



## DISAFFILIATION PROCESS 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 enter the official AWF Disaffiliation Process. A local church has a limited right to disaffiliate from the UMC pursuant to paragraph 2553 of The UMC *Book of Discipline* (the "Discipline"). This is a very consequential decision that impacts a church's mission, clergy appointment(s), the history of a church, and a local church moving forward. Therefore, the AWF Conference is providing this information to clarify the process and your next steps.

### **WHAT IS THE DISAFFILIATION PROCESS?**

A detailed explanation of the AWF Conference process is contained in the document entitled "Procedures and Processes for Churches Disaffiliating under paragraph 2553 of the Discipline" (the "Process Document") and can be found at [www.awfumc.org](http://www.awfumc.org). Paragraph 2553 provides for a limited right to disaffiliate based on reasons of conscience related to human sexuality as set forth more particularly in paragraph 2553 and the Process Document. The Process Document was recently amended due to questions and concerns, as well as recent Judicial Council decisions, that have come to the attention of the AWF Trustees. The Process Document provides for a formal discernment period as part of the disaffiliation process.

### **WHY IS FORMAL DISCERNMENT PART OF THE DISAFFILIATION PROCESS?**

The AWF Conference wants to ensure that the members of any local church fully understand the decision they are making and the consequences of any potential decision. It is a time for prayer, information gathering, respectful dialogue, and consideration of the ramifications of this decision. In potentially leaving The UMC, a local church is impacted financially, missionally, and strategically. Historic connections with UMCOR, Wesley Foundations, camps, hospitals, colleges, The Upper Room, and the worldwide connection are all impacted. This should not be taken lightly. Discernment should not be a time for campaigning; it should be a prayerful and intentional time of seeking God's will. Jesus modeled for us what we are to do whenever we are making important decisions - we pray. Prayer and discernment are time-honored practices in the Christian tradition. In essence, prayer and discernment are tools for a decision-making process that should recognize and honor the place of God's will in our lives. It is led by the Holy Spirit. Discernment is an interior search that seeks to align our will with the will of God in order to learn what God is calling us to. We are asking every congregation to pray and fast and seek God's will.

## **WHAT AM I DISCERNING?**

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. The formal discernment period is an opportunity for church members to prayerfully consider the provisions of paragraph 2553, the limited right to disaffiliate, and the potential ramifications of a decision to disaffiliate. One of the questions to consider is whether one prayerfully believes it is God's will for the church where you are a member to disaffiliate from the UMC based on one or both of these limited reasons set forth in paragraph 2553 and only these reasons to leave the United Methodist connection? During the disaffiliation process, discernment should focus on the limited rights afforded a congregation in paragraph 2553 and not whether a congregation might prefer another denomination or alternative.

## **WHAT IS THE STANCE OF THE AWF CONFERENCE REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY?**

The AWF Conference of the UMC is well known throughout the connection as one of the most conservative, traditional, and orthodox conferences. Our clergy are theologically trained, Wesleyan pastors who promise to uphold all the tenants of our faith best encapsulated in The Apostles Creed. Our clergy must also promise that they are not in violation of any of the provisions in the *Discipline* which would include not being a self-avowed practicing homosexual. No church in our conference has ever conducted an LGBTQ wedding. Bishop Graves has made it clear that he supports the current language in the *Discipline* and all churches in the AWF Conference are expected to follow the *Discipline*.

## **ARE THE DOCTRINES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH CHANGING?**

The answer is unequivocally no. Much of the confusion about the doctrines of the UMC is a lack of understanding regarding what are doctrines and what are legislative issues. The doctrines of the United Methodist church may be found at [www.awfumc.org](http://www.awfumc.org). Doctrines are the foundational beliefs. Our doctrines include the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the primacy of scripture, the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and salvation through Christ alone - all of which we profess in The Apostles' Creed. Essential doctrines are those core teachings that distinguish Christians from non-Christians and must be believed in order for one to be a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus. What did Jesus say was essential? One could never encapsulate all that Jesus taught in a short answer, but, as always, we go to the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ for our direction, Matthew 22:36-39, "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" (Jesus) said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

## **WHAT ELSE IS REQUIRED IN THE DISAFFILIATION PROCESS?**

The pastors and church leadership must complete some forms and other requirements. In addition a Town Hall will be scheduled for all members and guests to learn more about the process and other aspects of this consequential decision. The District Superintendent and a representative of the United Methodist Church will participate in the presentation. The date of the Town Hall should be in the cover letter of this document. We hope you will make every effort to participate. This is a very important decision you are discerning. Refer to the Process Document for specific requirements related to disaffiliation.

## **WILL WE VOTE AT THE END OF THE DISAFFILIATION PROCESS?**

Not necessarily. You are at the initial prayer and discernment stage of the Disaffiliation Process so you will not automatically have a church vote. No church is required to have a vote regarding disaffiliation. Votes are divisive and inevitably create winners and losers. At the end of the Disaffiliation Process, a majority of the church council may decide to ask for a church conference. Should a church council ask for a church conference, The District Superintendent will then decide if a church shall move forward in the process.

## **WHAT DO I DO NOW?**

We encourage you to pray, to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to fast, to discern if you believe it is God's will to disaffiliate from the UMC because of the changes in the *Discipline* in 2019 or the actions and inactions of The AWF Conference regarding homosexuality.

## **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](mailto:jeantippit.dsumc@gmail.com)

Baypines/Mobile - Rev. Dr. Debora Bishop - (251) 345-3313 or [ds.deborabishop@gmail.com](mailto:ds.deborabishop@gmail.com)

Montgomery-Opelika/Dothan - Rev. Dr. Jeff Wilson - (334) 239-7329 or

[ds.jeffwilson@gmail.com](mailto:ds.jeffwilson@gmail.com)

Montgomery-Prattville/Demopolis - Rev. Dr. Mike Pearson - (334) 239-7329 or

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