



The Florida Conference

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

August 5, 2023 Special Session

Information Guide

This guide contains the agenda for the Special Annual Conference Session, the names of the local churches seeking disaffiliation from The Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church, the disaffiliation metrics, and the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

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Special Session of the Florida Annual Conference

Saturday, August 5, 2023

Agenda

9:30 am	Optional Q&A session	Rev. Alex Shanks Rev. Dr. Cynthia Weems
10:00 am	Annual Conference Call to Order	Bishop Tom Berlin
	Opening Prayer	Alice Williams/Derrick Scott Conference Lay Leaders
	Organizing Motions	Rev. Beth Gardner Conference Secretary
	Practice Vote	Bishop Tom Berlin
	Consideration of Disaffiliating Local Churches	Rev. Emily Hotho Dean of Cabinet
	Closing Prayer	Bishop Tom Berlin
	Adjournment	

Local Churches Seeking Disaffiliation August 5, 2023

Atlantic Central District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
None		

East Central District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
Altoona	Altoona	\$ 16,196
Community	Casselberry	\$ 191,575
First	Apopka	\$ 131,665
Grace	Lake Mary	\$ 60,268
LifeSong	Orlando	\$ 129,369
Paisley	Paisley	\$ 21,002

Gulf Central District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
Lake Magdalene	Tampa	\$ 468,068
Ruskin	Ruskin	\$ 82,515

North Central District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
Evinston	Evinston	\$ 22,094
Lochloosa	Hawthorne	\$ 25,632
Nueva Vida	Ocala	\$ 93,258

North East District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
CrossRoad	Jacksonville	\$ 284,482
First	Green Cove Springs	\$ 29,043
First	Macclenny	\$ 58,641
First	Starke	\$ 157,118
Florahome	Florahome	\$ 14,887
Greater Bell	Brooker	\$ 20,398
Lake Shore	Jacksonville	\$ 123,912
Mount Zion	Jacksonville	\$ 20,884
Orange Park	Orange Park	\$ 265,399
Ortega	Jacksonville	\$ 263,041
Pleasant Grove	Starke	\$ 12,356
Ponte Vedra	Ponte Vedra Beach	\$ 171,730
Southside	Jacksonville	\$ 410,039
Spring Glen	Jacksonville	\$ 44,783

North West District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
First	Chiefland	\$ 54,987
First	Live Oak	\$ 84,183
First	Monticello	\$ 107,712
Jennings	Jennings	\$ 14,623
Tallahassee Heights	Tallahassee	\$ 98,267
White Springs	White Springs	\$ 16,173

South East District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
Matecumbe	Islamorada	\$ 56,020
Riverside	Miami	\$ 52,963
Westwood	Miami	\$ 38,141

South West District

Church Name	City	Exit Obligation
Bay Point	Nokomis	\$ 155,329
Carlson Memorial	LaBelle	\$ 113,715
First	Cape Coral	\$ 177,233
First	Frostproof	\$ 64,732
First	Ft. Meade	\$ 69,130
First	Immokalee	\$ 64,060
First	Zolfo Springs	\$ 33,295
Memorial	Lake Placid	\$ 134,161
Old Miakka	Sarasota	\$ 22,911
Pine Level	Arcadia	\$ 74,726
St. John's	Sarasota	\$ 189,761
Trinity	Arcadia	\$ 103,794

Disaffiliation Metrics for the 46 Churches Seeking Disaffiliation

- As of December 31, 2022, the total number of professing members represented by the 46 disaffiliating churches was 13,193. This is 9% of the total professing membership of The Florida Annual Conference of 145,577.
- As of December 31, 2022, the average attendance at all weekly in-person worship services by the 46 disaffiliating churches was 5,347. This is 10% of the total weekly in-person worshipping attendance of The Florida Annual Conference of 51,146.
- The value of all local church assets of the 46 disaffiliating churches, not including real estate, is \$18,275,548. This value is 5% of all local church non-real estate assets in The Florida Annual Conference of \$360,935,853.
- The value of the 46 disaffiliating church's real estate is \$187,906,644*. This is 9% of the value of annual conference local church real estate of \$2,016,190,856.
- The amount paid by the 46 disaffiliating churches for all conference apportionments over a five-year period was \$6,287,438. This represents 9% of conference apportioned receipts over that same period of \$68,008,393.

