



CHURCH CONFERENCE Q&A

WHY AM I RECEIVING THIS INFORMATION?

This information is provided by The Alabama-West Florida Conference (the "AWF Conference" of The United Methodist Church ("UMC")). You are receiving this information because the Church Council or other governing body of which you are a member has voted to request a Church Conference and the District Superintendent has scheduled one. During the upcoming Church Conference, you will be voting on whether or not to disaffiliate from the UMC. This is an important and consequential decision. We are providing this information to explain what to expect.

WHAT IS A CHURCH CONFERENCE?

A Church Conference is a meeting in which all full professing members, appointed clergy, and other active and retired clergy who hold their membership at this charge of a local church have both voice and vote.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I CAN VOTE?

Anyone who has joined the church via transfer, profession of faith, or confirmation is considered a professing member. Only professing members, appointed clergy, and other active and retired clergy who hold their membership at this charge shall be eligible to vote. Membership status may not be adjusted on the day of the vote, so please confirm with the church office, if you are unsure.

CAN YOUTH VOTE?

In the UMC, any youth who has joined the church (either through confirmation or profession of faith) is a voting, professing member of the UMC and may fully participate in a Church Conference.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

The District Superintendent schedules and presides over the Church Conference. Unlike what you may experience on an election day, this is not a come and go event. This is a called Church Conference with processes given to us by the UMC. Only professing members, appointed clergy, and other active and retired clergy who hold their membership at this charge will be allowed to vote. Membership may be verified by presenting a valid ID at the door prior to admission and receiving a ballot. Please plan to arrive early.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE VOTING ON?

The *Discipline* is clear that the only reason that a congregation may properly seek to disaffiliate from the UMC is based on the criteria set forth in paragraph 2553 of the *Discipline* which provides a limited right to disaffiliate from the UMC. You are voting on whether you want to disaffiliate from the UMC or remain within the UMC connection based on the eligibility statement the church council or other governing body has established. If you vote to disaffiliate, you will be leaving the second largest protestant denomination with over 25,000 churches in the United States and over 10 million members around the globe. Additionally, you will lose the connection to the many ministries that we enjoy together, some of which include UMCOR, Wesley Foundations, colleges like Huntingdon College, camping ministries, and the UMC's worldwide missions in over 130 countries.

ON WHAT SHOULD I BASE MY DECISION TO DISAFFILIATE?

The *UMC Book of Discipline* only gives a local church the limited right, under the provisions of paragraph 2553, to disaffiliate from the denomination 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 its annual conference related to these issues. Votes should be based on this limited right and the local church's specific eligibility statement included with this information.

The UMC's foundational doctrines, best encapsulated in the Apostles' Creed, are not changing. Our AWF Conference enthusiastically affirmed these core doctrines recently at our Annual Conference in June 2023.

WHAT VOTING THRESHOLD IS NECESSARY TO DISAFFILIATE?

At least two-thirds (2/3) of the professing members, appointed clergy, and other active and retired clergy who hold their membership at this charge present at the Church Conference of a local church must vote to disaffiliate from the UMC. You must be present to vote. No proxy voting is allowed.

ARE WE VOTING TO DISAFFILIATE FROM THE UMC TO JOIN ANOTHER DENOMINATION OR CHURCH?

At this stage, you are voting on whether or not you desire to leave the UMC due to the reason(s) included with the cover letter to this document. This is the only decision you are asked to vote on at the Church Conference. If you vote to disaffiliate and the annual conference ratifies a local church's disaffiliation, you will have a number of other decisions to make in the future including any potential alignments with any other denomination or group.

IF THE CHURCH WHERE I AM A MEMBER DISAFFILIATES, DOES MY UMC MEMBERSHIP END?

Yes, unless you act. When a local church disaffiliates, its members depart the denomination with it. From the standpoint of the UMC, it is impossible to simultaneously be a member of the UMC and a member of another denomination or church. If the church where you are a member votes to disaffiliate, and you wish to remain a member of the UMC, you may want to find another United Methodist congregation to join before the effective date of disaffiliation set by the Annual Conference. Go to awfumc.org to learn more about remaining United Methodist. A link on the AWF website is available to join the "General Roll" which will hold your membership in the UMC until you have found a new church home.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

We encourage you to pray, to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern if you believe it is God's will to disaffiliate from the UMC based on the eligibility statement attached and only that statement.

WHOM DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

If you need more information, you are always encouraged to ask your pastor. The District Superintendent is also available to answer your questions. Here is their contact information:

Marianna-PC/Pensacola - Rev. Jean Tippit - (251) 345-3313 or jeantippit.dsumc@gmail.com
Baypines/Mobile - Rev. Dr. Debora Bishop - (251) 345-3313 or ds.deborabishop@gmail.com
Montgomery-Opelika/Dothan - Rev. Dr. Jeff Wilson - (334) 239-7329 or ds.jeffwilson@gmail.com
Montgomery-Prattville/Demopolis - Rev. Dr. Mike Pearson - (334) 239-7329 or ds.mikepearson@gmail.com