

Frequently Asked Questions
About the Status of the UMC
(edited March 12, 2022)

1. *Why did the Church Council appoint a committee to educate our congregation on the Status of the UMC?*

Church Council appointed a laity committee charged with researching the multitude of articles with varying opinions and interpretations regarding the UMC's proposed "separation or disaffiliation" plans, theological differences, and impending Annual and General Conference actions. It is vital for church members to have facts about the cause of the conflicting issues in order to make informed decisions regarding the options that will be presented to the General Conference once it convenes.

This committee is covered by a prayer leader who serves on the Committee. The committee acknowledges that our congregation may hold a mix of differing beliefs along a wide spectrum from traditional to progressive. Verified confessing members will make the decision about where the church ultimately aligns - to leave the UMC and join a new traditional denomination or remain in the progressive Post Separation United Methodist Church (psUMC).

2. *The UMC has had years of disagreements and division over the LGBTQIA+ language in our Book of Discipline. Isn't this old news? Why keep talking about it?*

Yes, it is true that rumors of an "amicable denomination separation" have been bubbling up for decades. At the 2016 General Conference, the need for "a split" became so strong, ugly, and dysfunctional that an amicable separation or "just getting along and living together" was deemed impossible. At a 2019 special "called" General Conference, a plan was approved for a "gracious and amicable split" to solve the conflict once and for all. A traditional "disaffiliation" plan was approved as an addition to the Book of Discipline (¶12553), but did not end the conflict. Progressives immediately rebelled against that plan. Twenty U.S. Annual Conferences passed resolutions repudiating the General Conference's approval. Leading pastors and laity took out full-page ads in newspapers apologizing for the decision to approve the Traditional Plan. Those disagreements resulted in the creation of several other plans to pave the way for the denomination to resolve the conflict at the 2020 General Conference. The petitions for those plans are still valid agenda items for the August 29 – September 6, 2022 General Conference. Unfortunately, the 2022 General Conference has been postponed until 2024, thereby further delaying the opportunity to resolve this 40-year old conflict.

3. *Why is the UMC dividing over the issue of human sexuality language in the Book of Discipline?*

While human sexuality is the issue receiving the most public attention and debate, it is not the root issue. It is a symptom of a deeper divide about theological and institutional issues. By embracing and celebrating the popularity of homosexuality and same sex marriage, the modern culture has forced the UMC to address the issues regarding LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, asexual and intersex and other non-heterosexual and self identified genders, i.e. gender fluid, gender queer, pansexual, polyamory, two spirit, allies, kink, and non-binary). The language regarding homosexuality in the Book of Discipline has remained constant for decades. Legislative petitions have been submitted by Methodist individuals and groups requesting removal of this language, which exposes theological differences in the beliefs regarding human sexuality. See <https://www.resourceumc.org> - General Conference 2020: Advance Daily Christian

Advocate contains the petitions to be presented. See Volume 2, Sections 1 & 2 – Reports of Proposed Legislation.

4. *What are the theological and institutional differences?*

The UMC’s **theological impasse** is rooted in our differing beliefs regarding the authority of the Bible, interpretation of the Bible, its impact on how we live out our faith, and the Lordship of Jesus. These are only some of the theological differences:

Traditional Christianity	Progressive Christianity
Historic and Biblical; choose to reaffirm the traditional Biblical teachings	Culturally Driven; Favor a secular worldview that is fluid and shaped by political pressure from social justice groups
The Bible is The Word of God and divinely inspired by God. Canon is closed.	The Bible contains words of God, but the writings are products of “the writers time in history” and is a fallible record of human experiences; Canon is open to accept “new revelations”
There is Absolute Truth in the Bible	Parts of the Bible are true. My truth is not your truth; people define their own truth
Jesus is “THE” way	Jesus is “A” way
If God says it is sin in the Bible, then it is sin; belief in original sin	Some things in the Bible might have been a sin then, but is not now; humans are born good; the story about the Garden of Eden is a fairytale
Transformation of the world is a consequence of making disciples of Jesus Christ; the church is not built on politics, but on Jesus	Transformation of the world is through political action, often in line with liberal political causes. Promoting inclusion is the highest value of an unapologetic social justice agenda
Atonement & forgiveness is by faith in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection	Sin is corrected through acts of social justice and mercy; Jesus’ death on the cross was not necessary or divine
Sin needs conviction, repentance, justification, conversion, salvation	No need for repentance; universal salvation is a “civil right”; forgiveness is not a gift of grace
Believes the incarnation, virgin birth, physical death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus (Apostles and Nicene Creeds)	Progressive clergy have publicly professed their unbelief of these. Bishop Joseph Sprague denies the virgin birth. The Lesbian Bishop preaches that Jesus was human and “like a hunk of clay, forming and reforming himself”. The memory of Jesus’ life and teachings inspired His disciples to think He was merely “spiritually alive”
Practice of homosexuality is a sin	The practice of homosexuality is not a sin;
Marriage is between one man and one woman; it is God’s design for procreation	Marriage is between two persons or any two gender identities; same sex marriage is a human-affirming rite and a sacramental act to be performed in church
We are made in the image of God and He created us male and female	Our identity does not come from God; God did not make us in his image. Our gender identity is given to us at birth by “those who care for us” and has nothing to do with biology. God created an infinite number of genders.

