

# The Path Forward



## Introduction

**The Path Forward** is Mountain View's process of deliberate discussion as we prayerfully seek to educate and inform our members about the current issues that are facing the United Methodist Church (UMC).

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Several UMC churches have chosen to leave the denomination. This document is intended to be a guide to clarify the issues that have led to the decision to leave the UMC and educate the

congregation on those issues. Most of the content came from other churches who have gone through – or are currently going through – the discernment process.

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## A. How Did We Get to this Point?

Every four years the UMC has a General Conference, in which delegates from around the world converge to pray, discuss, and vote on the official positions of the United Methodist Church. The General Conference is also where any changes are made to the Book of Discipline.

***The Book of Discipline - A fundamental book outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organizational work and procedures of The United Methodist Church. Each General Conference amends The Book of Discipline, and the actions of the General Conference are reflected in the quadrennial revision. Often referred to as The Discipline.***

The UMC's struggle with the enforcement of the Book of Discipline, specifically related to the issue of homosexuality, led to a special General Conference in 2019. At that time, the Book of Discipline stated that *"The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching"* and thus *"self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."*

There was a debate, and a vote was taken. The delegates voted 438-to-384 to continue with the current stance. Many people were shocked, angered, and outraged by the outcome of the vote, and some churches left the denomination because they disagreed with the UMC decision about human sexuality. Additionally, some felt that there weren't enough actions taken to address the issue of enforcement of the Book of Discipline, while others simply wanted to avoid infighting.

As a result, in the summer of 2019, a diverse group of 16 church leaders representing centrist, progressive, and traditionalist viewpoints assembled to prayerfully consider next steps for the denomination. After decades of disagreement on the issue within the UMC, an agreement was carefully negotiated - **"The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation"** (often simply referred to as **"The Protocol."**) It was scheduled to be voted on in 2020.

If **The Protocol** is adopted, it would have allowed churches to leave the UMC while keeping their property. This is important because of the Trust Clause, noted in section B. Furthermore, \$25 million in funds would go from the UMC to a new denomination.

A new denomination, the Global Methodist Church (GMC), had plans to launch after the next General Conference, which was widely expected to approve "The Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation." A General Conference was scheduled for 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic postponed that gathering until August of 2022. In early 2022, to allow international delegates time to acquire visas due to Covid, it was announced that General Conference would be postponed until 2024. By that time, it would have been more than four years since the proposal, and some of the leaders who brokered that initial agreement were no longer willing to support it. Frustrated after years of delays and not wanting to wait any longer,

the Global Methodist Church decided to launch in May 2022, resulting in the need to accelerate decision-making for churches who would entertain separation.

## B. The “Trust Clause”

The trust clause is one way we seek to be *United* Methodists, all bound together with a common vision and mission in the service of our Lord.

The “Trust Clause” states that the property of a particular church is not owned by that individual church. Rather, the property is held “in trust” for the entire denomination.

This means that an individual church cannot simply “break away” from the UMC and retain their property.

## C. Paragraph 2553 and Why Now?

General Paragraph 2553 was added to the *Book of Discipline* following the outcome of the vote at the 2019 Special Session of General Conference. It gives individual congregations the opportunity to disaffiliate from the UMC without forfeiting their property. There are clauses and a specific deadline.

¶ 2553 of the *Book of Discipline*” states that, “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 conscience...”

The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on **December 31, 2023**. Therefore, many churches feel as if they now have to make a decision. Although this paragraph doesn’t expire until December 31, 2023, the North Georgia conference has set a deadline of February 28, 2023 to notify the District Superintendent of a Churches intent to request a vote.

The provisions of ¶ 2553 require, at a minimum, three things:

- a. a decision to disaffiliate from the UMC. A vote is taken by the members of a church, and a two-thirds majority is required for disaffiliation.
- b. the payment in full of two years of that congregation’s apportionment commitment as set by the conference;
- c. the payment in full of the congregation’s pro-rata share of the conference’s pension liability, based on a formula approved by the annual conference.

## D. Two Perspectives: Traditional & Progressive

Today in the UMC, Traditionalists are seeking to preserve the current doctrine and why we are United Methodists.

There has been concern over the enforcement of the Book of Discipline regarding bishops, seminary professors, and clergy in the UMC who have written and taught doctrine contrary to that of the UMC without being held accountable or without consequence.

The current views of the Traditionalists remain consistent with the Book of Discipline, as follows.

