

Clarifying Conversations on the Future of the United Methodist Church

Opening Statement

Back in 2019, before the Special Called Session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, we had a town hall meeting to talk about what may or may not happen during that session. I began that meeting with comments about how we do and do not talk to each other in the community of faith. The response to this reminder was overwhelmingly positive, so I want to take a moment to revisit that as we begin the first in what will probably be many conversations on life in the UMC regarding human sexuality.

First, the church does not have the benefit of having “issues”. We have people. Real people who are beloved children of God who belong to our congregation and to our families. It is easy to demonize and ostracize the other when we think in terms of issues, of winning and losing, of needing someone to be wrong in order that we might be right. Low integrity politicians get that privilege, the church does not.

The points of tension in the church have been around full inclusion of persons in the LGBTQ+ community, particularly the issues of ordination and same sex marriage. When we speak of these issues in our meetings, in our classes and groups, in the hallway and parking lots, we will always assume that we will be heard by someone whom this directly affects, either in their own personhood or the persons of their children or grandchildren. We are called to do no harm, and doing no harm begins with the language we use. We will not demonize the other where we disagree. We will remember that we have worshiped together and served together in spite of our differing opinions on a wide variety of things. We will also be mindful of our opportunities to support members of the LGBTQ+ community and their families to ensure that they feel safe and supported and loved by their church.

Today we share some corrective information on the misperceptions that are out there concerning the announcement of a new Methodist denomination. Hear me on this: Suncreek is a United Methodist Church with United Methodist clergy. This announcement does not in any way change who we are or what we are about as a church.

Recent History of Talk of United Methodist Church Split

- The General Conference is the only entity that speaks on behalf of The United Methodist Church.
- General Conference was going to look at various plans of how we can coexist or disaffiliate.
- In 2019, a Special Session of General Conference was called, and a vote was taken regarding the language in *The Book of Discipline* concerning Human Sexuality. That vote did not pass the judicial process and so the issue would be revisited at the next General Conference.
- As you are aware, General Conference was postponed due the COVID pandemic. Then the rescheduled General Conference was postponed again. The next date for General Conference is 2024, which puts General Conference back on its regular four-year cycle.
- Though often described as a “battle for traditional Methodism”, the division centers around language only added to *The Book of Discipline* in 1972.
- The issue centers around the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons, ordination, same sex marriage by clergy and same sex marriages in United Methodist facilities.

Misperceptions

1. The United Methodist Church split on May 1st.
 - In reality, a fringe group of clergy created a new denominational structure in anticipation of a hoped-for mass exodus from The United Methodist Church. There is no Global Methodist Church yet.
2. This announcement was timed to create a false sense of urgency.
 - The group that has created what they hope will be The Global Methodist Church (GMC) has been unhappy with The United Methodist Church going back over 30 years. They were first called the Good News Movement, then the Confessing Movement, then most recently the Wesleyan Covenant Association. So the question is, why now?
3. The Bishops have blocked General Conferences from happening because of their agenda to change the *Book of Discipline*.
 - Bishops have no authority whatsoever in the setting of General Conference.
4. Lots of churches would leave on May 1st.
 - Though this will vary from area to area and conference to conference, out of the 300+ churches in the North Texas Conference, the bishop is aware of only 6 or 7 that are even considering it.
5. It is only a matter of time until *The Book of Discipline* language changes regarding LGBTQ+ matters.
 - This may happen, but it is not a given. For the language to change, it will be changed through the due process of General Conference.
6. If you don't leave The United Methodist Church, you will be assigned a gay pastor.
 - Pastors are assigned for the good of the church in consultation with the Bishop and the District Superintendent.
7. United Methodist clergy will be required to perform same sex marriages and United Methodist churches will be required to host them.
 - Pastors do not have to marry anyone and churches have always set their own wedding policies.
8. If you are a conservative leaning person or attend a conservative leaning congregation, you have to leave The United Methodist Church.
 - No one has to leave The United Methodist Church. The group that announced this new denomination did not have to leave The United Methodist Church.

Closing Remarks

In closing, let me again say that Suncreek continues to be the church you love. We will continue to do what we do. We will continue in our mission and ministry. We do not have to do anything to remain who we are. We will continue to be the loving and welcoming congregation that you love and count on day to day for community, inspiration and spiritual growth. God has blessed who Suncreek is and what Suncreek is doing. To all our people this will remain a safe and loving place. I am honored to be everyone's pastor in this special place.

Information Provided by the North Texas Conference Office

While most of the churches in North Texas Conference will continue faithfully doing the good work of The United Methodist Church, the conference has established a process of discernment for those who would not. Based on 2553 of *The Book of Discipline*, the process is an intentional period of discernment that unfolds over 9-12 months and is conducted in partnership with conference with leadership. Any disaffiliation resolution must be approved by a 2/3 majority vote of professing members present at a church conference.

Basic terms include:

- Local church payments to the North Texas Conference by two years apportionments
- Payment of the local church's share of unfunded pension liability
- Repayment of any grants received from the North Texas Conference in the past 10 years
- Payment for the costs of any legal work required.