The institutional impasse is due to inconsistent or absent enforcement of Book of Discipline violations. Bishops are not holding clergy accountable, nor are they holding one another accountable. The Western Jurisdiction elected a partnered lesbian Karen Oliveto as a Bishop in 2016. In the Illinois Great Rivers

Conference, a drag queen/gay man, Isaac Simmons (Ms. Penny Cost) is the first openly Queer person to be certified as a Candidate for Ordained ministry, and the first drag queen to receive that title in the World. In the Baltimore-Washington Conference, retired Rev. Michael Johnson is now a trans woman identifying as Rev. Mary Johnson and is married to Bishop Peggy Johnson.

Two North Georgia Conference District Superintendents filed complaints against two North Georgia UMC elders for participating in a same-sex marriage at Glenn Memorial on the Emory campus in December 2021. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson investigated the complaints and determined that the elders neither participated in the vows nor pronouncement. They only prayed and read scripture, so the complaints were dropped. The letter of the Book of Discipline law was kept, while the spirit was blatantly violated.

At their June 2021, the Florida Annual Conference approved resolutions that allow churches the ability to list members as male, female, or non-binary and allow co-lay leaders who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community. When updating clergy profiles with the United Methodist Church, ministers are to select male, female, or non-binary (neither male nor female, but usually under the umbrella of transgender)

5. What is the UMC's position on homosexuality?

Human Sexuality – Book of Discipline ¶162.G. “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as their spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us”.

The UMC implores families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. Everyone is welcome to worship and actively participate in the life of our churches. Laypersons may become members and live out their faith through their local church without respect to sexual orientation or practice.

Sexual relations are affirmed only within the monogamous, heterosexual marriage and a distinction is drawn between orientation and practice, or behavior. In 1976, ¶613 was added to the Book of Discipline “No board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any ‘gay caucus’ or group or otherwise use of such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality”.

The church has also maintained restrictions regarding clergy. In 1984, ¶304.3 was added that “Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the UMC. ¶341.6 was added to the Book of Discipline “Ceremonies that celebrate same-sex unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches”.

Some members feel strongly that the church should uphold its current stances regarding gay clergy and marriage. Others strongly advocate for inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons in all aspects of life in the church. To accomplish this inclusion, they want all prohibitive language regarding LGBTQIA+ persons abolished entirely from the Book of Discipline.

6. What is our North Georgia Annual Conference's position on homosexuality?

During her Come to the Table Lay Webinar (4/19/22), NGUMC Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson presented the document “*Love is Making Room – Reclaiming the Welcoming Table.*” It included statement supported by the Bishop and her cabinet: “We believe that harmful language about LGBTQIA+ people and restrictions on marriage and ordination should be removed from the Book of Discipline”. While this vision represents the desire of the Bishop and her Cabinet, it is not policy and does not have any impact on the Book of Discipline. The Bishop and her Cabinet stated they would abide by the current Book of Discipline until any action is taken at General Conference to remove the LGBTQIA+ language. If the UMC splits, the Post-Separation Progressive UMC (psUMC) will remove all prohibitions* regarding LGBTQIA+ persons, performance of same-sex marriage in churches, and the ordaining of and election of LGBTQIA+ persons and Bishops.

* <https://www.resourceumc.org>

7. What is the Protocol Plan?

In December 2019, Kenneth R. Feinberg, one of the nation’s foremost experts in conflict mediation, offered (pro bono) to mediate an agreement for a process that would resolve theological conflicts by restructuring the church into at least two churches - a new Traditional denomination and a (Progressive) Post-Separation UMC. (psUMC). *The Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation and Restructuring Agreement* (The Protocol) is the result of the mediated compromised agreement* made and signed by a group of recognized leaders in the UMC. These leaders were Methodist traditionalists, centrists, and progressives acting both as individuals and as representatives of constituent Methodist groups. They did not act as official representatives of the UMC and had no authority to bind the Church. Only the General Conference makes binding decisions for the Church. A petition to approve the Protocol plan will be submitted to the General Conference, now scheduled to convene August 29 – September 6, 2022. As mentioned earlier, the 2022 General Conference has been postponed until 2024.

- <https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/the-agreement>

Note: Even though the General Conference has been postponed twice, the Protocol Plan remains the most favored plan to allow for an amicable split into two denominations. The Protocol continues to be supported by Progressives, Centrists, and Traditionalists Methodists worldwide. There is still no organized opposition to the Protocol.

