

MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM
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1. What is the rush to leave the UMC? The Protocol does not expire until December 31, 2023.

We have opted to complete our recommendation to the church council by October so our church conference, should we have one, could occur in sufficient time to allow for approval at the December 10, 2022 special conference called by our Bishop. We learned in August that our Bishop could be moved in January. While requests for disaffiliation could be considered at the regularly scheduled Annual Conference in June or potentially at a special conference in December 2023 (should one be called by a new Bishop), we opted to complete our process while we have the benefit of partnership with our current Bishop and clear expectations for the requirements to disaffiliate.

2. If we disaffiliate, will our clergy and staff stay the same? Will they disaffiliate? Will missions change? Will there be additional income/expenses if we disaffiliate?

It is expected that whatever path we take, our clergy will remain the same.

Mission giving has always been a strong part of the ministry of our church. Among any of the paths that we are considering, we will continue to maintain that legacy. Since in all our options we remain Methodist, we would continue to support Methodist missions, such as UMCOR, Church of the Reconciler and Rise Against Hunger as well as participate in the Emmaus Walk.

We have not identified any significant income/expenses if we disaffiliate. As outlined in our handout at the Information Session, apportionments do differ among each alternative.

3. How will our Fall Stewardship Campaign be affected?

Our fall stewardship campaign will proceed as planned. Stewardship is to support the local church. We are in a very strong financial position with no debt.

4. Will we conduct a poll?

We have no intention to poll the congregation. If the Church Council voted to disaffiliate, then the ultimate decision will rest with the congregational vote. Polling is not part of Bishop Wallace-Padgett's Discernment Plan, which we have implemented. We have also received the following input from our District Superintendent, Rick Owen, who stated, "polls are not an effective way to approach discernment. Our discernment process is designed to give churches a way to seek God's Will for the future of the church."

5. If we remain UMC, will our church's stand on gay people remain the same? Will the Book of Discipline change?

The UMC is governed by the Book of Discipline. It can only be changed at General Conference. A special session of the General Conference was held in 2019, and the Book of Discipline was upheld. The regularly scheduled 2020 General Conference (held every four years) has been postponed three times due to Covid related issues. The next General Conference is scheduled for 2024 and there is no way to predict what may or may not change in the Book of Discipline.

6. Will there be absentee voting at the church conference?

No. It is not allowed by the UMC Book of Discipline under paragraph 2552, which states that only professing members of the local church present at the church conference may vote.

7. Why don't churches who disagree with the 2019 General Conference decision disaffiliate?

Some progressives were disappointed in the outcome of the 2019 General Conference which affirmed the long standing prohibition on same sex marriage in the church and the ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals". Some have violated the Book of Discipline related to these issues without accountability. While we do not know why they have not left the UMC, it is reasonable to assume that they hope to vote to change these aspects of the Book of Discipline at the next General Conference scheduled for 2024.

8. Why is the Resource List so slanted to the negative? Who can submit positive stayUMC resources?

The Resource Library has been compiled by every member of the Discernment Team and we have made an effort to show all sides of the issues we are facing. We continue to add information to the Resource Library. We have several stayUMC articles in the Resource Library, some of which we received after meeting with Steve West, the North Alabama leader of StayUMC.

9. Does the church membership get to vote only if we disaffiliate?

The church membership will get to vote only if the Church Council votes to approve a motion from the Discernment Team to disaffiliate. If there is no motion to disaffiliate, there will be no congregational vote.

10. How does disaffiliation improve human sexuality, governance/accountability, finances, and stewardship, and pastoral pipeline?

If there is a vote by the Church Council to recommend that we disaffiliate, then there will be reasons that will support that decision. All of the options we have investigated have measures to hold the Bishops more accountable for their actions than the UMC currently does. We have not completed our discernment process yet.

11. How Does the UMC use the \$200,000 we send them every year? Does VHUMC receive any financial help from the UMC?

We tried to show this in the slide in the presentation, so you may want to access the script of it on the website. World Service is for missions/outreach. While it is the largest component of the UMC Budget, it has and is predicted to decline significantly over the last 2 quadrennials. The Episcopal component is salaries for the Bishops, current and retired. They are paid for life. That component has and is predicted to increase in terms of total dollars slightly over the last 2 quadrennials and significantly as a percentage of the total budget. The Bishop payments were about 15% of the budget two quadrennials ago and are predicted to be about 25% of the budget in this next quadrennial.

12. Ministerial Support and Black College funding is also declining like Missions/Outreach

VHUMC does not get any financial support from the UMC.

13. Please explain the unfunded pension fund of \$600,000. Who are we funding? Can you give a breakdown of the Unfunded Pension Fund?

The UMC Pension fund is for the clergy - both current and retired. It is like a traditional pension plan that a company would have. Clergy gain credit into the plan based on their years of service in the UMC. The plan has assets (stocks, bonds, etc.) that are used to pay the obligations (retirement benefits) of the plan. The assets are created through contributions from the churches on an annual basis. At any given point in time, comparing a pension plan's assets to its obligations, or liabilities, results in its funded status. There are actuarial assumptions used to determine the funded status, such as expected return on assets, retirement dates, life expectancy, market interest rates, etc. The calculation is updated quarterly and currently the status of our plan is that it is underfunded - the expected liabilities exceed the expected assets. That would not be unlike many corporate and government pension plans. Our portion of the unfunded status is calculated by our Annual Conference Treasurer. It is likely to be based on our size, in some way, relative to the other churches in our conference.

14. When did VHUMC start paying more than the suggested 10% apportionments? How many years did we pay more than 10%? Who has authority to determine apportionment payments?

The North Alabama Annual Conference sets apportionments using a formula provided by the UMC. The manner in which the NAC determines apportionments has changed over the years. For instance, prior to 2017 the formula was based on a combination of membership and core ministry expenses. So, at that time there was no reference to 10% of donations in the formula. Prior to 2014, we included expenses for ministries like our Day School in the expense component of that formula, which did result in VHUMC paying more than 10% of our donations (at least back to 1999, with a range of 10-16% of donations). Beginning in 2014, we determined that including auxiliary ministry expenses (like the Day School's) in the formula was not required, so we revised the expense component and our apportionment payments decreased to about 7.5% of donations. In 2017, the conference changed the apportionment method and began asking for churches to pay what they could with a target of 10% of unrestricted donations. So, it is encouraged, but not required, that we pay that amount. VHUMC has averaged paying 10% over the past 23 years. We are currently paying less than \$200,000 annually, which represents approximately 4% of unrestricted donations. The Finance Committee determines the apportionments that we budget and ultimately pay annually. The Church Council then approves the Budget. The Bishop and our District Superintendent are aware of what we are paying.

15. What would happen to our local church if enough large and/or medium sized churches left the UMC and the overhead weight of the UMC could not pay all of its bills?

The answer here is likely very similar to the one you asked about the UMC Finances. With more traditional churches leaving the denomination it is expected to decrease the budget of the UMC. The projections that we shared in the slide at the Information Session (and available on our website with the Script) are from the UMC General Council on Finance and Administration. Those projections show a decline in the overall UMC Budget from approximately \$600 million 2 quadrennials ago to less than \$400 million in the upcoming quadrennial. We don't know, nor would we speculate, how the UMC will address changes in future income and how those changes will affect local UMC churches.