church's annual conference).

UMC churches are not required to vote. Only if a church desires disaffiliation from the UMC is a vote necessary. In April, FUMC's Church Council discussed whether to vote and decided that a vote is unnecessary at this time, unless the results of General Conference in 2024 suggests a need for a vote. Council's decision was done thoughtfully, based on a number of factors.

1. The Global Methodist Church's primary issue with the UMC is the inclusion of LGBTQ individuals in the life of the church. This has been a hot button issue in the UMC for 50 years. FUMC's Church Council was in unanimous agreement that FUMC welcomes *everyone* seeking a spiritual home into the life of our church.

2. The bar for disaffiliation is very high. In addition to the 2/3rds majority of the entire congregation's membership, the financial cost is prohibitive. It includes two years of apportionment payments, plus an amount set by the conference for unfunded liability on clergy retirement benefits, and an amount that begins at 45% of the church's annual budget.
3. Votes always lead to winners and losers. Unless there is a clear and overwhelming majority of members who express a desire to disaffiliate from the UMC (which isn't the case at FUMC) then voting ends up causing deep wounds, regardless of which side of the theological issue one falls. John Wesley's first rule is "Do no harm." Taking a vote on disaffiliation has a strong potential to cause great harm in our congregation.
4. Currently, General Conference is scheduled for April 23-May 3, 2024. More information will come out of this conference, and there could be some unknown impact on decisions we might need to make.

The Church Council's decision not to take a vote does not mean that the conversation is closed. We want to have an opportunity to be in conversation in healthy ways, to share updates and to speak and listen to one another as we determine how FUMC will move forward in light of the results of GC2024 and unfolding decisions by the Mountain Sky Conference. This is the goal and priority of your FUMC pastors and church leadership.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Leslie
Senior Pastor

Rev. Lee
Associate Pastor

Judy Stout
Church Council Chair