

Q & A FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION NOV.19, 2022

Will we need a printed copy of the workbook, and will it be available at each conference site for those in attendance?

No, the workbook can be downloaded as a PDF from our website here:
<https://www.dakotasumc.org/resources/specialsession/conference-workbook> .

Does the workbook contain all the paperwork from each church?

Yes, it contains the agreements as well as the supporting documents for each church. For those that want a quick snapshot for each church there is a summary page for each church that has an overview of details like the vote count, the completion dates, or the financial terms etc. In the online version, you will find hyperlinks that go directly to the specific church you are looking for.

Can churches that are disaffiliating vote for other churches to disaffiliate?

Yes, they can. Persons are duly elected members to the annual conference as laity or members of the annual Conference as clergy. They have voice and vote until they are no longer United Methodist. The disaffiliation dates, as you notice on those documents in the workbook, are after our conference on November 19.

Do you have the steps of the disaffiliation process available as a document to share?

Yes. There is a detailed Disaffiliation Process available from the Conference Treasurer Office. Here is the link to the Disaffiliation Process: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/ppmw9ucoriji5iq/08-02-22-Process%20for%20Local%20Churches%20to%20Disaffiliate%20%20.pdf?dl=0> .

What is the process for church members to remain United Methodist if their church disaffiliates?

For persons who wish for their membership to remain in the UMC, there are several ways that can happen. One is by connecting with another United Methodist Church, whether in the area or now because of technology and streaming of worship services and virtual campuses, joining a Methodist church anywhere in the conference or even throughout the connection is possible. In the Dakotas Conference, we are working to identify some churches that would be willing to be what we're calling 'Oasis' churches who are committed to being United Methodist, and who are willing to be havens of care and support, to those individuals or groups that wish to remain United Methodist and give the persons the possibility to receive pastoral care needs, to be a part of worship, whether it is for a season or while they discern if they are going to launch a new United Methodist Church in their community. We hope to connect all individuals either with another United Methodist church in the area or launch a new United Methodist church.

Can a church tell the cabinet that they want to be an Oasis church?

Yes, that would be wonderful. Please contact your district superintendent. The cabinet is starting to gather names. Please reach out so we can connect people either in person or virtually.

Why would annual conference members vote "no" to allowing these churches to disaffiliate if churches have gone through what appears to be a rigorous process?

At this special session, we are voting to ratify the agreement. It is not possible to change or amend the agreement. This is the final step of the disaffiliation process. The agreements are legal documents that have been proofed and worked through by our trustees and conference chancellors. If there was something somebody found that they felt was not in alignment with what was correct, or if they felt like something in the process was egregious or ignored, that may be a reason.

For clarification, is the reason for disaffiliation the gay/LGBTQ issue?

As paragraph 2553 states it is related to the matters around human sexuality and the actions or inactions of an annual conference related to what happened at the special General Conference 2019. That was our special General Conference

Session specifically related to this matter. There are other issues being discussed in addition to human sexuality, like power structures and biblical interpretation. We are respecting the churches who have gone through the process and have discerned that this is their next step.

With the statement that we are voting on the "disaffiliation agreement" and "not the permission to disaffiliate," my question is "given the fact that I believe all of these congregations were presented "many more reasons to disaffiliate" that has nothing to do with what is stated in paragraph 2553, therefore is it actually legal for these churches to disaffiliate and only state the "reason of conscience regarding a change in requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality, etc."?"

With paragraph 2553 a congregation has to be disaffiliating for reasons of conscience regarding the change in requirements of the Book of Discipline or the action or inaction by their annual conference. Each of these churches had to explain their why under paragraph 2553. All churches meet the requirement of paragraph 2553. We are aware that churches and individuals have other reasons in addition to this.

Is there any reason to believe that any of the 18 churches whose agreements are being voted on have not followed the disaffiliation process?

No. Some churches have gone above and beyond and some have done the basics, but all followed the same process. There were some differences in how the checklist was completed, but the requirements remained the same. An example was that if one of the district superintendents was not able to be at the informational meeting, they sent informational videos to share with members. The Cabinet and trustees received all surveys that were sent out and had the information present to go through the checklist. The Common Table then verified.

Does our process or does the Discipline require a church leaving to connect with another Methodist denomination or network?

Our process does not dictate how local churches handle themselves after disaffiliation. It does not require the churches go one way or another or go with a denomination or go independent. That is a church decision, and therefore we were not a part of that. But we have heard anecdotally from many of them that they are choosing to align with the GMC.

Are all of these churches planning to join the Global UMC or various denominations?

Not necessarily. Not all of the churches have determined what they're doing next. Our responsibility as a conference and a district superintendent is to care for this side in the process. Once a church chooses, and votes to disaffiliate they determine what they do next as a congregation.

If the conference is going to archive records from disaffiliation churches, can the churches send in digital copies of these records instead of the physical records?

No. The originals are needed and will be saved in our archives by our archivist Laurie Langland.

What happens if a church fails to meet the agreement by its date of disaffiliation?

