

Discernment Team Questions

- Who from the Administrative Board is leading the charge to have our church enter discernment and disaffiliate?
 - The vote to enter the discernment process was by secret ballot; therefore, knowing exactly who voted which way would be speculative. However, the original motion to enter the discernment process was put forth by Travis McKay.
 - Why don't they just leave the UMC instead of dragging us all through this?
 - That is a decision individuals must make for themselves.
- When will we officially be separated if we decide to do so on March 9?
 - Thursday, May 11th. All documents and financial responsibilities must be satisfied by May 1st.
- If the issue is about gay/lesbian marriage in church or gay clergy, why is there such a rush to go into discernment and vote?
 - Paragraph 2553 expires Dec. 31, 2023, and there is no assurance that the terms put forth by the Conference board of trustees will remain after the expiration date. Paragraph 2553 cannot have the expiration date altered, because to do so would require a change to the Book of Discipline. The General Conference is the only body that can change the Discipline and the next GC isn't scheduled until April-May 2024. Some members of SFUMC's leadership wanted to be ahead of the Dec. 31, 2023 deadline.
- Can the bishop overturn our vote if we have discerned less than the three months?
 - Our discernment process officially began on Nov. 29th & will end, if a church conference is necessary, on March 9th. So, the 3 month minimum is fulfilled.
- Why do some members of the Sylacauga First United Methodist Church want to disaffiliate?

- SFUMC is open to LGBTQ+ persons “in church;” however, not in leadership, and some feel as though this boundary might be crossed in the future.
- What are the provisions for using the Lane Trust and are there any restrictions?
 - The Lane Trust is to be used as an interest-only account. There have been two exceptions for this: paying off the parsonage and repair of the steeple. These were special exceptions, and approved by the congregation with the DS presiding over the session.



Friends of The Global Methodist Church



Robin Hudson · 3h · 🌐

From another FB pg

“I have heard that my home conference, the Alabama-West Florida Conference, is not allowing certain large UM churches to proceed with the possibility of disaffiliation. Namely, First United Methodist in Montgomery, and First United Methodist of Auburn. Does anyone know if this is actually true? ”

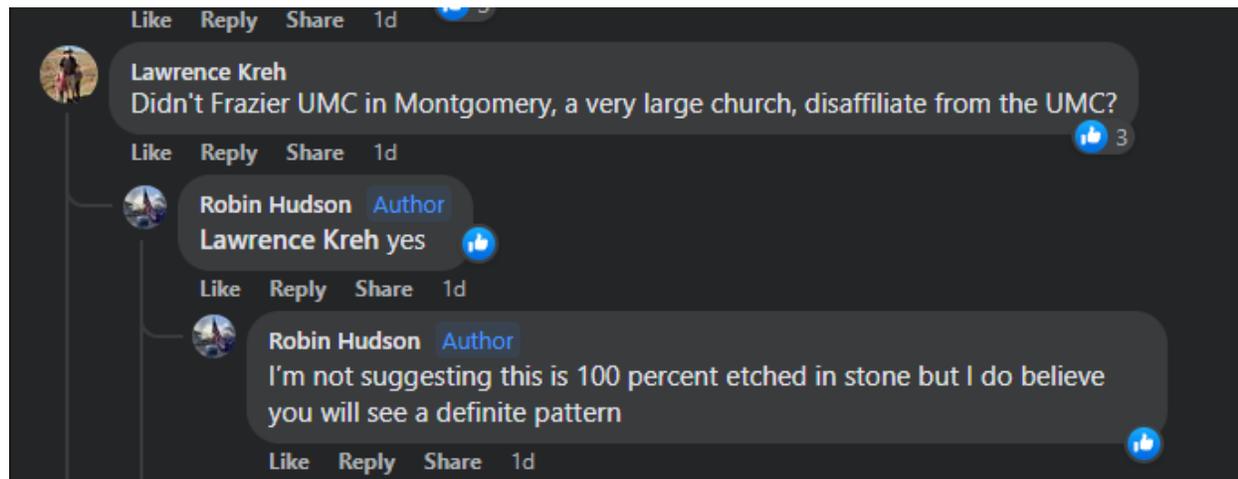
I believe this is the new UMC tactic.

Circle the wagons around the mostly liberal big budget city churches and let the mostly small conservative, under funded, expensive to maintain, country churches fall by the wayside.