The above information is derived from local church statistical data as submitted by local churches and reported to the General Council on Finance and Administration.

*Property values derived from Ministry Protection as insured value.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Disaffiliation and the Special Session of the Annual Conference to be held on August 5, 2023

1. What does disaffiliation mean in The United Methodist Church and The Florida Conference?

The United Methodist Church has wrestled with matters related to human sexuality since 1972. With the most recent postponement of General Conference until 2024, and the launch of the Global Methodist Church, some churches are discerning they should disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church. Some churches will become independent, and some will join other historic or newly formed Wesleyan denominations.

The Florida Conference lay and clergy leadership respects that the decision to stay or leave the denomination should be one of conscience. There is a fair, simple, and consistently applied process for those who have prayerfully discerned disaffiliation as their chosen option.

For those churches considering disaffiliating from the denomination for reasons of conscience relating to matters of human sexuality, Paragraph (¶) 2553 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* as amended in 2019 (the “Discipline”) must govern this process through December 31, 2023, at which time ¶ 2553 will lapse. [See Judicial Council Decision 1449](#).

Paragraph (¶) 2553 was added to the *Discipline* at the specially called General Conference in 2019. General Conference is the only body that can amend ¶ 2553.

[Judicial Council Decision 1422](#), which was issued February 9, 2022, confirmed that any church seeking to disaffiliate for reasons of conscience over matters of human sexuality, whether conservative, moderate, or progressive, may use ¶ 2553 to do so.

Any church who chooses to explore disaffiliation needs to first contact their District Superintendent to learn more about the process established for Florida Conference churches. *For any churches that wish to remain in The United Methodist Church, no action is needed.*

2. How many churches in The Florida Conference are seeking disaffiliation?

In 2021 and 2022, 17 churches were approved to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church under ¶ 2553 by The Florida Annual Conference membership.

On April 22, 2023, 55 churches were approved for disaffiliation. On August 5, 2023 The Florida Annual Conference lay and clergy members will consider 46 churches seeking to disaffiliate under ¶ 2553. The Florida Conference currently comprises over 500 churches.

3. Why is a Special Annual Conference being held? What business will be conducted?

Special Sessions of the Annual Conference will be held on three dates this year: April 22, August 5, and December 2 to process disaffiliations under ¶ 2553 of the *Discipline* for churches that have met the requirements.

At 9:30 a.m., a Q&A session will be held for any members to ask questions pertaining to the Special Annual Conference. At 10 a.m., the Special Annual Conference will convene solely to vote on the request of 46 local churches that seek to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church over matters of human sexuality using ¶ 2553 of the *Discipline*.

4. What will be the voting procedure at the Special Sessions of the Annual Conference?

The names of each church requesting to disaffiliate under ¶ 2553 will be presented. The Annual Conference members will be given the opportunity to vote “yes” or “no.” There will be no amendments to the Disaffiliation Agreement for those churches seeking to disaffiliate under ¶ 2553 of the *Discipline*. There will be speeches “for” and speeches “against.” The simple majority of the body will prevail on the vote. For those churches seeking disaffiliation under ¶ 2553 of the *Discipline*, this process was approved by [Judicial Council Decision 1420](#) on February 9, 2022.

5. What is The United Methodist Church trust clause?

United Methodists and generations of Methodists before structured ministry through a connectional system that sustains the work and mission of the church.

The trust clause is central to this approach. The United Methodist trust clause is specific wording in legal documents (deeds) declaring that the property and assets of a local church or United Methodist entity are held “in trust” to benefit the entire denomination. The trust clause applies to all United Methodist properties, even if it is not present in their legal documents, based on prevailing legal opinions from the courts. The trust clause ensures that United Methodist property will continue to be used for the purposes of The United Methodist Church.

Holding property in trust for The United Methodist Church means the “holder” must use the property exclusively for the purposes of and to benefit The United Methodist Church.

Because a local church holds its property in trust for the denomination, it has a legal obligation to maintain and protect that property so it can continue to be used as a United Methodist church. The local church does not own the property; rather, title is held in the name of the local church trustees, subject to the trust clause.

