

Aldersgate UMC, Nixa

FAQs of Disaffiliation

With Glossary of Terms

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.

-- John Wesley, Evangelist and founding father of the revival movement that became known as Methodism

Assembled by Lead Pastor Dennis Miller
and Executive Pastor Sarah Fotopulos

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We compiled this information to be transparent about our concerns regarding the United Methodist Church's failure to hold fast to the orthodox faith as revealed in Scripture and why we feel we must disaffiliate now before the option to do so and retain our property expires. While no document can answer every question that might arise, it is our hope no one feels uninformed. As always, we remain available to answer questions and welcome the opportunity to speak with you further.

All items marked with * are explained in the Glossary (p 13-15).

--Lead Pastor Dennis Miller and Executive Pastor Sarah Fotopulos

What does it mean to be a United Methodist Church?

- The Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Church united in 1968 to form The United Methodist denomination.
- UMC churches are supposed to:
 1. Uphold and abide by the doctrine and polity of the UMC as articulated in the *Book of Discipline**. The sad reality is that while the following statements are foundational to the Christian faith, many UM pastors, Bishops,* Annual Conferences,* and Jurisdictional Conferences* are either not enforcing these doctrinal standards or are acting in open defiance of them.
 - a. "United Methodists profess the historic Christian faith in God, incarnate in Jesus Christ for our salvation and ever at work in human history in the Holy Spirit." *Book of Discipline* 2016, ¶102 Section 1, p. 47.
 - b. "We share with many Christian communions a recognition of the authority of Scripture in matters of faith, the confession that our justification as sinners is by grace through faith, and the sober realization that the church is in need of continual reformation and renewal." *Book of Discipline* 2016, p. 50.
 - c. "Our Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith contain the essential doctrines of the 'historic

Christian faith in God' as practiced by United Methodists." *Book of Discipline* 2016, ¶104, p. 65-77.

- d. "The Constitution of The United Methodist Church, in its Restrictive Rules (see ¶¶ 17-22), protects both the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith as doctrinal standards that shall not be revoked, altered, or changed." *Book of Discipline* 2016, Section III, ¶18, p.31.
2. Pay apportionments* to their Annual Conference* each year.
3. Receive their pastor(s) through appointment*.
4. Hold their property in trust to benefit the Annual Conference* of which they are a part.
5. Meet annually with the district superintendent* to conduct the business of the church.

Why do we need to disaffiliate (withdraw) now from the United Methodist Church?

- The current denominational systems to which we are bound are increasingly dysfunctional and oppressive to those who hold orthodox beliefs and values as stated in our *Book of Discipline*,* namely the authority and power of Scripture to restore in us an undistorted image of God through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit through sanctification. The further the UMC wanders from orthodoxy, the more the dysfunction and oppression increase.
- The unrelenting push for full inclusion of all sexual identities and preferences is causing conflict and uncertainty about changes in UMC doctrine. These conflicts have turned the church's attention away from our mission, to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
- A serious divide has been present in the denomination from the beginning and is growing ever wider between United Methodists who hold to the historic Christian faith as expressed in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the UMC Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith and those who hold and teach

beliefs contrary to the foundations of that faith including teaching that the virgin birth is a myth, Jesus was not physically resurrected,¹ Jesus is not the only way to God's salvation,² Jesus was/is not God but in need of conversion,³ and God is queer, fluid, and ever-becoming.⁴ This divide will only continue to widen as more and more pastors, Bishops*, Annual Conferences*, and Jurisdictional Conferences* refuse to abide by or enforce the *Book of Discipline*.

- Retired Bishop Mike Lowry cited his allegiance to Jesus above all else, the failure of the UMC to uphold the *Book of Discipline*, and “the ongoing argument over just what constitutes the theological and moral foundations of contemporary Methodism” among his reasons for resigning from the College of Bishops and severing his relationship with the UMC to join the recently launched Global Methodist Church, an orthodox expression of Wesleyan Christianity.⁵
- A growing number of United Methodist seminaries are promoting Unitarian Universalism* and thus graduating future pastors who hold beliefs contrary to established UMC doctrine.⁶

¹ See “Methodist Bishop Cleared of Heresy,” at <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2003-02-19-0302190091-story.html>.

