



The Florida Conference

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Frequently Asked Questions

The answers below are based upon information we know as of March 22, 2022. The delay in General Conference has proven that we are in unprecedented times and answers could change depending on various circumstances. Below is a compilation of the questions from the March 20, 2022 laity webinar.

We are still in the process of responding to the questions and concerns raised from the webinar. If you do not see your question below or still have more, we encourage you to attend one of the District Gatherings taking place in your area. You can find that information here: <https://www.flumc.org/the-continuing-united-methodist-church>.

CONTINUING UMC

Q: Where can I find helpful resources?

A: As the conversation on the continuing United Methodist Church progresses, <https://www.flumc.org/the-continuing-united-methodist-church> webpage provides resources to help address questions that many are asking such as: Why should I stay in the UMC? Tell me how to leave if I don't want to stay? How do I know if there will be a place for me? Laity can also visit LaitySpace.org.

Q: Has the theological core of Methodism changed?

A: The continuing UMC still believes in the divinity of Jesus, the resurrection, salvation, etc. The doctrinal standards of our denomination have not changed, are nearly impossible to change due to our polity, and no one is proposing changing them. This is simply not about which side is the Bible-believing church. The continuing United Methodist Church will believe in Scripture, in Jesus, in the resurrection, in salvation, in those core tenets of the Christian faith.

Q: Can a church establish a covenant with the FLUMC to determine which type of pastor (traditional or progressive) will be placed in our church?

A: Yes, there has been discussion around the formation of a covenant that would allow churches to continue a more traditional point of view and keep a pastor who is able to support this viewpoint.

Q: Will the continuing UMC be a spiritual home for all people?

A: The continuing UMC has room for all kinds of people whether they consider themselves liberal, evangelical, progressives, traditionalists, middle of the road, conservative and centrists, etc.

Q: Is our district superintendent willing to talk about the future of our church?

A: Absolutely! They are willing and able to answer all questions or concerns. Please visit <https://www.flumc.org/districts> for their contact information.

Q: Has the Global Methodist Church (GMC) decided to launch their new denomination on May 1, 2022?

A: Yes. In response to the third General Conference delay, the GMC has decided to launch their denomination early instead of waiting until after the General Conference Session in 2024.

DISAFFILIATION, CHURCH VOTE & CHURCH INFORMATION

Q: Do we have to vote as a church?

A: No vote needed, you do not need to do anything to remain part of the United Methodist Church.

Q: What if my church does not want to wait until 2024 to decide if we will remain with The UMC or explore other denominational options?

A: Any current UMC has the option to explore disaffiliation pursuant to the 2019 legislation found in paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline. The Florida Conference has a very specific process to pursue disaffiliation and if you would like information about disaffiliation, please contact your district superintendent. The first step that triggers the process is for lay leadership from a church to communicate to the DS a desire for the church to have a conversation about disaffiliation. Disaffiliation is a several month process which includes the vote of the Annual Conference. Churches must meet all the requirements of the disaffiliation agreement and the checklist in order to disaffiliate. This includes full payment of financial requirements. If you have financial concerns, please discuss this with your District Superintendent.

Q: Has there been a date established for churches to make a decision about staying or leaving?

A: Churches do not need to rush this process. If a church has discerned that leaving is their best option and wish to disaffiliate this year at Annual Conference, they should have already been in touch with their District Superintendent. The original deadline to have a church conference was April 15. We are willing to extend this but all disaffiliation material must be completed before May 31st to be properly before the annual conference session in June.

Q: What is the March 31 date?

A: There is no significance of this date in the FLUMC this year.

Q: Is there a deadline to Para. 2553?

A: Yes, December 31, 2023 was the original deadline set by the General Conference. Still quite a bit of time away. We suspect this will be addressed by General Conference 2024 or possibly prior to that by the Council of Bishops and Judicial Council.

Q: Can my church leave under Paragraph 2548.2?

A: This is not a viable option. Upon the recommendation of the Council of Bishops and based on the Judicial Council rulings and the input from Wespeth, all disaffiliations will take place under Paragraph 2553. You can access Par. 2553 here:

<https://www.umofficialresources.com/updates/15/book-of-discipline-addendum-and-errata-december-2019>

Q: What are the churches doing that have disaffiliated? Are they still United Methodist?

A: Once the disaffiliation process is complete they are no longer part of The United Methodist Church.

Q: Is it up to a Senior Pastor to decide if the church remains UMC or disaffiliates? Who decides?

A: The church decides whether to remain UMC or if they wish to disaffiliate. They do that first at the church council and then at a church conference where every member would have a vote. Paragraph 2553 requires a 2/3 majority vote of the church conference to disaffiliate. And there is no need to rush this decision given the postponement of the General Conference to 2024.

Q: Can a church council vote to require only a 51% majority to disaffiliate rather than the stated 2/3?

A: No, Paragraph 2553 requires a 2/3 majority vote of the church conference to disaffiliate.

Q: Is the deadline for churches to submit disaffiliation requests to the 2023 Annual Conference the same as that for Resolutions (January 31?); or will a later date be established for disaffiliation?