6 comments

- I found the original post on Facebook from Robin Hudson. Here is a comment made later in the thread:



- It appears that the original comment is speculative at best, and shouldn't be used to cause alarm or undue anxiety.
- The Global Methodist Church established itself in May 2022 to receive congregants of UMC who want to disaffiliate and espouse the same beliefs. Why don't the people in our congregation just go ahead and join the Global Methodist Church instead of tearing our church apart with a vote?
 - Even if SFUMC disaffiliates, the leadership doesn't know which denomination, if any, SFUMC would align with.
- "For those who want to disaffiliate, with regard to Paragraph 2553:
 - Are you opposed to gay marriage in the church?
 - The general consensus seems to be that there is opposition to same gender weddings being held at SFUMC.
 - Are you opposed to a gay minister?
 - The general consensus seems to be, yes, there is opposition to SFUMC being appointed a LGBTQ+ pastor.
 - Are you opposed to gay persons being involved in the church?
 - No

- Are you opposed to having gay church MEMBERS?
 - No
- What is the line in the sand for those who want to disaffiliate?
 - The line in the sand appears to center on LGBTQ+ weddings within the SFUMC facility, and the possible appointment of a LGBTQ+ clergy person to SFUMC, as well as the possible appointment of a LGBTQ+ bishop to the North Alabama Annual Conference.
- If we can't afford what we have now, how are we going to afford it if we lose members?
 - Increase giving and bring in new givers
- Are there options available other than pursuing a potentially divisive and harmful vote?
 - Yes, a gracious separation where assets are discussed and divided among the separating groups. And open, honest dialogue. An example of this comes from *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church*, where it is written:

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward shared how a Unity Dialogue process that the North Carolina Annual Conference has used for fifteen years has “emended” their life together. She writes that strong differences remain, but this process has created a “greater capacity to live well with differences.” She urges United Methodists holding various beliefs “not to be afraid of convening and conversing. Conferencing is our deeply rooted United Methodist way of moving through disagreements and disputes.

In an essay encouraging opposing sides in the debate over LGBTQ issues to “disarm,” Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr. urges United Methodists to embrace the “path to maturity and holiness,” a path of interdependence, rather than independence. He encourages “Christians

who cannot accept gays and lesbians, in orientation or in practice to place the judgment of them (and all of us) in God's hands." He also encourages "gays and lesbians to be patient with their brothers and sisters in the church who have not walked their journey." Acknowledging that any discussion of sexuality is "mysterious, complicated, and emotionally charged," Carter believes dialogue can only take place when we follow the advice of James 1:19 to "be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry."

(Rebekah Jordan Gienapp, *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church*. Abingdon Press: Nashville; pgs. 42-43.)

- Why doesn't the UM come up with a better way of assigning pastors to Sylacauga First?
 - Methodism began with a group of traveling preachers, who went from place to place preaching, baptizing, and presiding over church affairs. That heritage has continued in today's itinerant system for the appointment of elders. Matching the gifts of an elder and the needs of the church or extension ministry is the most important consideration in the making of appointments. When needs change, the itinerant system provides for new appointments to be made smoothly. Another important feature of the itinerant system is that it provides an opportunity for churches to experience a variety of leadership and ministry styles through the years, strengthening the skills of the laity whose strong leadership is essential to any ministry. ([Discipleship Ministries | Understanding The United Methodist Church \(umcdiscipleship.org\)](http://umcdiscipleship.org))
- Could a minimum assignment beyond 3-4 years be considered?
 - According to the *Discipline*, the UMC practices itinerant ministry, and pastors are to be reviewed and appointed/reappointed annually. Long-term appointments are possible, but would need to be agreed upon annually by the SPRC, pastor, and appointive cabinet.

- Why don't the members have a say in hiring ministers?
 - The SPRC does have input regarding the appointment of clergy. The SPRC is to represent the greater congregation in doing this work. Also, the UMC utilizes an episcopal and connectional form of church government. UM churches are not congregational. Each Annual Conference shares resources, including clergy, and it is the responsibility of the appointive cabinet to appoint clergy to churches where the gifts and graces of both the church and clergy person can be used in order to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- What's going to happen to the kindergarten?
 - If disaffiliation occurs, the new church would have to establish its polity and procedures in such a way that the kindergarten could continue as is.
- Are we working toward God's will?
 - With God's help, we are.
- What happens to financial assets if SFUMC disaffiliates from the UMC?
 - Property and assets will remain with the prevailing group.
- I know the reason for discernment has to do with human sexuality, with that in mind, how do you explain how the UMC all over the country is allowing gay clergy and bishops?
 - Not all Annual Conferences all over the country are allowing the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons. Most Annual Conferences, including the North Alabama Annual Conference, have maintained fidelity to the *Book of Discipline* and its prohibition against LGBTQ+ weddings in UM churches and the ordination of practicing self-avowed homosexuals. Nevertheless, in response to the assumed spirit of the above question: At General Conference 2016 (May 10th-20th) the Commission on a Way Forward was formed in the hopes of creating a gracious path forward for the UMC regarding issues related to human