² “UM Bishop Denounces Christian Beliefs as Idolatrous,” <https://theird.org/wp-content/uploads/2002-04-UMA-Dec.pdf>

³ Bishop Karen Oliveto, August 19, 2017, Facebook post from Yellowstone Conference UMC. Screenshots available at <https://juicyecumenism.com/2017/09/15/lesbian-Bishop-oliveto-warns-not-create-idol-jesus-says-bigotries-prejudices-updated/>

⁴ “Duke Divinity School holds worship service to ‘the great queer one,’” <https://www.thecollegefix.com/duke-divinity-school-holds-worship-service-to-the-great-queer-one/>

⁵ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/retired-Bishop-leaves-umc-for-new-conservative-church.html>

⁶ <https://juicyecumenism.com/2022/07/12/united-methodist-seminaries-promote-unitarian-universalism/>

What is disaffiliation?

- Disaffiliation is the process of withdrawing from the United Methodist denomination. A vote by a 2/3 majority of professing members* present at a duly called Church Conference* is required to approve disaffiliation.
- Disaffiliation isn't a new phenomenon. In the early 1970s, some Evangelical United Brethren churches felt they had made a mistake in joining the UMC and asked to disaffiliate due to theological incompatibility. They were able to do so without punitive measures.⁷
- Disaffiliation is currently an option but only for a limited time due to the addition of ¶ 2553 to the *Book of Discipline* by the 2019 General Conference that affirmed and upheld the orthodox doctrine as stated in the 2016 *Book of Discipline*.
 1. This provision was added to allow churches who object to the current doctrinal standards to leave the UMC denomination.
 2. With the failure to hold a General Conference* in 2020, 2021, or 2022 that could have approved a formal process of denominational separation, churches who affirm and uphold the current doctrine are now using this provision to exit the denomination ahead of expected changes in doctrine at the 2024 Annual Conference.
 3. ¶ 2553 expires 12/31/2023. The future creation of another provision to allow churches to exit the denomination is uncertain.
 4. Provisions include payment of "any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionments."⁸

⁷ Timothy Tennant, President of Asbury Theological Seminary at timothytennant.com, September 21, 2022.

⁸ 2016 *Book of Discipline* ¶ 2553 4b.

5. However, “Annual Conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.”⁹

What will happen if we disaffiliate?

- We will be free from a denominational system that refuses to abide by its own rules and standards.
- We will continue to hold to the historic Christian faith as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the UMC Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith.
- We will continue in our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ without this distraction.
- We will continue to be the same warm-hearted church operating by the same biblical standards.
 1. We will continue to reach out with the love of Christ in service to our community and world.
 2. We will continue to worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our services.
 3. We will continue our Wesleyan biblical teaching and preaching.
 4. We will continue to support and serve in cooperation with other local charitable organizations such as Least of These, Abundant Blessings, and the Pregnancy Care Center.
 5. We will continue partnering with local schools to serve students, faculty, and staff as allowed by the school system.
 6. We will continue to live into our vision to be who we are in Christ to be Christ in the world.
 7. We will continue to welcome all with the love of Christ.

⁹ *Book of Discipline 2016* ¶ 2553 4a.

8. We will not immediately join another Methodist denomination but remain an independent Methodist church for a time to ensure we recover all costs of disaffiliation. We will together prayerfully consider our options in the future.
- Your pastors will remain your pastors, resign from their affiliation with the UMC as of the effective date of disaffiliation, and continue to serve Aldersgate as pastors licensed by the authority of the Church Council*.
 - We will continue the process begun earlier this year by direction of the Church Council* to obtain our own 501(c)3 designation so we can continue to receive tithes and offerings as a tax-exempt charitable organization after the disaffiliation.
 - We will go through the legal processes necessary to change our name to Aldersgate Church and remove the Trust Clause* from our property deeds when the disaffiliation takes effect. Minimal cost is expected for these processes.
 - We do not plan to sue our Annual Conference, but to use the provision provided in ¶ 2553 and the process established by our Annual Conference* in good faith. For that reason, we have not retained legal counsel. Attorneys in our membership may be asked to help with legal filings such as those mentioned above.
 - We will continue to follow the process outlined in *Book of Discipline* ¶ 2553 to complete the disaffiliation, including filing all necessary documents with the MO Annual Conference to be added to the agenda for the 2023 Annual Conference in June so the Conference can vote to approve our disaffiliation. We are not officially disaffiliated until that vote is taken, the effective date is established, and payment is made to the Annual Conference.
 - We will pay a fee to the MO Annual Conference to release our property and assets to our ownership.