A: The deadline to vote at a church conference this year (2022) was April 15 and we have worked with churches who needed an extension. For 2023 disaffiliations, we have not set a firm deadline. We want churches to work with their DS and not make any quick decisions.

Q: What is the total amount of the Conference's unfunded pension obligation and how do you calculate a church's pro-rata share of that amount?

A: Your church must request the amount from the Conference Treasurer (csmelser@flumc.org) with a copy to the District Superintendent and the Episcopal Office.

Q: Legal people on social media are stating that the pension fund is fully funded already. Is that true or false?

A: False. Wespeth provides fully audited financial statements to show the unfunded liability which is on a market basis. You can find more information at wespeth.org.

Q: Will LGBTQ members be appointed as Clergy?

A: Currently the *Book of Discipline* does not allow self-avowed practicing members of the LGBTQIA community to be ordained as clergy.

Q: If or when there is a vote and if our church goes Global, will the conference take charge and be intentional about finding a location for the UM congregation members who want to stay UMC and move worshipping to a different location?

A: We hope no one will leave the UMC, but should your church decide not to remain UMC we will assist churches who are disaffiliating with a listing of UMC churches in the area.

Q: Our church is not in conflict or having any conversations about disaffiliation. Do we have to talk about this?

A: We ask that you continue to pray for God's guidance for those churches who are in their discernment process.

Q: Right now, my congregation is confused, many have lots of misinformation that boils down to the basics of what they consider the issues are.

A: We highly encourage you to contact your District Superintendent. They are a great resource and want to walk alongside the churches. Also, visit <https://www.flumc.org/the-continuing-united-methodist-church> and www.laityspace.org for resources.

Q: Some people in our congregation have decided they want to disaffiliate and have been following the Global Methodist movement. How should we deal with them?

A: Love them, pray for them in their discernment, and release them with God's blessing.

Q: Do all churches own their property?

A: In the UMC under the *Book of Discipline*, church property is held in trust for the Annual Conference. If a local church closed the property would return to the annual conference.

GENERAL CONFERENCE

Q: Why was the General Conference postponed again?

A: The Commission on the General Conference made the decision to postpone General Conference 2020 until 2024 due to the ongoing pandemic and long processing time of obtaining visas for delegates from outside of the United States. A virtual option had been considered previously but was rejected due to the 16-hour span of time zones, unreliable internet, and challenges to safeguarding the voting. You can read more from the Commission on the General Conference <https://www.umc.org/en/content/general-conference-further-postponed-to-2024>

Q: What do I say to people who are frustrated by the delay in the General Conference? I know that many are frustrated that this means delaying doing the right thing.

A: We share their frustration in the delay. The Commission on the General Conference made the decision to postpone until 2024. We are a global church and attendees from various parts of the globe are impacted differently by the Covid pandemic and the ability to obtain visas for travel. A virtual option for GC was considered however reliable internet access and electricity is still an issue for some of our delegates.

Q: When will a new date be announced?

A: The commission has already secured a venue for what would have been the regularly scheduled quadrennial event. An announcement about the location will be forthcoming as soon as the required logistical planning is complete. Event planned for 2024.

Q: Will the Florida Conference elect new delegates for 2024?

A: Since the 2020 General Conference was postponed, it is our understanding that the delegates elected at the 2019 session of Annual Conference will continue to serve in this capacity. In the commission's press release, Rev. Gary Graves, chair, states, "We will need to look to the Judicial Council for clarity regarding which preparations and processes are based on the postponed 2020 General Conference and which would need to be enacted should this be seen as a new 2024 General Conference." We await further guidance from the Commission and Judicial Council, and will communicate any updates we receive.

Q: What happened to the traditional plan that was voted on at the last conference?

A: The Traditional Plan is still in effect. However, due to the continued impasse in our denomination, the Council of Bishops has agreed to an Abeyance on all charges related to inclusion until the next General Conference in 2024.

Q: What about the Protocol for Separation? Is it still expected to be on the agenda for 2024?

A: The Judicial Council will decide what, if any, legislation scheduled from GC 2020 (including the Protocol) will be brought forward to GC 2024. It is possible the Protocol will be considered in its current form or amended.

Q: Will we be able to have a Jurisdictional Conference before 2024 to elect new bishops?

A: There are ongoing discussions about this possibility, but that decision has not yet been made. It is currently being considered by the Judicial Council. We will announce when there is a decision.

As we walk through this journey together may we remember we are on mission together. With more than 12 million members across the globe, we are a powerful connection, living and sharing the grace of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. May we stay committed to work for global health, education, creation care, child welfare, disaster recovery and countless other efforts. Where all belong and will be loved in the UMC. All will be heard, respected and engaged. All will be free to develop their personal relationship with God and to serve fully in the ministry of Jesus Christ. As Bishop Latrelle Easterling of the Baltimore-Washington Conference said in a Facebook post: "Things that have not been postponed: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, consoling the grieving, sharing the love of Christ and fervent prayer."