sexuality. In July of 2016, Rev. Karen Oliveto, a gay minister serving in San Francisco, was elected Bishop within the Western Jurisdiction. Charges were filed, but the Western Jurisdiction failed to move on the issue. It was determined that no action would be taken until the Commission of a Way Forward completed its work. At the special called General Conference 2019, the Commission on the Way Forward presented their completed work where the Traditionalist Plan passed by a vote of 438-384. Also, at GC2019 paragraph 2553 was approved for inclusion into the *Book of Discipline* allowing churches who disagreed with the Traditionalist Plan's restrictive and punitive language to graciously exit the UMC with their property. Almost immediately a diverse group gathered and crafted The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation which received great support. Within the Protocol, it was requested that chargeable offenses related to human sexuality be placed in abeyance until after GC2020 in which "The Protocol" was expected to pass. COVID-19 shut down the world resulting in two GC postponements. The issue will once again be taken up at GC2024. In short, those who are being defiant toward the *Discipline's* prohibition regarding LGBTQ+ persons received an extended timeline in the judicial process due to the work of the Commission on a Way Forward, the acceptance of "The Protocol" as well as its requested abeyance, and the understanding that the issue would be a priority at GC2020—all of which will be taken up at GC2024 due to the COVID pandemic.

- Why is the timeline so short?
 - According to Andy's conversation with the District Superintendent, the 3 month minimum is being fulfilled, and stretching the process out could result in further harm to the congregation and our witness within the community.
- $\frac{2}{3}$ vote - who gets to vote, how are votes counted, what is the method for voting, etc.?

- $\frac{2}{3}$ majority of voting members present; no absentee or proxy voting. Membership is verified as folks enter the voting space. Please be aware that once the Called Church Conference begins, a 10-minute grace period will be given for any late members to receive a ballot. After the grace period, no ballots will be distributed.
- District Superintendent presides over Church Conference, Per the DS:
 - Announcement of church conference purpose in church bulletin 2 weeks before the conference. (Also announced from pulpit).
 - Church designates a person to take minutes of the church conference.
 - Church provides a sign-in sheet at the table in entry.
 - Church provides ballots prepared on white 3x5 blank sheets of paper and distributed by the tellers.
 - Tellers selected and appointed by the church. These names should be submitted to the district office 10 days prior to the Called Church Conference.
 - Collection containers for the completed ballots will be provided by the church.
 - Lay person (church member) should be designated by the church to be the observer. This person's name should be submitted 10 days prior to the Called Church Conference.
 - Small table for tabulation of votes should be set up in the front area where ballots are completed (sanctuary/meeting area).
- Why didn't this go through the congregation as a vote first?
 - United Methodist polity is representational. Members of leadership committees are to represent the congregation as a whole. The North Alabama Annual Conference also drafted a required discernment process laying out the necessary steps; this process ends, not begins, with a Church Conference and congregational vote. As well, church membership is voluntary.

Members are free to “vote” by continuing to offer their presence, or by removing their membership.

- If you decided to stay UMC, can you document that specific church’s stance against allowing same gender unions being allowed in the church, and their rejection of a homosexual clergy person?
 - Yes, the church has the autonomy to set its own restrictions regarding wedding policies. Clergy appointments require the input of the SPRC, pastor, & appointive cabinet. If language regarding LGBTQ+ persons is removed from the *Book of Discipline* at future General Conference sessions, the church’s SPRC may document their desire to not receive a LGBTQ+ clergy person; this request should be honored. There is no reason or benefit to knowingly send a clergy person into an environment that will harm the church as well as the pastor.
- What money is included if the church decides to disaffiliate?
 - It is our understanding that all money and assets will go to the side who wins the vote.
- Who is the money specifically transferred to and how does it get transferred?
 - Funds are not transferred, they default to the prevailing group.
- Are there any controls on who gets the money and how it is used?
 - Only those that were written into the original endowment.
- What payments are required to the North Alabama Annual Conference of UMC?
 - Pension liability and fair share of apportionments.
- Of the existing church accounts that have restrictions, will the restrictions go with the money?
 - Yes
- How does a disaffiliating church take money/endowment that was given to Sylacauga First UMC?
 - The assets provided to the church go with the prevailing group, per paragraph 2553.

What can we do to keep as many members as possible? What can we do to do the least amount of harm?