1. The negotiated amount due to the Annual Conference:

a. Unfunded Pension Liability*	\$221,404
b. 2022 and '23 Apportionments	\$187,754
c. minus 2022 payments ytd	(\$ 86,054)
d. Total	\$323,104

2. This amount will be further reduced by apportionment payments made in Dec 2022 and Jan-Jun 2023.
3. This amount may be further reduced when the MO Conference recalculates pension liability in April 2023.
4. We do have funds in an interest-bearing account to cover the negotiated amount. These funds include:
 - a. \$100,000 in an emergency fund
 - b. Designated funds
 - c. The Legacy Fund
5. After borrowing these funds to pay for our disaffiliation, we will repay ourselves by directing funds formerly used to pay apportionments back into these designated funds.

What will happen if we don't disaffiliate?

- We will continue to operate as a UMC church bound by the current and future denominational systems.
- As a UMC church, we will:
 1. Uphold and abide by the doctrine and polity of the UMC as articulated in *the Book of Discipline** in effect now and any future editions reflecting changes in doctrine or polity as determined by General Conferences.
 2. Be bound by the practices allowed and disallowed by our current bishop and any future bishops regardless of what is stated in the *Book of Discipline*.*
 3. Pay annual apportionments* to our Annual Conference*, currently in the amount of \$93,877.
 4. Receive our pastor(s) through annual appointment* as determined by the current or future bishop at his/her discretion.
 5. Hold our property in trust to benefit the Annual Conference* of which we are a part.
 6. Meet annually with the District Superintendent* to conduct the business of the church.

Pastoral Items of Concern

- Increasing numbers of UMC pastors, bishops*, Annual Conferences*, and Jurisdictional Conferences* refuse to abide by *The Book of Discipline*, the definitive statement of faith and practice for our denomination with no repercussions.¹⁰ This includes pastors in our Missouri Conference, some of whom are influential pastors of large churches.
- With no penalties for pastors, bishops*, Annual Conferences*, or Jurisdictional Conferences* that violate or openly defy the *Book of Discipline*, we lose the scriptural foundation of our faith and the steady guiding hand for our denomination in the face of challenges to our established orthodox doctrine.
- It is the experience of your pastors at the latest gathering of the MO Annual Conference and in smaller, local closed clergy gatherings that the atmosphere is increasingly hostile to orthodox pastors who are obviously the minority.
- The 2022 MO Annual Conference clergy session voted to approve a group of candidates to become provisional elders who only moments later issued a statement declaring their full support for a group of provisional elders in Florida who were denied ordination by the clergy of the 2022 Florida UMC Annual Conference. This group included two people who were in clear violation of the ordination standards in our *Book of Discipline* * Their statement received a nearly unanimous standing ovation on the floor of the MO Annual Conference clergy session. Our Bishop then stated he was glad we don't have that problem in Missouri.
- At their future ordination, this group of provisional elders will be asked if they have studied the doctrines of the UMC as spelled out in our *Book of Discipline*, believe our doctrines are in harmony with Scripture, and will preach and maintain them. After affirming all these things to be true, they will then join the ranks of many other ordained UMC pastors who took the same

¹⁰ Dr. Timothy Tennant, President of Asbury Theological Seminary at timothytennant.com, September 21, 2022.

ordination vows and are now acting in open defiance of our *Book of Discipline*.