8. What will the Protocol accomplish?

If the General Conference approves the Protocol, it will provide a process and timeline for an orderly and amicable separation from the UMC for those who uphold the current position of the UMC (Traditionalists). It then allows for traditional conferences, churches, and clergy to leave the UMC denomination and align theologically and join a new Traditional Orthodox Wesleyan denomination.

At the first General Conference of the Post Separation United Methodist Church (psUMC), passage of a regional conference plan will take place to allow the United States to have its own regional conference. The first session of the U.S. Regional Conference would remove all prohibitions related to LGBTQIA+ persons. The Protocol will then give the progressive leadership full control of the United States psUMC.

The Protocol provides for Annual Conferences to join a new denomination with a 20% threshold to call a vote and then supported by a threshold of 57%. If there is no vote called, the Annual Conference will remain in the psUMC by default. The Protocol includes a financial agreement from unrestricted funds to provide the new Traditional Methodist denomination \$25 million, paid over four years. If more than one Traditional Methodist denomination is registered, the money will be split. In addition, \$2 million will be provided for potential later Methodist denominations. Another financial agreement was made to pay \$38 million, of which \$13 million will come from the new Traditional Denomination, paid over 8 years, to ministries of Asians, Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander Communities and Africa University. Remaining funds will stay with the psUMC. Restricted assets were not divided because legal issues prevent the division of those assets.

9. If the Protocol is approved, what options are available for a local church that does not agree with the Annual Conference's vote to stay or leave the psUMC?

If an Annual Conference votes differently than a local church would prefer, then each congregation has the opportunity to vote to join the new Methodist denomination. The local Church Council decides the voting threshold of simple majority or 2/3rds majority.

The vote on a motion to opt to join a denomination different from the Annual Conference shall occur in a church conference and must be held in consultation with the District Superintendent who shall authorize the church conference to be conducted within 60 days of the request from the Church Council. The decision about affiliation by a local church must be made by December 31, 2024. If a local church does not vote, by default it remains a part of the denomination selected by its Annual Conference. Local churches, which opt to disaffiliate and not become part of the new Methodist denomination or psUMC, must comply with ¶2553 of the *Book of Discipline*.

10. What is the difference between separation under the Protocol and disaffiliation under ¶ 2553 in the Book of Discipline?

The steps for Disaffiliation are outlined in the Book of Discipline ¶2553. It was approved by the General Conference in 2019, and expires on 12/31/23. Disaffiliation is a process for local church congregations to leave the United Methodist Church in order to become entirely independent. Members of a local church, present and voting, must approve the decision to disaffiliate by a 2/3rd majority at a Church Conference “*for reasons of conscience 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 the Annual Conference related to these issues.*” There is no requirement that “actions or inactions” be specified or justified. The agreement with Annual Conference Trustees must be ratified by a simple majority vote of the Annual Conference to become effective.

Local churches must pay unpaid apportionments for the current year, plus one additional year of apportionments, and the local church's share of pension liability risks. Wespath calculates the unfunded pension liability amount for each local church on a regular basis. A local church will know the total amount for its pension obligation at the time of a local church vote to disaffiliate. This 100% lump sum of the pension liability is paid before departing the UMC and is satisfied forever. Upon approval of the request to disaffiliate,

the Annual Conference will release the Trust Clause provisions with no lien on property, and the disaffiliated church will have full legal rights to all of its assets.

The steps for **Separation** from the UMC and joining a new traditional denomination are outlined in a new legislative petition ¶ 2556 that must be approved by the General Conference when it convenes. The Protocol does not require the lump sum for unfunded pension liability. Every local church joining the new traditional denomination will get the deed to its own property and have full legal rights to all of its assets. Local churches will have to pay back loans or grants given by the Annual Conference as is also required under disaffiliation rules.

11. *What is the Trust Clause?*

The Trust Clause ¶2501 – Each congregation’s property is held in trust, for the benefit of the entire denomination. Property cannot be sold, bought, or substantially changed without the involvement of the district superintendent. Local churches do not own their church property and assets. The Protocol provides for all Annual Conference assets properties, and liabilities to go to the Annual Conferences. Annual Conferences will not exercise their Trust Clauses for local churches that join a new Traditional denomination.

12. *What happens to clergy if the UMC splits?*

Clergy may choose to affiliate with the denomination of their choice. The Wespath pension plan will remain intact for all clergy and church personnel who join the new denomination. Clergy pensions are protected by law, and no matter whether a pastor joins the psUMC, the GMC, another denomination, or simply quits the ministry, his or her pension is protected.

Health insurance differs from Annual Conference to Annual Conference. It is anticipated that similar standards for health insurance most clergy are familiar with today will be available in whatever denomination with which they align.

