

Frequently Asked Questions

What is disaffiliation?

Disaffiliation is the process a congregation must take when leaving the United Methodist Church. Each church will discern the best direction for their congregation. A discernment period of prayer, study, and conversation around staying or leaving is vital for the church to understand their core values, mission, and vision within the call God has placed upon them. After this time of discernment, a conversation around disaffiliation will determine if a church pursues disaffiliation or remains UM.

A decision to disaffiliate requires a two-thirds majority (66.7%) vote of church members present at a church conference to begin the legal process of leaving. Congregations choosing to disaffiliate under Paragraph 2553 (of the Book of Discipline) have until December 2023 to complete the process.

Because all local church property is held in trust for the UMC, the process of disaffiliation requires a meeting/session of the Annual Conference where a simple yes or no vote will be taken to allow a congregation to disaffiliate. The Annual Conference, most likely, will vote yes and allow a congregation to leave after the conditions of the Discipline have been met.

Why are we being asked to consider disaffiliation?

1 The UMC Discipline currently outlines a process and allows for congregations to leave the UM denomination under paragraph 2553, which will expire at the end of 2023. There is no guarantee that our Annual Conference will extend this exit after 2023; though our Bishop has suggested he wishes to do so. There are other paragraphs in the Discipline by which a church could disaffiliate, but the process is more tedious and there is no guarantee that the conference would allow a church to leave under these paragraphs.

2 There was hope that the General Conference of 2024 might pass what is called the protocol. The protocol is a piece of legislation that would allow congregations a more gracious exit with the expectation of keeping church property and limiting the financial liability of leaving. However, there is no guarantee the protocol will pass and how it might be amended at General Conference is unknown. In addition, several of those originally supporting the protocol have since withdrawn their support.

3 The marriage of same sex partners and the ordination of clergy candidates who are practicing homosexuals have been influential issues in the decision of some congregations to leave. Currently our discipline does not allow clergy to conduct same-sex-couple marriages, nor is church property of UM congregations to be used for such weddings.

Nevertheless, there are concerns that once traditionalists leave for another denomination, these paragraphs in the Discipline might change and allow such activity. Others site the lack of enforcement of the Discipline on these issues by some conferences and bishops as a reason to leave. Congregations on the other end of this debate have left, or are leaving, because the UMC has not moved fast enough to allow such activities.

4 Some are citing other theological concerns around the divinity of Jesus, the view of God's Word, and how seriously we will live orthodox Christian lives. There are over 30,000 ordained clergy and licensed pastors in the UMC, 13 UM seminaries, and numerous colleges and universities that use the United Methodist name. There is little question about some having potentially un-orthodox beliefs. However, we must ask: How do these impact the local congregation? Has our church ever been asked to preach or teach contrary to God's Word? Will that happen in the future? These are questions that are important to consider as we discern the weight of what impact they may have on our congregation.

How will we know when/if we need to take a vote?

At some point we will take a poll to help us understand the landscape of our congregation and help discern if there is a need for an official vote. We believe it is prudent to have a sense of the landscape before we call for an official vote. There are congregations with a majority who wish to remain United Methodist and are therefore not calling for a Church Conference to take a vote.

If we take a vote . . . What is the process? Can I vote by proxy?

The pastor must, in writing, ask the District Superintendent to hold a Church Conference meeting. Once the date is set, we must give at least 10 days' notice prior to the Church Conference via the pulpit, email, and/or in writing. All present members of the church at that meeting constitute a quorum. They will have both voice and vote.

Proxy votes are not permitted, nor are e-votes, telephone votes, or any other "not-in-attendance" votes; you must be present to vote.

Does my church have to vote?

No. A church is not required to vote. We are a United Methodist congregation, and until we determine otherwise; nothing has changed.

What is the cost of disaffiliation?

Once a vote has been ratified and approved by a two-thirds majority vote, the trustees of the church will begin negotiations with the conference trustees to determine the financial cost of leaving.