- Florida bishop Kenneth Carter refused to allow the clergy to vote on each individual candidate so the candidates not in violation of the ordination standards could be approved. He later issued a statement in support of the two candidates in question showing his attitude toward our *Book of Discipline*. “We were presented with the option to choose grace or choose to live by our word of *Discipline*: one or the other.”¹¹
- A Western Pennsylvania pastor, who self-identifies as queer, wrote anonymously to a Pittsburgh paper and shared his vision for the full inclusion of queer pastors in the UMC. “I can openly talk about my wonderful wife because it’s socially acceptable. But when you’re married and also have a girlfriend, people see it as cheating and being unfaithful when it’s really about having two people who I love intimately in different ways.... Until the split happens, I fantasize about what my dream life looks like. I’d love nothing more than to have my house full with my wife, her partners, my girlfriend, and possibly a boyfriend if I met the right person. I would be ecstatic to come home from work and be greeted by all of them, then cook dinner and enjoy family time. I would adore the idea of having snuggles with all of them on the couch and watching a movie. I would love the chance to go out as a polycule and enjoy dinner, movies, and parks.”¹²
- Isaac Simmons, who preaches in drag as Ms. Penny Cost, in the opening line of his slam poetry poem entitled “The Bible is... Nothing,” states, “Look, the bible, the bible is nothing, nothing but poetry, pain, and performance. The bible is no more holy than Allen Ginsberg’s howls of life, no more peaceful than Oscar

¹¹ 2022 Florida Annual Conference summary, <https://www.flumc.org/newsdetail/conference-offers-apology-and-support-for-rejected-ministry-candidates-16523436>.

¹² “Being a queer pastor isn’t for the faint of heart: a first-person essay on bisexuality, polyamory, and acceptance,” by Anonymous, September 07, 2022, Pittsburgh City Paper, at <https://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/being-a-queer-pastor-isnt-for-the-faint-of-heart/Content?oid=22370650>

Wilde's "Requiescat" and Pache, no more stronger than Tammy f***ing Fay's g**d*** eyelash glue." ¹³

- Ms. Penny Cost is one of the featured speakers at a conference coming up at a St. Louis-area UMC church.
- These voices are a few examples of progressive denominational leaders and their growing influence and hopes for the direction of the post-separation UMC doctrine and practice.
- In speaking of the abandonment of Scripture as the basis of our doctrine and practice, a lay leader in an Ohio church that voted to disaffiliate commented, "'The United Methodist Church has probably done more globally than just about any other denomination there is,' said [Alvin] Talkington of Boyce Church. 'They do a lot of good, but this scriptural thing—they are just willing to tear it apart.'"¹⁴
- The New Testament is clear that false teaching is a serious matter. See:
 1. 2 Peter 2:1-10
 2. 1 Timothy 1:3-11
 3. 1 Timothy 6:3-5
 4. 2 Timothy 2:14-19
 5. 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
 6. 2 Corinthians 11:1-4
 7. Galatians 1:6-10
 8. Jude 3-4
 9. Rev 2:18-23

¹³ <https://www.mspennycost.com>

¹⁴ "Why Congregations Aren't Waiting to Leave the United Methodist Church," by Megan Fowler, Christianity Today, July 16, 2021, 06:00 AM.
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/july/umc-leave-church-methodist-split-lgbt-conference-protocol.html>

Sources for Additional Information

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Glossary of Terms

The United Methodist Church uses terms which may not be familiar, so we've provided a brief glossary of words and phrases to help. Information comes from *The Book of Discipline*.

Annual Conference - A geographic region that includes all United Methodist churches and ministries in that area. Representatives of each church and ministry meet annually to approve business, set budgets, and promote ministry programs. Clergy are elected to Conference membership by the Annual Conference. A bishop presides over each annual conference.

Appointment – The process of selecting, assigning, and sending a pastor to a church. The bishop sets appointments in consultation with the cabinet.

Apportionment - A portion of the annual conference budget each church must pay to support conference and global church ministries and administrative costs.

Bishop - Ordained Elders elected by lay and clergy delegates at a Jurisdictional Conference and consecrated to the office of bishop. Bishops preside over an Annual Conference and lead The United Methodist Church. They are authorized to "guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the church" and to "lead all persons entrusted to their oversight in worship, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in their *mission of witness and service in the world*."