13. *Why are Traditionalists being shown the door and give up the name “United Methodist Church”? The progressives are the ones who don’t agree with the Book of Discipline’s language regarding human sexuality.*

Methodism is our expression of Christian faith, but we are no longer “United.” Traditionalists feel they aren’t leaving. The church is leaving them. The goal was never about winning or taking over the UMC. The Traditionalist’s goal has always been to create a vibrant evangelical Wesleyan church that is fully focused on mission and ministry and not a church mired in a bloated bureaucracy, dysfunctional, divisive and struggling over sexuality. Traditionalists do not believe their future will be determined by getting all that is rightfully theirs. Trusting God’s grace and committing to doing his will leads to a faithful and fruitful future.

Traditionalists outnumber centrists and progressives, but do not have the votes to elect orthodox bishops in the more liberal jurisdictions. Centrists and Progressives have no incentive to leave. They control the power structure of the UMC as more Centrists and Progressives are being elected as General Conference Delegates in

the U.S, and also in our North Georgia Annual Conference. At the 2021 NGUMC Annual Conference, not a single traditional voice was appointed to the North Georgia Conference Committee on Nominations. There is a continuing liberal slant within many of our denominational boards, agencies, and their staffs.

The “United” Methodist Church “name” never truly signified theologically united; it was rooted in the merger of the United Evangelical Brethren Church and The Methodist Church in 1968. A “name change” would require a super-majority vote at General Conference and ratification by Annual Conferences.

14. *Why can't we all just stay together in love and peace and respect each other's theological differences?*

It has been proven over decades that it is not possible to live together with the deep, theological differences. In the wisdom of Dolly Parton, “A bird and a fish can love each other, but where are they going to live?” Methodists can still have respect and compassion for one another, but we cannot all live in the same house any longer. Separating into two expressions of faith is both a beginning and an end for both Traditionalists and Progressives - an end to conflict and uncertainty, and the beginning of vibrant denominations that can focus time and resources on missions and ministries instead of focusing on the conflicts that divide us. Still, there will be deep grief for all Methodists when separation happens.

Rick Warren – “Our culture has accepted two huge lies. The first is that if you disagree with someone’s lifestyle, you must fear or hate them. The second is that to love someone means you agree with everything they believe or do. Both are nonsense. You don’t have to compromise convictions to be compassionate”.

15. *What is the new Traditional Denomination? Will the Progressive Post-Separation UMC (psUMC) stay the same or also be different?*

A sample chart of comparison of the GMC and psUMC can be found at <https://peopleneedjesus.net/2021/05/21/two-methodisms-a-comparison-chart/>

The planning for the Global Methodist Church (GMC) has been the work of the Wesleyan Covenant Association and a wider Transitional Leadership Council that includes some United Methodist Bishops. The vision for the GMC supports more local control, less denominational bureaucracy, and classic Christian and Wesleyan doctrine/ethics. It is estimated that 3,000 – 5,000 congregations in the U.S. will initially join the GMC, with perhaps another 1,000 joining later. Some Annual Conferences and overseas United Methodists will likely opt into the new denomination. This new denomination will be distinctly global in nature.

In the ¶2556 petition that will be presented to the General Conference when it convenes, the Preamble for the progressive post separation United Methodist Church (psUMC) states: We envision a new future for the people of the UMC to avoid further harm to one another, including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer United Methodists and their families and friends, as well as further harm to the church universal.

The Protocol will then give the progressive leadership full control of the United States psUMC to “reset and reform” the UMC. It will retain the United Methodist Church name and logo. At the first General Conference of the psUMC, passage of a regional conference plan to facilitate ministry adaptable to regional contexts will take place to allow the United States to have its own regional conference.

There are two competing visions for the future of the psUMC. The first is an effort on the part of Progressives to shape the remaining institution around the concepts of intersectional and social justice. This is the “Out of

Chaos....Creation” Group. The other vision is captured in a working document shared by a group of bishops that calls for a regionalized, theological “big tent”, which keeps Centrists and Traditionalists in the UMC. There will be emphasis on marriage and sexuality inclusive standards.

16. How do Doctrines and Disciplines in the new Traditional Denomination compare to the current UMC?

Doctrinally, the new traditional denomination will be based on traditional Wesleyan theology, which aligns closely with the stated doctrines of the current UMC. Structurally, the new denomination is designed to decrease bureaucracy and increase local church control.

A Sample Comprehensive Comparison Chart – UMC, Transitional GMC, WCA Proposals by Tom Lambrecht – Published September 1, 2021 can be found at:

<https://goodnewsmaq.org/distinctions-differences-and-the-future-of-methodism/>

17. The message from the North Georgia Conference is that there will be a place in the Progressive Post-Separation UMC (psUMC) for Traditionalists. Is that true?

