

Lexington United Methodist Church
Congregational Town Hall Meeting
SCUMC Local Church Discernment Process
“A Faithful Step Forward”
Information Session
November 19, 2023

A Faithful Step Forward Communications Committee

Created by the Church Council

Chair: Frank Seeby, as elected by Council

Voting Members: Maddie Connor, Angie Cunningham, Bob Graham, Pastor Mack McDowell, Susan Mitton, Lessie Polk, and Levy Rogers

Presenters: Lynn Brewer and Phil Gaines

SC Annual Conference Delivers a Process for Local Church Discernment: “A Faithful Step Forward”

Bishop Holston provided instructions:

“To ensure congregations are equipped to make decisions that enable them to best live into their disciple-making mission, South Carolina Conference leaders have adopted a process through which a local church can discern whether it will continue in ministry within The United Methodist Church or separate from the denomination.

The Local Church Discernment Process is designed to help local churches determine whether they can function as a United Methodist church if they firmly believe that the denomination has not consistently upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality. It will provide an opportunity for church members to engage in dialogue, to allow every voice in the congregation an opportunity to be heard, and to discern the congregation’s sentiment regarding separation.”

Communications Team Scope and Objectives

Scope:

For the Communications Team to provide information, after having it approved by Church Council, to the LUMC Congregation regarding the SC Conference “A Faithful Step Forward” process

Objective:

1. Provide clear, accurate, unbiased, objective & truthful information regarding the process
2. Maintain a cooperative spirit, open mind, and warm heart as we discuss emotional issues
3. Provide the “history” of how we got to this point in the life of the UMC
4. Provide the options to be discerned by the Lexington UMC membership. (This is only needed if Church Council determines that the membership should move into the discernment process to either separate or remain a United Methodist Church.)

The Guiding Principles for Today's Session

“Different biblical understanding can remain among us, but we can still be warm Christian friends. In fact, as we grow to better understand our differences, we can grow in our appreciation of one another.” (Taken from the “Disciple Bible Study” handbook)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, correcting and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. *2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NSRV)*

What Information Are We Covering Today?

1. United Methodist Church Structure – The Methodist Connection, Methodism 101
2. Current Book of Discipline Language
3. The United Methodist Church Split/Decades of Dissension
4. General Conferences Since 2016
5. Current Denomination Status – General Conference/ SC Annual Conference

What we are not covering?

An effort to sway anyone towards departing the UMC or remaining a member of the UMC.

What Are the Beliefs That Make Us Christians?

We state it every Sunday while reciting the Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;

the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

The One True God

The Virgin Birth

The Crucifixion

The Resurrection

The Trinity

The Methodist Connection: Structure and Decision Making

General Conference

Only global body that speaks for the UMC
600-1000 elected delegates equally divided among laity and clergy; Meets every 4 years, or for special sessions
Provides for judicial proceedings
Establishes boards and commissions

Jurisdictional Conference

Meets every 4 years in July - after General Conference
Elects and Assigns Bishops (40 currently)
Determines boundaries of annual conferences

Annual Conference

The conference is a regional body, an organizational unit & a yearly meeting
54 Conferences – Ours is the SC Annual Conference
Sets priorities and budgets for its region
Approves those to be ordained
Elects delegates to General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference

Districts

Supervision of churches in a regional area
The Columbia District includes 55 churches
District Superintendents provide leadership and assist with pastoral appointments