Book of Discipline (BOD) – The foundation for the doctrine and polity of the UMC. It includes historical information, doctrinal standards, and rules for the organization and operation of each UMC church. General Conference, which meets every four years, is the only entity that can make changes to The Book of Discipline. New editions are printed following each General Conference to reflect decisions made by the General Conference. The current edition is the 2016 edition.

Cabinet – All the District Superintendents in an Annual Conference.

Charge Conference - A local church meeting that includes the elected leadership and clergy of the church. It meets at least once a year to review goals, elect new leaders, set clergy salaries, and recommend persons for candidacy. The District Superintendent fixes the date of

Charge Conference and leads it. Only elected church leaders vote at a Charge Conference.

Church Conference - Local church meeting where all full, professing members vote on a matter presented to the church. The BOD determines when a particular issue requires a Church Conference vote. Only full, professing members of the church may vote.

Church Council – Governing body of the local church made up of duly elected leaders consisting of the church council chairperson, lay leader, Staff-Parish Relations chairperson, finance committee chairperson, board of trustees chairperson, church treasurer, lay member to Annual Conference, United Methodist Men president, United Methodist Women president, young adult representative, United Methodist Youth representative, and the pastor(s).

District Superintendent (DS) - Ordained Elder assigned by the bishop to oversee and lead churches within a defined geographic area in an Annual Conference. They serve as extensions of the bishop's authority in all matters. The Missouri Annual Conference currently has five districts and seven District Superintendents.

General Conference (GC) - Main governing body for the UMC. It meets every four years (except in extreme circumstances like Covid19). It is made up of clergy and lay delegates from each annual conference across the world. GC is the only body authorized to speak on behalf of The United Methodist Church and establish or make any changes to The Book of Discipline.

Lay person - Full, professing member of a local church who is not ordained or licensed clergy.

Jurisdiction - Group of annual conferences within a geographical region in the United States. The US currently has five jurisdictions: Northeastern, Southeastern, North Central, South Central, and Western. Aldersgate is in the South Central Jurisdiction.

Jurisdictional Conference (JC) – Gathering of lay and clergy delegates from each Annual Conference in the jurisdiction. JC meets every four years after General Conference to elect new bishops and select members of general boards and agencies.

Missouri Annual Conference – Includes all UMC churches in the state of Missouri, including Aldersgate. Bishop Robert Farr presides over the MO Annual Conference.

Professing Members – “All baptized people who have come into membership by profession of faith through appropriate services of the baptismal covenant in the ritual or by transfer from other churches.”

Trust Clause - Statement included in the BOD and required on every church property deed declaring the property and assets of a local United Methodist Church are held by that church "in trust" for the United Methodist denomination. This means we do not own our property. We pay for it, maintain it and hold it "in trust" for the UMC.

Unfunded Pension Liability - Difference between the amount an annual conference has in cash assets to fund the pension of clergy before 1982 and any additional specific obligations any annual conference makes to clergy. Since 1982, clergy pensions have been deposited and administered directly through Wespath. If a local church leaves the UMC, they are required to pay their share of this liability since they will no longer be contributing to the unfunded pension reserves of the annual conference. Unfunded pension liability amounts are specific to each annual conference's situation and commitment to its clergy.

Unitarian Universalism – A philosophical system often referred to as a religion. “Unitarian Universalists are agnostic, theist, atheist, and everything in between.”¹⁵ According to their website, this also includes the practices of indigenous religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, humanism, Islam, Christianity, and Modern Paganism such as Wiccans, Druids, and practitioners of Goddess Spirituality.

Wespath - Wespath is the organization that administers the Health and Pension benefits of the UMC for all clergy. They determine the unfunded pension liability for each annual conference. However, “Once a pension withdrawal liability payment is made by the separating church to the annual conference, that payment similarly is not required by the *BOD* to be made to the pension trust.”¹⁶

¹⁵ “Existence of a Higher Power in Unitarian Universalism,” <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/higher-power>

¹⁶ “Wespath Contingencies for Potential UMC Restructure or Disruption,” updated June 15, 2022. Bulletin from Wespath to the General Conference. Pg. 15