Bishops of a few Annual Conferences have made that statement. Some of the proposed plans also state this claim. The current theological make-up of the North Georgia Conference Bishop’s cabinet and conference administrative positions do not suggest traditionalists will have a place. Not a single traditional clergy was elected to the North Georgia Delegation to General Conference or Jurisdictional Conference in the last election cycle. Not a single voice on the Bishop’s cabinet spoke in opposition to the “Reclaiming the Welcoming Table – Love is Making Room” document during the April 2021 webinar statement:

“We believe that harmful language about LGBTQ people and restrictions on marriage and ordination should be removed from the Book of Discipline. Clergy have always had discretion about which couples they will agree to marry, and no clergy will be asked to do anything against their conscience. And Clergy Executive Sessions of the Annual Conferences have always followed the guidance of the Boards of Ordained Ministry and the Holy Spirit to discern whom to ordain. The Cabinet will continue to discern appointments in which clergy and churches are a good fit for each other, and in which churches will welcome their pastors and follow their leadership.”

A survey of participants at an informational meeting of the Centrist group “Uniting Methodists claimed that 80% of Methodists are “in the center”. Participants were from an audience of progressives and compatibilists and excluded the 45% of Methodists who live outside the U.S. that are largely conservative. When people say they want to construct a solution for 80% of United Methodists in the middle, they are ignoring the voices of nearly half of the church. In the same survey, 65% of progressive clergy in the survey believe that only 34% of their congregations are predominantly progressive. The lay participants believe 44% are progressive. This means that half of the progressive clergy in the survey are serving predominantly conservative congregations. How can a church be restructured to ensure greater compatibility between clergy and congregations? Will progressive pastors allow their congregations to decide to belong to a different grouping with which the pastor identifies?

Many Traditionalists believe that once the Book of Discipline normalizes same sex weddings and LGBTQAI+ ordination, it is a small step to require compliance in local churches rather than merely permitting it. In addition, if the General Conference approves the Protocol, it is expected that Traditionalist Clergy will leave the psUMC, resulting in a short supply of Traditional pastors to appoint to Traditional churches that do not align with the psUMC.

Adam Hamilton – Pastor of UMC of the Resurrection – Kansas City- Washington Post Article – March 29, 2019 - U.S. Methodist Leaders Lay Plans to Resist Vote Against Same-Sex Marriage – Rev. Hamilton is organizing with Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, Texas’s Bishop Michael McKee, and 30 handpicked clergy and leaders, including seven LGBT leaders:

After the 2019 special called General Conference, North Georgia Conference Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson was quoted in the Washington Post “I think this is a spiritual exercise,” said Hauptert- Johnson, who favors a split into two denominations, saying she believes population demographics mean Americans will increasingly be under the thumb of African voters unless they split. “How do we go about this in a way that you know is of God, led by God?....How do we sense that the Holy Spirit is leading the church now?....If the Methodist church has to get leaner and nicer, I’m all for it. I’m tired of the meanness, I’m tired of the pettiness. I’m tired of the fighting to win at all costs.”

80% of international delegates and at least 90% of the Africans voted for the traditional plan in 2019. Progressives and Centrists see international delegates as “work arounds” to be marginalized, and not as brothers and sisters worthy of respect and of fully participating in the General Conference.

Bishop Sue is a founding member of UMNNext that is in support of the U.S. becoming its own regional conference and will remove the influences from the more traditional African delegates. Of the 862 General Conference Delegates, 32% are from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe, and 55.9% from the U.S.

To learn more about the vision of progressive groups, here are a few useful links:

<https://umcnext.com>, <https://www.thelmx.org>, <https://rmnetwork.org>, <https://unitingmethodists.com>

18. Will local churches still have to pay apportionments if they align with the new denomination?

Yes. Apportionments paid by local churches in the new denomination will be less than current UMC apportionments. The new organization and structure will be a smaller bureaucracy and have reduced costs. Smaller apportionments will free up cash flow for local and global missions, paying down debt, and general ministries.

19. Delegates at the 2021 North Georgia Annual Conference approved a resolution in support of the Protocol. Why was that necessary since Annual Conference approval isn’t necessary?

It isn’t necessary for any Annual Conference to “approve” the Protocol for it to take effect. Only the General Conference can give approval. However, it is helpful for the North Georgia Annual Conference, as the largest one in the U.S. and known by General Conference Delegates to be theologically diverse, to affirm its support

of the Protocol. The affirmation vote of nearly two to one in support of the Protocol will have influence across the denomination.

20. What if the 2022 General Conference is postponed again, and if it does meet and the Protocol is not approved, what's next?

The Commission on General Conference is the only body that can make a decision to change the dates of the General Conference. There will be a firm announcement in March 2022 to confirm the General Conference meeting dates of August 29 to September 6, 2022. If it becomes apparent that not all overseas delegates would be able to attend, there is still time to set up alternatives.

Failure to adopt the Protocol would leave the church mired in a continuation of the conflict that has undermined the vitality and witness of the UMC for years. Local churches have alternative ways to withdraw from the UMC.