Local Church

Where laity hold membership
Elects at least one member to Annual Conference

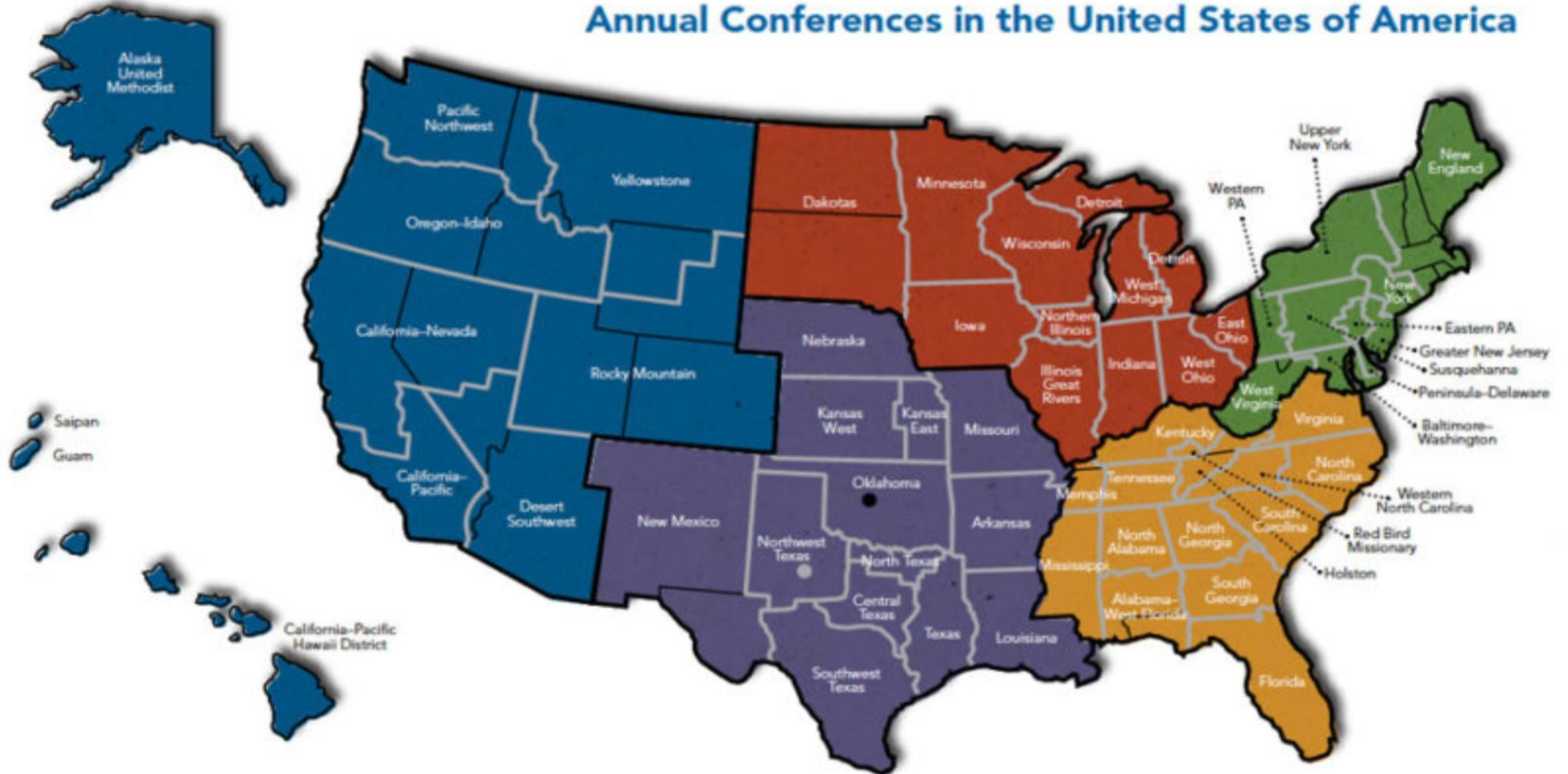
Judicial Council

Nine members elected by General Conference
Determines the constitutionality of General Conference actions
Reviews all bishops' decisions and final court of appeal

Council of Bishops

Includes all active and retired UMC Bishops
Provides oversight and vision of the whole church
May call a special session of General Conference

United Methodist Jurisdictions and Annual Conferences in the United States of America



Where Do We Find Methodist Governance and Doctrinal Standards?