- Historic interpretation of the Bible
- Does not believe our culture should dictate what we believe
- Beliefs align with the current United Methodist Book of Discipline
- The Bible is the Word of God
- The Bible is true and authoritative
- Scripture is the guiding principle of your life experiences
- Believes in the tenets of The Apostle's Creed
- Jesus was both fully human and fully divine
- The Virgin Birth
- The literal, physical crucifixion & resurrection of Jesus
- Sin separates us from God
- We need atonement in order to be restored into a relationship with God
- Forgiveness comes from faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- Salvation is the precious gift received in response to God's grace
- Salvation only comes through faith in Jesus

Progressives hold the belief that our understanding of Scripture is fluid and changes over time, and we have new revelations from God.

It is important to note that the official doctrine of the United Methodist Church has **not** changed.

Seeking to address some of the concern and criticisms of the current state of the denomination, the UMC produced a document stating, "Here is what the Articles and Confessions of the United Methodist Church says on these matters and will continue to say:"

• **Virgin Birth and Divinity of Jesus:** The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature of the blessed Virgin."

- **Confession of Faith:** “We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

- **Resurrection of Jesus Christ:** Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

- **Confession of Faith, Article II:** “Jesus Christ... was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, from whence he shall return.”

- **Salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ** Articles of Religion, Article IX: “We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith.”

- **Confession of Faith, Article IX:** “We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

According to UMC Next, which represents some of the progressive viewpoints, groups of churches can form new expressions of Methodism and offer resources to new denominational expressions. Examples may include:

- May or may not believe in any or all of the tenets of the Apostles’ Creed
- Many of the foundations of the traditional UMC church are being questioned
- Some believe this, but others do not agree:
  - Jesus was literally born to a virgin
  - The crucifixion is not to be taken literally
  - The physical resurrection of Christ
  - There was No original sin (Man is inherently good)
  - It is possible for sin to be corrected through works of justice & mercy
  - That Jesus’ death on the cross is not necessary for atonement
  - That all receive salvation regardless of belief
  - There is more than one path to salvation

### **What if Some of My Beliefs are in Both Groups?**

- Prayerfully consider how important each belief is in your faith journey
- Read Scripture related to the belief or topic
- Use the references provided and your own research to understand current practices
- Ask questions; contact a member of The Path Forward Committee, a Pastor, or a spiritual mentor ([mvcpf2022@outlook.com](mailto:mvcpf2022@outlook.com)).

## E. Human Sexuality:

The current language regarding human sexuality has been voted on and kept in the Book of Discipline by a majority vote at General Conferences for decades, most recently at a Special Session in 2019.

### The Current Language in the UMC Book of Discipline

- Inclusiveness (¶ 4 and ¶ 104) and Eligibility (¶ 214):
  - "... all persons are of sacred worth" created in the image of God and "All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members in any local church in the connection."
- Human Sexuality (¶ 161.G):
  - "... does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." "...whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage."
- Ordination of Ministers (¶ 304 and ¶ 2702 ):
  - "...self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."

¶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."

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.

With regard to human sexuality, the Book of Discipline is not consistently followed. As a result, many members of the UMC feel that the majority vote is not respected or validated. Also, there hasn't been accountability for violations of the Book of Discipline.

## F. Where We are Now:

The current situation with the UMC and its members (and potentially Mountain View) has reached irreconcilable differences resulting in disruption of the missions and ministries of the church, confusion and anxiety amongst members, and distracts from the focus of the Church.

Contradictions to theology and Scripture illustrate how we've arrived at this intersection, yet each perspective believes their understanding of the Bible is correct.

*Important Note: Mountain View is a vibrant church and the conflict that is currently happening within the UMC is not necessarily a reflection of the Mountain View congregation. The conflict happening within the UMC is requiring Mountain View, as a congregation, to prayerfully make a choice.*

## G. Our Options:

There are two decisions on the table; to remain in post-separation UMC or to disaffiliate. After the vote, the Path Forward committee will provide additional information related to each of these options.

- Remain
  - Do Nothing – Remain in Post-Separation UMC
- Disaffiliate
  - Join Global Methodist Church
  - Become Independent (Non-Denominational)
  - Join a Smaller Denomination with Methodist Roots
  - Remain independent until we can make the best decision

## H. Our Future:

This is a difficult moment in the history of our church and our denomination. The intent is that Mountain View will not change who we are as a church.

Regardless of how the congregation votes, people will be left to their own choices irrespective of which perspective they hold.

## I. The Path Forward Timeline:

- September-October** A series of workshops, discussions, and handouts presenting information from the full range of perspectives.
- November-January** Continued efforts by the Task Force to present educational opportunities for the congregation as well as to update and present new information as it becomes available.