The 2019 special General Conference adopted a process for a gracious exit that is outlined in the Book of Discipline ¶2553. That process is complex, time-consuming, and could be expensive for most local churches. Annual Conferences have to approve this exit. It expires 12/31/23. Probable deadlines for churches who choose disaffiliation could be as early as February 2023 to place approval on the June 2023 Annual Conference Agenda.

Other options are found in ¶2548.2 and ¶2549 that are ambiguous and have rarely been used. Under these paragraphs, a local church can deed its local property to another evangelical denomination under a comity agreement. The Annual Conference would have to approve this transaction. A church would probably have to pay their proportionate share of the unfunded future pension liability as part of the transfer of the property. Once the Global Methodist Church legally becomes an evangelical denomination, the comity agreement between the local church and the GMC would permit the property to be transferred without any local church payment requirement. The GMC would pay the future pension liability.

A few progressive and traditional churches have already disaffiliated from the UMC. It is estimated that over 100 congregations have already disaffiliated from the UMC. In New England and Texas, it has been primarily progressive congregations exiting. In other parts of the country, traditionalist churches have left. Some churches have requested to use ¶2553 to leave, but their Bishops or Annual Conferences has denied their requests. In a few Annual Conferences, there is fear that even asking about the ¶2553 process would lead to closing of churches or reappointing the pastor.

Local churches are advised to decide for themselves which option is best. Churches should stay informed, and pray for God's guidance and wisdom.

21. What if a local church doesn't want to join the new denomination as described in the Protocol, but instead wants to leave the UMC to become independent?

Churches deciding to be independent would have to follow ¶2553 to disaffiliate. There are some local churches that don't want to wait to leave and are pressuring their church leaders to act now to disaffiliate before December 2023. These leaders will weigh carefully the urgency of starting the disaffiliation process now, compared to the costs involved.

22. What is the confidence level that the Protocol will be approved?

Several Annual Conferences, including North Georgia, the largest U.S. Conference, and a very liberal California-Pacific Annual Conference passed resolutions favoring adoption of the Protocol. The Renewal and Reform Coalition, which includes U.S. evangelical delegates, as well as many delegates from Eastern Europe, the Philippines, and Africa, remain solidly supportive. Many progressives favor the Protocol as the best way for them to pursue their agenda of moving the church to affirm LGBTQAI+ ordination and same sex marriage. In addition, many Centrists are tired of fighting and just want to resolve the conflict so the church can focus on its mission and ministries.

With the postponement of the 2022 General Conference to 2024, support for the Protocol could lose support as more churches may decide to Disaffiliate under ¶2553 in the interim.

23. Is there really a thing called “Progressive Christianity”? Isn’t the term “progressive” just used to describe differences in Biblical interpretations of whether or not homosexuality is a sin?

There are churches that self-title as “Progressive Christian Community.” Most people have never heard the term “progressive Christianity,” and even now it is difficult to describe what actually qualifies someone as a progressive Christian. Progressive Christianity represents a post-modern theological approach, and is not necessarily synonymous with progressive politics. Although there is a focus on promoting values such as compassion, social justice, and tolerance, achieving these is often through political activism. Concerns of feminism are also a major influence on the movement. The Progressive Christian Bloggers Network, Center for Progressive Christianity, The Beatitudes Society, CrossLeft, Social Redemption and The Progressive Episcopal Church are all notable initiatives within the movement for Progressive Christianity.

Progressive Christianity developed out of the Liberal Christianity of the modern era, which was rooted in enlightenment thinking. It is a post-liberal movement within Christianity “that seeks to reform the faith via the insights of post-modernism and a reclaiming of the truth beyond the verifiable historicity and factuality of the passages in the Bible by affirming the truths within the stories that may not have actually happened”. It is characterized by a willingness to question tradition, accept human diversity with a strong emphasis on social justice, caring for the poor and oppressed, and environmental stewardship of the earth. It emphasizes right actions over right beliefs, and does not claim that Christianity is the only valid or viable way to connect to God. There is a deep belief in the centrality of instruction to “love one another” (John 15:17) within the teachings of Jesus Christ.

24. How does a Centrist differ from a Traditionalist or Progressive?

There are major differences between Traditionalists and Progressives, and there are also many differences between Traditionalists and Centrists because the distance between Centrist and Progressive beliefs has diminished or disappeared.

Centrists have a high view of Scripture, but believe competing teachings can co-exist in one denomination. Therefore, there is no consensus in the interpretation of Scripture on issues of same-sex practice. Centrist pastor, Adam Hamilton stated: “At times, modern knowledge should lead us to change how we read

scripture". A Centrist group, called Uniting Methodists* has a position that there is a middle ground that would allow same-sex marriage and ordination in the church, but not require it. Pastors could make their own decision about doing weddings and individual annual conferences could decide whether or not to ordain practicing homosexuals. Their hope is to keep the church united around this "third way" or "local option" approach. This group is referred to as "compatibilists."