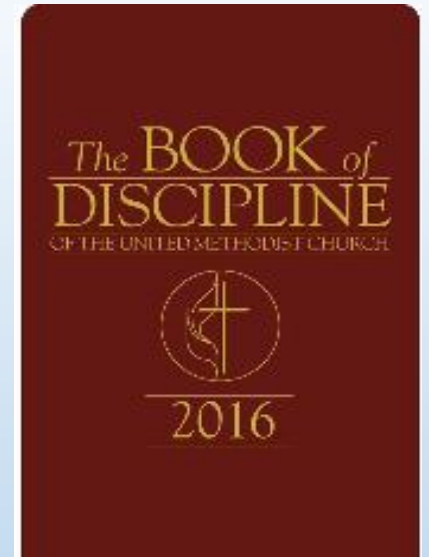
The Book of Discipline (BOD)

A volume of church history, Articles of Religion, doctrinal standards, and church law.

Originally published in 1784, the Articles of Religion have rarely changed as they have been protected by the church as Doctrinal Standards.

To change these standards would require a two-thirds vote of General Conference followed by a three-fourths vote of the lay and clergy members of every annual conference throughout the world. It would require a near miracle to change the Articles of Religion.

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.



Where Do We Find Methodist Governance and Doctrinal Standards? (The BOD, continued)

The governing laws/ legislation can only be modified by the General Conference, the authority that can alter the legislation in the Book of Discipline. The BOD is typically republished every four years following the meeting of the General Conference.

The most recent edition of the BOD is that of 2016.

The Book of Discipline is made up of five (5) parts:

I. Constitution ¶¶ 1-61

II. General Book of Discipline ¶ 101

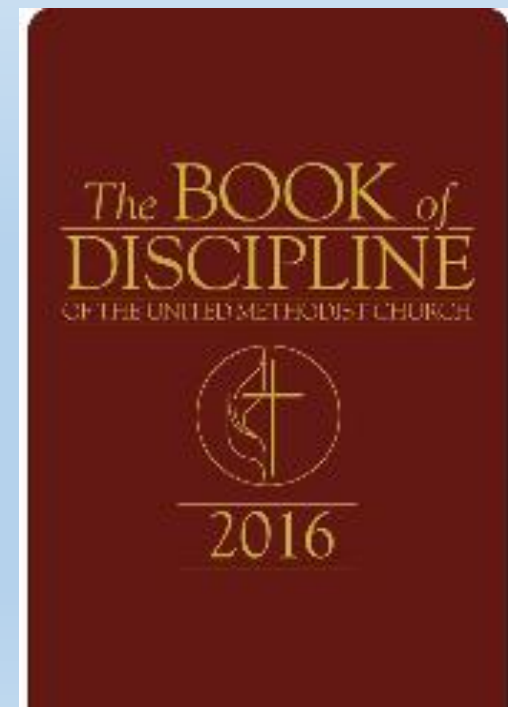
III. Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task ¶¶ 102-105

IV. The Ministry of All Christians ¶¶ 120-143

V. Social Principles ¶¶ 160-166

Today we will primarily focus on parts III and V.

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-101-general-book-of-discipline>



Who Owns the Property of the Church?

Book of Discipline: The Trust Clause

The Trust clause in Methodism was originated by John Wesley himself in the 1750's in England to protect the property acquired by "the church." He wanted to make sure that local societies could not take control of these properties from the connection he was creating.

¶ 2501 – the Trust Clause. In short, the Trust Clause is a binding legal reality that local congregations don't own their property outright. Instead, we hold the property "in trust" for benefit of the entire denomination; therefore, ownership and usage of the property is subject to the Book of Discipline.

Note: For entire verbiage, refer to Book of Discipline

What is the UM Church's Position on Inclusiveness?

Book Of Discipline: Inclusiveness

¶ 4 Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church

The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.

What Are the UM Church's Social Principles?

Book of Discipline: Social Principles THE NURTURING COMMUNITY ¶ 161 (G):

We affirm...

1. Sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.
2. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.
3. ...the UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

Note: For entire verbiage, refer to Book of Discipline, pages 112 – 113.