**January 2023** Submit formal request to our District Superintendent. She will call for a special Church Conference. Members will vote on whether to stay in the UMC or disaffiliate. Two-thirds of the voting members required to disaffiliate from the UMC. Voting members must be present.

**June 2023** If the Church votes to disaffiliate from the UMC, it would receive final approval at the North Georgia Annual Conference. This disaffiliation would take place on July 1, 2023.

### J. Examples of Concern:

It should be noted that the following examples are not critiques or judgments of one’s character or passion for ministry. Our United Methodist heritage is our strong doctrine, and we are seeing some extreme examples of beliefs and teachings that are not in line with our official United Methodist doctrine.

The Bishops recently addressed many of these issues by stating, “Some stories have been circulating about a few Methodist pastors – out of over 50,000 around the world – who don’t believe in the Virgin Birth or the physical resurrection of Jesus. These stories are misleading. It is zeroing in on less than 1% of the church, and saying that’s 100% of what will be left.”

The traditionalist perspective is that the United Methodist Church is a connectional system and these examples point out instances of a lack of accountability.

#####

In July 2016, Rev. Karen Oliveto became the first openly gay bishop in the UMC. She is the Bishop of the Mountain Sky Conference, which consists of Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and small portion of Idaho. In 2017, a complaint was filed by a fellow Pastor for a sermon Oliveto preached, in which she claimed that “If Jesus can change, if he can give up His bigotries and prejudices, if He can realize that He had made His life too small, and if, in this realization, He grew closer to others and closer to God, than so can we.”

The Book of Discipline is very specific on the UMC views on homosexual clergy.

#####

Rev. Roger Wolsey is an ordained United Methodist pastor, who leads the Wesley Foundation at the University of Colorado (the Wesley Foundation is the official United Methodist campus ministry.) In addition to being a blogger for a Buddhist website, he wrote, “Jesus isn’t God. Jesus didn’t die for our sins. Jesus wasn’t killed instead of us... God didn’t write the Bible...Jesus’ resurrection didn’t have to be understood as a physical one...”

#####

In the Iowa Conference, Bishop Laurie Holler issued a decree stating, “To put it clearly, pastors will be able to choose which weddings they officiate, as long as it is two consenting adults who have been counseled. Likewise, church leadership, in consultation with their pastors, will be able to determine their own policy regarding weddings.”

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Rev. Craig Duke, a United Methodist Pastor in Indiana, performs in “drag” and is a cast member in the latest season of the HBO reality show, “We’re Here.”

#####

The issue of human sexuality is not the most disturbing concern about the Rev. Isaac Simmons, an openly gay pastor in Bloomington, Illinois, who has been widely celebrated as the first drag queen certified as an ordination candidate in the UMC. Simmons preaches in drag as the female persona “Ms. Penny Cost.”

In his message entitled, “The Bible is Nothing,” Simmons repeatedly uses profanity (including blasphemy), consistent anger-filled claims against traditional values, and even a denial of God.

Simmons opens with the claim that “The Bible is no more holy than Allen Ginsburg’s howls of life, no more peaceful than Oscar Wilde’s Requiescat in pace, and no more stronger than Tammy f---king Faye’s g-d---n eyelash glue.”

On his website, he calls the Bible “nothing but poetry, pain, and performance” and refers to God as “God, themself” (avoiding male pronouns for God).

Simmons has been invited to speak at several United Methodist events and congregations across the country. The United Methodist News Service produced a video about Simmons, celebrating how he uses “the art form of drag” to “speak in a new way.”

#####

In 2016, the General Conference formally withdrew support for abortion rights and Roe vs. Wade. Yet, when the Supreme Court made its ruling on June 24, 2022, the United Methodist Council of Bishops, the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, the United Methodist women’s group, and General Commission on Women in Society, and General Board of Global Ministries all denounced the court ruling. A statement by the Council of Bishops referred to pro-life advocates as being against the “sacred worth of women.”

#####

Duke University is a prominent United Methodist seminary. On March 22, 2022, a worship service was conducted by Divinity Pride, a student group affirming the “dignity, faithfulness, and strength of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and gender/sexuality non-conforming Christians.”

A second-year seminary student opened the service by referring to God as “mother, father, and parent and drag queen, and transman, and gender-fluid.”

Another seminary student claimed that the Book of Genesis (chapter 33) supports gender-transforming surgery, declaring that surgery “can be framed as a choice... transition is better framed as a calling. It is a calling to wrestle with God and not let go until we receive a blessing in our own bodies.”

Note: “The Divinity School at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, is one of ten graduate or professional schools within Duke University. It is also one of thirteen seminaries founded and supported by the United Methodist Church.”