However, there is no organized effort among UMC Centrists to suggest a structure that would protect traditionalist expressions from re-education or "requirement" by the progressive majority. A church serious about retaining traditionalists might offer some sort of structural protections within the larger system, like greater annual conference autonomy/choice. Beyond the politician's smile, no such reassurances have been given. (From Caffeine Team – Ritter)

Traditionalists have a high view of Scripture, its authority and interpretation, uphold that marriage is between one man and one woman, and that ordination standards exclude LGBTQI+ persons.

Progressives believe the church must liberalize its sexual ethics and ordination standards, and Biblical teachings on marriage. The UMC must change with the liberal culture.

The leaders of Uniting Methodists are in favor of allowing same-sex marriage and ordination. Some leaders are part of Reconciling Ministries Network (the primary advocacy group for changing the church's position). Two-thirds of the clergy and lay participants of Uniting Methodists identify as Progressives. They fully support the *Next Generation UMC Proposal*.

Is *Uniting Methodists* an authentically centrist group that seeks to welcome both sides, or only a predominantly progressive group that seeks a slower transition toward a fully progressive position in the UMC? Pastor Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection (United Methodism's largest membership) hosted an informational meeting for *Uniting Methodists*. Rev. Hamilton stated that about 70% of his church used to be conservative on the issue of human sexuality, but it is now 70% progressive on the issue.

<https://goodnewsmaq.org/218362/>

<https://unitingmethodists.com/about/>

25. Are there other non-traditional denominations, other than the post-separation UMC? For example, what is the Liberation Methodist Connexion?

According to www.thelmx.org, LMX is a grassroots denomination of former, current, and non-Methodist faith leaders working on the unfolding of the "kin-dom" of God. LMX theology is not written in stone because our human understanding continues to evolve as we deepen our personal and collective understandings of God. God remains infinitely gracious, creative, merciful, and engaged with creation, healing, and redeeming the world.

LMX is journeying toward a new way of being followers of Christ that refute the imbalance of powers, and privileges that have plagued Methodism: colonialism, white supremacy, economic injustices, patriarchy, sexism, clericalism, ableism, ageism, transphobia, and heteronormativity. We trust God's presence and our collaborative labors will guide us toward a new, more liberative way of answering our calling and being in connexion together. We intentionally invite the full participation of all who are living out their god-given identities and expressions.

26. Explain the reasons slavery, the status and role of women in the church and society, and divorce are used to support and accept today's societal and cultural beliefs about homosexuality and same sex marriages.

Over the past few decades, some Christians have compared the legitimization of homosexuality and the legalization of same sex marriage with earlier struggles in our society over slavery or the status and role of women in the church and society. The assumption is that slavery, women in ministry, and homosexual behavior were and are culturally bound and homosexual behavior and same-sex marriage should be set aside for a more enlightened and inclusive view.

Progressives believe that over the years, opposition to homosexuality and same-sex marriage is passing away and in the years to come, and we will be shocked that it was ever opposed by society. How we answer the questions of what Scripture is, now, when and why it was written, and the way in which God influenced its human authors shape how we make sense of issues like homosexuality. When easy comparisons are made between slaves, women and homosexuals in the Bible, interpretation and explanation of text must be made with a careful study of Scripture.

The *organized church* is different from the church as *bodies of believers*. The organized church has not always gotten it right as history has proven. If the Catholic Church had gotten it right, there would not have been the reformation. If the Methodist church had been right, there would not have been the Free Methodist split over slavery. If the German church had been right, there would not have been Dietrich Bonhoeffer's death because the German church supported Hitler. Each split had to do with accuracy of Scripture and personal holiness. The proposed split for the UMC also has to do with accuracy, authority, and interpretation of Scripture.

Slavery is not condoned or condemned by the Bible, but examples are given on how slaves should be treated correctly. The Old Testament lays out a long, redemptive process that ultimately overturns the institution of slavery and moves toward freedom. Examples are: A Sabbath day of rest for slaves (Ex 23:12), release of slaves in the seventh year (Lev.25:39-43), provision for slaves upon release (Deut.15:12:18) and capital punishment for slave traders (Deut 24:7). This culminates in the New Testament when Paul pleads with Philemon to release Onesimus from slavery on the basis of Christian brotherhood. Household codes actually served to protect slaves from human cruelty. John Wesley, William Wilberforce, John Newton (Amazing Grace) opposed slavery from England. The same is true of the U.S. positions, which was not North-South as much as individuals, and many churches split over this concern.

Divorce is not God's ideal plan, but neither is sin. Divorce is permitted or commanded in instances of adultery, physical or emotional abuse or abandonment in the Old Testament. Scriptures in the New Testament permit divorce if there is abandonment by an unbeliever or in cases of adultery. Most Scriptures look at the man doing the wrong thing, but this could also be the woman. If a man divorced his wife for the wrong reasons, then to remarry is living in adultery.