What Are The Church's Ordination Qualifications?

Book of Discipline: The Ministry of the Ordained

Qualifications for Ordination:

1. Be accountable to The United Methodist Church, accept its Doctrinal Standards and Discipline and authority, accept the supervision of those appointed to this ministry, and be prepared to live in the covenant of its ordained ministers. ¶ **304 (J)**
2. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. ¶ **304.3**
3. Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches. ¶ **341.6**

Note: For entire verbiage, refer to Book of Discipline.

What Does The BOD Say About The Use Of Funds?

Book of Discipline: The Use of United Methodist Funds

¶613: 19: The conference council on finance and administration shall have authority and responsibility to...ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The UMC "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends."

Note: For entire verbiage, refer to Book of Discipline, page 429

What Are Our Doctrinal Standards?

Book of Discipline: Doctrinal Standards- Articles of Religion

Article I—Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Article II—Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

What Are Our Doctrinal Standards (continued)

Book of Discipline: Doctrinal Standards- Articles of Religion

Article III—Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until He returns to judge all men at the last day.

What Are the Points of Controversy in the UMC?

Named Controversies regarding the Book of Discipline Position on Homosexuality

1. Definition of Marriage
2. Statement on Human Sexuality
3. Ordination Requirements

Other points of Controversy

1. Accountability for Laws Within the Book of Discipline
2. Perception of Changing Theological Views and Teaching

Summary of Amendments to the Book of Discipline

History of General Conference Changes Since 1972 Regarding Homosexuality

1972 – “We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible with Christian teaching” and “We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex.”

1976 – Added 3 statements banning the use of church funds to promote homosexuality

1980 – 1972 and 1976 positions were left intact.

1984 – Adopted as the standard for ordained clergy, commitment to “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness” and “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The UM Church.”

1988 – Added “... we affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”

1992 – Delegates voted to retain the church’s stand.

Summary of Amendments to the Book of Discipline

History of General Conference Changes Since 1972 Regarding Homosexuality (continued)

1996 – Added a definition of “self-avowed practicing homosexual,” and a declaration that ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by UM clergy or in United Methodist churches.

2000 – Added “We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends.”

2004 – Delegates agreed to a statement of unity: “As United Methodists, we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for the common mission of making disciples throughout the world.” Delegates reaffirmed the denominational position.

2008 – Delegates approved a new resolution to oppose homophobia and heterosexism.

2012 – Two items stating Christians have different opinions about homosexuality were not approved, leaving the current language intact.

What Events Occurred During the 2016 General Conference That Caused Talk of Separation?

May, 2016: Two open letters were offered in advance of the General Conference:

1. 15 Members of the New York Conference announce that they were gay or lesbian
2. 111 Deacons, Elders, Pastors and Ministerial Candidates declared publicly that they were gay, lesbian or bisexual
3. Delegates voted to accept a recommendation by the Council of Bishops for the General Conference to **defer** all votes on human sexuality and referred the entire subject to a special Commission named by the Council of Bishops, to develop a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality.

July, 2016: After the deferral was agreed to at the General Conference, the Western Jurisdictional Conference elected the first openly lesbian bishop.

2019 Special Session of the General Conference in Response to Talk of Separation

The Commission on a Way Forward: 32 people worked to develop a unifying plan to be presented to the Council of Bishops:

Three Plans Presented at a special session of General Conference

One Church Plan

Current Structure with no denominational obligation to the Methodist BOD. No annual conferences, bishops, congregations, or pastors are compelled to act contrary to their convictions.

<https://mainstreamumc.com>

Connectional Conference Plan

Three connectional conferences, Progressive, Centrist/Unity, and Traditional, each covering the whole country, based on theology including perspectives on LGBTQ+ ministry. Each Conference having distinctive definition of accountability, contextualization and justice

Traditional Plan

Current Structure

Accountability to the Current Book of Discipline

What was the Response to the Plans by the Commission of The General Conference?

