

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES FROM LISTENING SESSION 1

What was the source for the information on the pastoral pipeline?

Bill Brunson is the chair of the Board of Ordained Ministers for the North Alabama Conference and provided the information.

What ministerial pipeline will we use if we disaffiliate?

In the event of disaffiliation, if we join the Global Methodist Church, pastors will be decided jointly by the bishop/presiding elder and the local congregation. If we should join the Free Methodist Church, pastors will be decided jointly by the conference and the local church. If we were to become an independent Methodist Church, there are Headhunting organizations that help churches find ministers, for example, Vanderbloemen Search Group, a Texas based company that specializes in placements for church staffing and non-profits. Even our last three associates at VHUMC were hired internally because there were no qualified persons in the NAC with the right qualifications.

In reference to the DT FAQs, are these really the most frequently asked questions?

Yes.

Who is “existing church leadership?” Is the Book of Discipline thrown out?

Our current clergy have all expressed a desire to stay with our church, whether we stay UMC or vote to disaffiliate. Our church follows the Book of Discipline. Our existing church leadership includes the Church Council, Staff Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees, and Finance Committee. If we were to disaffiliate and become an independent Methodist Church, it is likely that we would adopt the relevant sections of the Book of Discipline. Sections considered relevant would be used for theology, doctrine, and to govern the local congregation, among others. Those not considered relevant would include those concerning General Conference, Annual Conference, Bishops, District Superintendents, etc. (These examples are not all inclusive for this answer). **What if a church fails?** If a church fails, the assets, whether money or the building, has to go to another non-profit. No one receives any money.

What are our current worship numbers?

In 2019, we averaged 781 people per Sunday, not including Sunday School.
In 2021, our numbers dropped to 535 per Sunday, not including Sunday School.
In 2022, we worship 636 per Sunday, with 65 streaming, not including Sunday School.
Our total church enrollment is 2,940.

What exactly will we be asked to vote on, simply to disaffiliate or a path forward?

If the Discernment Team presents a motion to the Church Council to disaffiliate, it will include a path forward, whether that be GMC, FMC, or independent Methodist.

Has our Bishop said she is staying or not?

Our Bishop does not have control of whether she is reappointed to this conference or moved to another conference.

Who decides the appointment of Bishops?

Bishops are elected by lay and clergy delegates in each jurisdictional conference, following the regular session of the General Conference. Any active ordained elder in good standing is eligible, but must have at least four years (a full term) to serve before reaching the mandatory age of retirement of 68. In the U.S. bishops are elected for life and traditionally begin their assignments September 1. In 2022, bishops will be elected on November 4, and will take office on January 1, 2023.

Could the amount we have to pay to disaffiliate change?

The exit fee calculation in the North Alabama Conference is the sum of the church's portion of the conference's unfunded pension liability and the remaining apportionments for the current year and the following year's full apportionment. The unfunded pension liability changes based on variations in market conditions and is calculated quarterly. Due to an increase in market interest rates, that amount is currently at the lowest level that it has been in a number of years. Exit fees in other conferences have included additional amounts, as determined by those conferences. We are pleased that such additional fees are not currently included in the North Alabama conference calculation and would hope that would continue to be the case, but there is no way to be certain that the current formula might not change in the future.

What will happen to the smaller UMC churches that are struggling?

Many of the smaller UMC congregations are struggling in many ways - membership, attendance, finances and with clergy and lay leadership. Many are congregations that are growing older without new membership to offset those that are aging. Since many of these churches struggle just to keep operations going financially, they are not likely to be able to pay the exit fee to disaffiliate and retain their property. Therefore, while it is not possible to be able to generalize all such churches or to understand the situation of each, it is reasonable to assume that many will not disaffiliate.

Disaffiliation and Paragraph 2553

Paragraph 2553 states: "Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscious regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference relate to these issues which follow. ...The provisions of paragraph 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date."

Disaffiliation "for reasons of conscious" has been broadly interpreted in the UMC since the presenting issue in the denomination has been related to human sexuality. However, we also believe that there are other important issues to consider as we discussed in our information sessions.

What is the rush?

Our discernment team has not said that the disaffiliation process WILL change under a new Bishop's leadership, only that it COULD change. A new Bishop can slow or frustrate the process put in place by a previous Bishop. While conference trustees are involved in setting the process, a new Bishop could apply pressure to trustees to change the process if the Bishop desired, and/or reassign uncooperative cabinet members. When we met with Bishop Wallace-Padgett in July, we asked this very question of her. She did not deny the possibility that the process could change, though she said it would surprise

her if a new Bishop tried to change things. After hearing from members of our congregation that they understood Bishop Wallace-Padgett to say that the process would not change under a new Bishop, we followed up by email with Bishop Wallace-Padgett to clarify our understanding of this issue. Her response includes the following statement: *"I am confident that the commitment of North Alabama Conference leadership, including Board of Trustees, to a fair and gracious exit for churches that discern to disaffiliate when my tenure ends. However, the details of the disaffiliation process could change if approved and implemented by the Board of Trustees."* Our team acknowledges the possibility that the process will remain in place through next year but opted to complete our process by December of this year so we could be certain of the expectations for disaffiliation, should that be a choice our church makes. As for the cost of our church's share of the unfunded pension liability, that cost is dependent on market conditions. As our team noted at the first listening session, the value of our unfunded pension liability is much lower than it has been and is one factor in our decision to complete our discernment process by December. We began the discernment process much sooner than some of our peer churches, so it is not surprising that some of our neighboring churches have a target of 2023 for the completion of their discernment process - our discernment timeline was reviewed and approved by our District Superintendent and has met with Bishop Wallace-Padgett's approval.