Typically, the cost of leaving is:

- Payment in full of two years of the congregation's apportionment commitment as set by the conference (calculated as the remainder of the year's apportionment when disaffiliation occurs, plus the next year's apportionment), AND
- Payment in full of the congregation's pro-rata share of the conference's pre-1982 pension liability, as calculated by our pension company (Wespath Benefits and Investments) and the conference treasurer, AND
- An additional 10% of the above total to cover the cost of transferring title and drawing up other legal documents that the Conference may incur.
- Should clergy choose to remain United Methodist, the conference will also ask the church to place into ESCROW the salary package for clergy for the remainder of the appointment year (the appointment year is July 1 – June 30) to complete their financial obligation to their pastor(s). As we understand, salary will

be paid out from that account until clergy have been reappointed or until June 30, whichever comes first.

What will happen to the Peoria First Foundation if we disaffiliate?

The Peoria First Foundation has retained the services of a lawyer to help answer the question of what happens to Foundation assets and how best to preserve our assets in the event the Peoria First UMC ever ceases to exist or becomes a new entity. It is likely that regardless of disaffiliation status, the Foundation will recommend a revision of the bylaws that govern the Foundation to provide a clear process should the status of our church ever change.

Will we retain our current clergy if we disaffiliate?

This will depend upon the call each clergy feels upon their life. If the pastor chooses to leave the United Methodist Church and realign with the denomination that the congregation has chosen, clergy can remain. However, if the church joins the Global Methodist Church (GMC), but clergy choose to remain United Methodist they will be reappointed.

Our denomination can make “cross-appointments” to non-United Methodist churches, but only if the General Conference has an agreement with the other denomination. Because we have not had a General Conference since the creation of the GMC, we have no agreement for cross-appointments. The next General Conference is scheduled for 2024, and there is no guarantee they will create such an agreement.

What happens if we vote to disaffiliate but I want to remain a United Methodist?

No one will be asked to leave regardless of the outcome of the vote.

Upon disaffiliation, however, all church members will have to transfer their membership to the new entity – most likely by joining the new church and taking new membership vows. If you choose to remain UM, your membership will need to be transferred to another United Methodist church, even if you continue to worship and serve here.

Technically, a vote to disaffiliate is a vote to close Peoria First UMC and reopen as a newly reorganized church.

What will happen to the ministries of our congregation and our mission partners around the world?

Here is where things are somewhat uncertain. We hope and pray that the ministries and missions we deem vital will continue offering healing and hope to our community and world. If we stay UM or leave, once we’re able to fully focus on mission and vision, we are prayerful that these ministries will become even stronger in the future.

If we choose to disaffiliate, we should, in theory, still be able to support and partner directly with those missionaries with which we’ve built relationships. We see little reason that we would not continue to have vibrant and impactful relationships with them. There may even be new avenues for missional relationships in a new denomination, although we’re not seeking new opportunities at present.

Whether a vote is taken or not, we are hopeful of reviving missions and ministries, but have no way of knowing the financial and volunteer impact of these decisions. It is estimated that 5-10% on either side may leave the church depending upon the outcome of the vote. That is an estimate, and our experience might be different. It is certain that there will be some positive and some negative impact, but how much impact is unknown.

Nevertheless, given our current financial condition, the impact of a 2 ½ year pandemic, and the need to increase our discipleship/volunteer base to reopen vital ministries may lead us to make significant decisions regarding our ministries.

A few important questions:

- Do we have the faith to let some ministries go by allowing God to prune where fruit is not being produced?
- Do we have the financial and discipleship/people resources necessary to maintain the rich ministries and missionary relationships that are bearing fruit?
- Will we faithfully answer God's call to proclaim the good news of Jesus in new ways and reach those in our neighborhoods for Christ?

What is the hope for the future of our congregation?

Our hope has always been in the grace and redemption of Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the call of God to love as God has first loved us. The pastors of Peoria First will continue to talk and preach about the mission and ministries on the corner of Main and Perry. It is *this* local congregation that impacts our neighbors and *this* neighborhood. Regardless of the name over our door, we must be faithful right here and pray for a true awakening of the Holy Spirit in our lives.