2019 Special Session Results

The Traditional Plan passed with 438 yes votes (53%) and 384 no votes (47%).

The Taylor Disaffiliation Plan, sometimes called an "exit plan," and producing ¶ 2553 in the BOD, also passed, thus establishing guidelines for congregations who wish to separate from the UMC.

¶ 2553 - Requirements to Disaffiliate:

A vote with a 2/3 majority of church membership wishing to separate.

Pay unpaid apportionments for last 12 months and future 12 months of apportionments.

Must pay local share of pension liability determined by Annual Conference (formula outlined).

Local church property transfers with the church voting to disaffiliate; no trust clause.

Expires December 31, 2023.

What Happened After the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference?

Rejection, as displayed by ...

1. Boards of Ordained Ministry in Annual Conferences across the USA publicly declared that they would not abide by the BOD with regard to who they approve for candidacy and ordination.
2. Bishops across the US have publicly stated, and followed through, that they will not enforce the BOD with regard to all the human sexuality legislation.
3. Traditional-minded leaders started developing plans to exit.

How Was the Continued Controversy Addressed?

A Plan for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation (The Protocol)

In the summer of 2019, Bishop John Yambasu (Sierra Leone Episcopal Area) invited traditionalists, centrists, and progressives to meet along with Mr. Kenneth Feinberg as Mediator.

The plan would allow conservatives within the church to form their own “traditionalist” Methodist denomination, taking their church properties and \$25 million from the UMC for the new denomination, The Global Methodist Church.

The terms of the Protocol were to be presented to the 2020 General Conference, which did not occur due to COVID. After subsequent reviews, ¶ 2553 from the BOD was upheld and for various reasons, support dwindled for The Protocol.

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/protocol-of-reconciliation-and-grace-through-separation-faq>

What is the Current Situation Regarding Separation?

2020 General Conference Postponement to 2024, due to COVID, has ramifications:

1. The Global Methodist Church (Traditional) launched May 1, 2022.
2. Each Annual Conference has the option to provide a process by which a local church may separate from the United Methodist Church.
3. As of July 6, approximately 6,182 (20%) of the 30,000 churches nationally have separated thus far and additional churches are expected to separate by December 31, 2023.
4. All five jurisdictions resolved to disregard UMC BOD language with a moratorium on complaints surrounding sexual orientation. For example, The Western Jurisdiction elected a new Bishop, Cedric Bridgeforth, who recently married his male partner.

What are the Details for SC Churches That Wish to Separate?

SC Annual Conference Delivers a Process for Local Church Discernment: “A Faithful Step Forward”

Bishop Holston provided instructions:

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The Local Church Discernment Process is designed to help local churches determine whether they can function as a United Methodist church if they firmly believe that the denomination has not consistently upheld its stated doctrine on issues of human sexuality. It will provide an opportunity for church members to engage in dialogue, to allow every voice in the congregation an opportunity to be heard, and to discern the congregation’s sentiment regarding separation.

What are the Details for SC Churches That Wish to Separate? (continued)

Church Council must decide whether or not our church is to enter into a period of discernment and will provide informational sessions.

If Church Council decides to enter the Discernment process, the process is to be led by the pastor, the DS, or their designee, to help the congregation to decide to vote either to remain a United Methodist Church or to separate from the United Methodist Church.

If the Church Council determines that is not in the best interest of the church to allow the congregation to pursue separation, the church remains a United Methodist Church and nothing further is to be done at that time.

<https://www.umcsc.org/discern/>

What Action Was Taken at the 2023 SC Annual Conference Regarding Human Sexuality?

The South Carolina Conference of the UMC met in Florence, SC, on June 4-7, 2023. In a solemn and historical moment of holy conferencing, the South Carolina Annual Conference approved 113 churches across the state to separate from the UMC over human sexuality and other concerns. The 113 churches comprised almost 12% of the 958 total churches in the South Carolina Conference and represented every one of the 12 districts in the conference. These churches closed as UMCs, effective June 30, 2023.