Women in leadership has occurred throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, with continued progress towards the respecting of women as equal, but different from men. From the beginning, God created woman as an equal to man and gave dominion of the earth to both of them. While there are no

women as apostles, there are also no gentiles. Women, in the ancient world had few rights, were exploited and were regarded as property in the spoils of war. In cases of adultery, women were more severely penalized than men, and infertility was assumed to be a “problem” with the female. Again, Scriptures begin a process of liberation and equality. Deborah, Huldah, Pricilla and Junias (Judges 4:2; Kings 22:14-20, Acts 18:26; Romans 16:7) are lifted up to positions of leadership. Women can inherit property (Num. 27:5-8; 31:1-9), purchase land (Prov. 31:16), have their rights protected (Deut. 21:15-17), and engage in public commerce (Prov. 31:24) In the New Testament, Jesus had female disciples (Matt.27:55, 56; Luke 8:1-13); Jesus protects and defends a woman from capital punishment (John 8:1-11) and grants dignity to many women through his ministry by engaging in serious conversations about major matters (John 4:1-30; Matt 15:21-28; Luke 10:38-42). Women were the very first to witness and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-14). Women are not property and sexual objects, but persons of sacred worth, created in the image of God (Lev.19-29; 21-9; Deut.23:17,18; 1 Cor. 6:15-20)

There has been no change in the view of homosexuality from the first 2000 years of the church after Jesus, or from the previous thousands of years of the Jewish nation. There is no redemptive movement toward relaxing the biblical prohibition against homosexual behavior. Homosexual **behavior, not homosexual persons**, is regarded as sin, along with a whole range of other sins, and is consistently condemned in the Bible. Genesis 19:1-11; Lev 18:22, 20:13; Judges 19:11-24; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:8-10; Jude 7). The Bible is clear about this as not being the way God made humans to act. That does not mean that persons are not born with an inclination towards the same sex, but that they are not to give in to that desire. There are claims that homosexuality is not mentioned in the Bible. The homosexual “act/behavior” is described whether it was labeled as homosexuality or not.

Christ held everyone’s *behavior* to the same standard. Both progressive and traditional theologians have written many articles about the Scriptures addressing slavery, women, divorce and homosexuality. Our personal challenge is to examine the Scripture and make decisions about our choices and beliefs.

Timothy Tennant – President of Asbury Theological Seminary and a Professor of Global Christianity - Slaves, Women, and Homosexuality – Feb 2013 – seedbed.com.

Adam Hamilton – Making Sense of the Bible – 3 Buckets for Scripture

William Webb – Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis.

27. What is the Christmas Covenant?

This Christmas covenant was conceived during the Christmas season of 2019. It is a reminder of the Christmas Conference of 1784 gave birth to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. It was to be a rallying point for a renewed and revived UMC around the world.

The Christmas Covenant is a set of legislation and constitutional amendments written primarily by United Methodists from Africa, Europe and the Philippines and submitted to the UMC’s General Conference with the goal of establishing regional equity in the structures of the church for missional effectiveness while sustaining connectional unity. The legislation aims to change the name of “Central” Conference to “Regional Conference. The term “central” has a negative connotation associated with the “Central Jurisdiction” that segregated Black churches and clergy in the U.S. The legislation sets up 5 episcopal areas in Africa, as recommended by the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

The Christmas Covenant is rooted in the following values: (1) Connectional relationships rooted in mission (2) Respect for contextual ministry settings (3) Legislative equality for regional bodies of the church. In its preamble it also celebrates the diversity of God’s creation in its many beautiful expressions, and values mutually empowering relationships to strengthen evangelism, discipleship, and social witness for the transformation of the world. It advocates being in mission together as we embrace differences and allows for self-determination. Our different contexts need different solutions. It provides opportunity to engage in the life and ministry of the church within respective regions, while maintaining connectional relationships with other regions.

The Connectional Table (CT) affirms the Christmas Covenant as an “expression of the CT’s commitment to institutional equity and to dismantling historic, systemic colonialism. (CT press release, Nov. 3, 2020) In turn the Christmas Covenant celebrates the Connectional Table’s U.S. Regional Conference legislation.

28. What is the Christmas Covenant stance on the inclusion of LGBTQI persons?

The Christmas Covenant legislation ensures that no regional conference can be forced to do anything against its will. No regional conference can impose on any other regional conference. The Christmas Covenant recognizes the sacred value of all persons as created in the image of God and encourages regional conferences to consider ministry approaches that reflect the theological convictions of the missional contexts they serve.

29. Is the Christmas Covenant in conflict with the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation?

No. These are two separate pieces of legislation focused on two different things. The Protocol has “regionalization” as one of its pillars; it does not have proposed legislation to make that happen. The Christmas Covenant does not prevent any part of the UMC from separating from the denomination.