The *Discipline* sets forth detailed procedures a church must follow before taking most major actions affecting its property. By following the disaffiliation process, signing the Disaffiliation Agreement, and paying the disaffiliation fees and costs, the local church is being allowed to

leave the denomination, free of the trust clause. This allows the local church to assume title to the property, real and personal, tangible, and intangible, subject to any third-party claims.

[Learn more about the trust clause in an article from Ask the UMC.](#)

6. What is included in the Exit Obligation for Disaffiliation?

In the event that a church seeks disaffiliation, two financial obligations associated with our connectional life together must be addressed. These are determined by ¶12553 and include the Conference's share of the denominational clergy pension liabilities and the church's share of apportionments for the current year and one additional year. An additional, practical matter is also addressed in the exit obligation, which is the fee for legal services to execute the required documents for a church to disaffiliate and be removed from the trust clause.

The Conference's share of the denominational pension liabilities is determined by Wespath, and the Conference Treasurer will identify a disaffiliating church's share of that liability. The liability is calculated on a market value basis, which reflects the ongoing risks associated with a long-term defined benefit liability. The Conference's pension liability will be updated quarterly by Wespath.

The unfunded pension liability represents the cost of the pension benefits that have already been earned by our Conference's clergy. That liability is the difference between the projected value of the Conference's pension assets and the projected total pension liability. If the liability exceeds the projected value of the pension assets, there is an unfunded liability.

The apportionment obligation is the current year's unpaid apportionments (Conference + District) and an additional 12 months of apportionments.

Both pension liability and apportionments reflect a commitment to honor decisions that were made collectively by members of the general church and the annual conference for clergy benefits and connectional giving.

7. What will the Florida Conference do with the exit obligation funds once they are received?

As mentioned above, the exit obligations are actually funds that are already committed to their intended purposes. Those meant for pension obligations will go directly to that fund in order to ensure stability in our pension program for many years to come. The funds intended for apportionments will go to support both this year's apportioned commitments as well as next year's. The cost of the legal fees will go directly to pay our legal professionals.

8. What is the process for clergy choosing to withdraw from The UMC?

The decision of clergy to withdraw from The UMC is separate from the decision of a church to disaffiliate. Following the procedure outlined in the link below, clergy must submit a written request for withdrawal from membership in The Florida Conference of the UMC to the Bishop and copy the Office of Clergy Excellence, their District Superintendent, and the Office of Pension and Health Benefits. The withdrawal [process is outlined here](#) for all clergy.

The expectation for previously retired clergy is that any retired clergy who wish to participate in any capacity in a disaffiliated church will withdraw their conference membership as they are unable to honor the covenantal commitment to steward The United Methodist witness nor fulfill the Disciplinary requirement (§1357.5) of holding a charge conference membership in a United Methodist Church.

9. If a church is disaffiliating on August 5, 2023, should lay membership who want to remain in The United Methodist Church move their membership prior to that date?

The disaffiliating church is a UMC until the effective date of the disaffiliation agreement, which is September 1, 2023 for this group of churches. Lay persons wishing to move their membership to a new church should do so before this date. Those persons wishing to remain United Methodist but are uncertain of their new church home can offer their names to the General Church Roll for one year as they discern next steps. To do this, contact [Janet Earls](#) in the Office of Congregational Vitality.

Our expectation is for a smooth and healthy process of separation for those leaving. While we understand some may have very strong feelings about the disaffiliation process, we seek to do our part to maintain integrity and a mindset of peace. In this way, we honor the grief and pain of those whose churches are leaving while they desire to remain just as we are honoring a process for a church to choose to leave.

10. What is the effective date of disaffiliation for the 46 churches being voted on today?

Disaffiliation is complete only if all obligations of the Disaffiliation Agreement are met by the effective date. For churches being voted on at the August 5, 2023 special session of annual conference, the effective date is September 1, 2023. Items such as a Certificate of Insurance and final payment of exit obligations are due before this date. Until the effective date, the local church remains a United Methodist Church, with their appointed pastor. The Annual Conference approving the Disaffiliation Agreement is one step, but it is not the final step.