Also, four resolutions offered by South Carolina Reconciling Ministries were scheduled to come before the Annual Conference for a vote. Three of the resolutions pertained to policies and language related to sexual orientation and support for the LGBTQIA+ delegates and community. These resolutions were ruled out-of-order on a technicality and, therefore, no vote was taken.

What Are the Options for SC Churches?

If the Church Council of a local church determines that it is in the best interest of the church to allow the congregation to pursue separation, the “A Faithful Step Forward” process is initiated:

1. The local church enters into a 30 day Discernment period to determine the direction of the church.
2. After Discernment, the direction is determined via a congregational member vote:
 - a) Remain a member of the United Methodist Church- no transfer of property
 - b) Separate from the United Methodist Church- transfer of property; church leaves the UMC and establishes a new church
 - c) As of this date, the local church may enter, withdraw, and re-enter the “A Faithful Step Forward” process annually, subject to approval by the District Superintendent. Should the vote be to remain a member of the UMC, it is possible for the process to be repeated in subsequent years. Should a vote be made to separate, the process cannot be repeated, as the church is no longer a part of the UMC.

What Is The “A Faithful Step Forward Process”?

Church Council determines that it is in the best interest of LUMC to allow the members to pursue separation

Church Council requests & the District Superintendent sets a Church Conference date

LUMC begins a 30 day minimum Discernment process

Church Council obtains a property appraisal from the Conference with value of real property & liquid assets

Conference provides amount of unfunded liability, unpaid direct bill and apportionments

Council holds church wide information sessions concerning separation and the finances

Church Conference must be held by March 1 for member vote on separation

If “no” vote, process ends with no operational changes for LUMC; BOD is UMC doctrine

If “yes” vote, process continues with legal, financial, and operational changes

Funds to be placed in escrow by 5/29; Annual Conference votes to accept in June session

Transfer of all property to new entity prior to June 30

LUMC closes as a UMC on June 30 and becomes new entity

Is the SC Plan Different From the Plans For Other Conferences?

Most conferences are using ¶ 2553. South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama-West Florida, and South Georgia's plans are grounded in ¶ 2549 . South Carolina's usage of the paragraph seems to be open-ended.

¶ 2549 Disposition of Property of a Closed Local Church—The district superintendent may, pursuant to this paragraph, recommend the closure of a local church, upon a finding that:

- a) The local church no longer serves the purpose for which it was organized or incorporated (¶¶ 201-204); or
- b) The local church property is no longer used, kept, or maintained by its membership as a place of divine worship of The United Methodist Church.
- c) A local church may decide to close.

What Are the Next Influence Points?

With traditional churches and/or members separating from the UMC, the percentage of progressive churches and or members may increase, potentially affecting the outcomes of votes on human sexuality at future UMC Conferences.

Upcoming Meetings and/or Decision Points

1. United Methodist Church General Conference 2024 (postponed 2020 conference) April 23 - May 3, 2024, Charlotte, NC
2. SC Annual Conference 2024 - June 9-12, 2024, Greenville, SC

What Should We Do Next?

1. Prayerfully seek Biblical and Spiritual Guidance
2. Ask Questions
3. Continue the education process. Educate yourself on multiple viewpoints on human sexuality in the UMC as well as other topics:

<https://www.umcsc.org/discern/>

<https://www.umc.org>

<https://www.umc.org › en › content › doctrinal-standards-in-the-united-methodist-church>

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-101-general-book-of-discipline>

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-united-methodist-trust-clause>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/protocol-of-reconciliation-and-grace-through-separation-faq>

<https://rmnetwork.org/summary-of-jurisdictional-conference-outcomes/>

<https://globalmethodist.org/>

<https://wesleyanconvenant.org/>

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/homosexuality-full-book-of-discipline-statements>

<https://rmnetwork.org>

[Ask The UMC Series: Is The United Methodist Church really...?](#)

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-happened-at-general-conference>

<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/what-happens-when-a-new-denomination-launches>

Questions?