#####

On June 25, 2022, the United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration voted to include a category for “non-binary” church members and clergy who don’t identify as male or female. Of the 18 members taking part in the meeting, only one voted against it.

In 2019, Rev. M Barclay became the first openly “non-binary trans person” to be ordained in the United Methodist Church. Barclay chooses the pronouns “they/them/theirs.”

#####

Mark Miller is a professor at Drew Theological School, a United Methodist seminary in Madison, New Jersey. Like many United Methodist professors and clergy, he is urging people to refrain from using male pronouns when referring to God. With The Lord’s Prayer, he uses the term “Our Father,” instead using “Our God.” He refuses to use the word “Kingdom,” instead using “kin-dom.”

#####

In June 2022 Emory University, which is affiliated with the United Methodist Church, had on display a student drag queen's photo of himself as “gay” Jesus. The photo was a self-portrait by Emory graduate Tommy Greenler, who in the accompanying text raised speculations about Jesus' sexuality by asking, "Why did he spend much of his adult life living with 12 male admirers... Why was John the only disciple present at the Crucifixion, when many gospels confirmed that Jesus loved him in a special way?" Last year Tommy Greenler led a “drag” show at Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church in Atlanta.

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At a Chicago-area “Winter Warming” retreat, one of the points of emphasis was finding ways to make VBS and other early-childhood education programs LGBTQ+ affirming. Churches were encouraged to “drop the gender binary” terms, such as “boys and girls,” and providing “all-gender restrooms.”

#####

In 2019, when the General Conference voted to continue with the Book of Discipline’s stance that homosexuality was incompatible with Scripture, the deciding votes were issued by the foreign delegates from Asia and Africa, who are very traditional in their understanding of Scripture. Bishop Minerva Carcano of Phoenix, was outraged by the outcome of the vote and angered by the conservative stance of the Africans. She said, “I sat there wondering when our African delegates will grow up” to accept enlightened American views on sexual liberation.

#####

Glide United Methodist Church in San Francisco, the fifth largest United Methodist church in the United States, has sought to distance themselves not only from the United Methodist Church, but from Christianity in general. According to their Bishop, baptisms are performed “in the name of the people rather than from a Christian understanding of Baptism” and Holy Communion was abandoned...” The Bishop for the California-Nevada Conference has stepped in to address these issues. The church has criticized the Bishop because of “her mission to create more ‘Disciples of Christ.’” In other words, the largest United Methodist Church in California is outwardly angry about the call to make disciples of Jesus.

#####

Rev. Doug Damron, a prominent United Methodist pastor in Ohio, claims that the denomination needs to “speak into existence a church which fully welcomes, includes, affirms not only God’s beloved gay and lesbian ones, but a host of other folks who have found the door of the church closed to them: trans folks, bi folks, kink folks, poly folk, gender-fluid folk, and others.” The term “poly” refers to those who have multiple partners at the same time. “Kink” is any kind of sexual activity or desire that falls outside the realm of culturally sanctioned norms.

#####

Rev. Austin Atkinson is a United Methodist Pastor in suburban Seattle. He serves on the Board of the Pan-Eros Society, which sponsors the Seattle Erotic Art Festival and a monthly event called "Men Tying Men," which promotes sexual bondage (their website states, "Nudity is perfectly fine. Bring rope and your enthusiasm.")

#####

The Rev. David M. Felten, the Senior Pastor of a prominent UMC in Arizona, boasts that his church offers an alternative to "biblical Christianity." One of his sermons declared, "The notions of biblical inerrancy and the need to be born again... keeps the whole church trapped in a quagmire of outdated fantasies." In regard to the concept of sin and redemption, he writes that Paul "made up a fanciful story about sin and the power of Jesus to redeem us... But science has given us a story that makes more sense for the 21st century... We are evolving creatures striving to emerge from the primal ooze of our past to achieve a more advanced form of life." In terms of the virgin birth, Felten disagrees, even pondering that "Mary may have been a local peasant girl assaulted by a Roman Soldier... Jesus may have been the illegitimate child of rape."

#####

In a recent national radio interview on NPR, Rev. Kimberly Scott, a United Methodist pastor in Arizona, was asked about the Book of Discipline's stance on same sex clergy. She responded by saying, "Well, it's clear-cut in regards to our Book of Discipline, right? It clearly states that you cannot be an openly-practicing homosexual and be ordained in the United Methodist Church. That's very clear, right? It sounds clear. However, in many conferences in the United Methodist Church, especially here in the U.S., churches have gone beyond what the Book of Discipline says to make the church open and accessible to gay and lesbian clergy like myself."

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