If a church does not meet the steps required and the financial obligations by the date that they chose for disaffiliation, their agreement becomes null and void. It means that there would have to be a new agreement drawn up with the trustees in partnership with our chancellors, and that would have to be ratified at the next annual conference.

Do the disaffiliating churches have to have payment with them to submit at the conference?

No, they need to submit their financial obligations to the finance office, and those checks have to be cleared before the date of disaffiliation. Those dates are in the agreements and are different for each of the churches. Many of them chose December 31, but there are some who have chosen different dates, and those payments need to be in before that date and not on the date of the special conference.

When you say 1 dollar is paid for the building who pays the \$1.00 and gets the building?

There is a church conference vote for disaffiliation, and it needs to pass by to a two-thirds majority of those members present. Then the agreement is ratified, and the facility remains with the disaffiliating congregation. The 1 dollar is meant to facilitate the transfer of title to the new organization.

Why is this happening now with expense to the conference and the churches attending, rather than at the last regular Annual Conference or at the next one?

At the last annual conference, we did not yet have this process. There was a process in place, but we updated it and realized we had to make some clarifications following the Dickinson disaffiliation. The reason that we're choosing to do this now is in part, because we have some churches that are ready. And also the way that the terms are set up regarding apportionments is based on the date of disaffiliation which happens after the ratification of the special session. There is a deep sense of grief in this process because our connection is changing. We are all still members of the body of Christ. Certainly, when we go through not being connected in the ways we have been, there's a lot of grief, and we all go through it in different ways.

My church hasn't held a congregational vote and I don't believe there is any intention to do so. Are there other churches not holding a congregational vote?

Yes. There are many churches who have said that this is not a matter of which they are going to vote on. They know voting creates winners and losers, and they are committed to staying together as a United Methodist Church, valuing our diversity, and that it is Christ crucified and risen, that unites us and our mission to go out and share that.

How are we caring for the LGBTQ population that exist?

This is not something we take lightly. Reaching people and loving people and inviting them into a life of following Jesus is our mission. We know there are thousands of denominations out there, so we know different persons live out that mission in different ways. It is certainly not easy, especially in our world where it must be all or nothing. The question has come up how to care for and to support LGBTQ+ individuals and their families, as they have wonderful gifts to offer. And again, there are churches that are already doing that, and doing so in very intentional ways, because they see families and individuals in their community that they want to invite into their family of faith, into a life of following Jesus. There are churches who are moving forward in deep relationship and deep walking alongside, sharing and celebrating the gifts those persons bring. And I know that those churches are excited about that.

What is the process for a pastor to disaffiliate? When do pastor decide if they are staying or leaving?

A procedure for pastors who wish to withdraw is presently being finalized by our cabinet and will be available soon. In these churches that are disaffiliating, if they are served by a licensed local pastor, or a pastor of another denomination, once that church is no longer United Methodist, that license or that approval would end. This includes persons who might be commissioned and are not fully ordained in the United Methodist Church. If someone is fully ordained, it's more complicated. We are working with the Board of Ordained Ministry to determine options which will include: a new appointment or a request to be on personal leave until requesting a new appointment as of July 1.

How long can a "UMC" pastor work to recruit other churches to leave the UMC before they are no longer a UMC pastor?

Some of those pastors are still determining what they will do. They are certainly back and forth on whether sharing information or sharing opinion, is recruiting, and I will just leave that at that.

What happens to pastors appointed to churches that disaffiliate, but don't want to leave the UMC?

There is a way they can seek another appointment. There is the option for leave if they can't take an appointment until July 1. If they're a retired pastor, they can remain United Methodist. Retired pastors can serve other denominations if that denomination recognizes their ordination.

What are the ramifications of staying UMC? What changes in the discipline?

Currently there are no changes in the Book of Discipline. The Book of Discipline can only be changed by a General Conference, and that will not be happening until April 2024. We know there is legislation seeking for removal of some of the restrictions related to UM pastors being allowed to perform same sex marriage or persons who are LGBTQ+. Additional legislation will be submitted to the 2024 General Conference not only regarding this matter, but other matters as well.

If a pastor goes to the GMC how does that affect the pension liability?

WesPath has a great resource that can explain that in detail. We have that available on our website under the following link: https://www.dakotasumc.org/media/library/fluidmod-page/137/documents/Pensions_Wespath.pdf

If there appears to be money with the foundation for the benefit of the UM church that intends to disaffiliate then what happens to the foundation money?

The foundation money follows the donor's designation. For more detailed or case by case questions, please contact the Foundation directly.

Will it be the same process for disaffiliation going forward?

This process is in place with paragraph 2553, and the paragraph expires December 31, 2023. The question that has arisen and that our conference board of trustees will need to discuss is what happens in 2024, when we don't have this paragraph, and we don't yet have a new book of discipline? There's always been a means for churches to leave the denomination, but it's been through discontinuation as a United Methodist Church, and that paragraph is very vague in terms of voting. When there are no terms outlined, how would that be handled? The Board of Trustees will have to review before next year's annual conference.

Will there be a supplemental journal for this special session?

The special session on November 19 will be included as an addendum to the 2022 Journal.