

Church Family,

In the last few weeks rumors have swirled around our church and community concerning our church disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church. First and foremost, I want to assure you that these are only rumors and gossip. Our church has NOT made a decision regarding disaffiliation.

There is another Friendship UMC located in Bacon County Georgia that has made that decision. This information is public knowledge and has been published on Facebook and the internet. I believe that the publication of this news has fueled much of the rumors.

So, to help clear up some confusion. Our church has formed a committee whose sole purpose is to educate and inform our congregation of the state of the United Methodist Church. This committee is NOT a decision making committee. At this time the committee is still gathering information and researching implications. We know that many of you have questions. That is why we have offered a simple form in the APP that allows you to send ANONYMOUS questions. I want to assure you that the committee knows the importance of confidentiality and transparency.

In the coming months the committee does expect for more information to be available through decisions by the Annual Conference and Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church. As these decisions are made the committee will share them with the church. As a part of this information sharing I will soon take a Sunday to explain the State of the United Methodist Church in both services. I will announce that Sunday in the next few weeks.

Please understand that the enormity of this decision requires that the process of our information gathering and research move at a slow pace allowing for every aspect to be examined. The leaders serving on this committee take their task very seriously and understand these ramifications will not only impact the church today but generations to come.

Here is a link that the conference has provided regarding the disaffiliation process: <https://www.sgaumc.org/disaffiliation-faqs>

Attached you will also find the recent letter that was sent to the entire congregation regarding what information that we know now.

Sincerely,

Nate

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Rev. Nate Lehman

Pastor

Friendship United Methodist Church



To the Friendship Family,

Two months ago, the administrative board decided that it would be necessary to create a subcommittee that would be responsible to investigate the current state of the United Methodist Church and the options available to our congregation if the United Methodist Church were to split. When this committee was formed there were a number of unknown variables that would affect our church and our congregation. This is where we stand at this time.

- One of the most frequent questions being asked is: Why are we trying to change Friendship?

The answer is honest and truthful: We are not trying to change Friendship we are trying to preserve it. While there are many disputes in the United Methodist Church right now. The main argument revolves around human sexuality. Unfortunately, many of our members and those who attend do not understand or know the theology and doctrine of the United Methodist Church concerning human sexuality. Below are the current doctrines of the United Methodist Church.

¶ 4. Article IV. Inclusiveness of the Church

The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ. The United Methodist Church acknowledges that all persons are of sacred worth. All persons without regard to race, color, national origin, status,⁴ or economic condition, shall be eligible to attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith, become professing members in any local church in the connection.⁵ In The United Methodist Church no conference or other organizational unit of the Church shall be structured so as to exclude any member or any constituent body of the Church because of race, color, national origin, status or economic condition.

¶ 214. Eligibility

The United Methodist Church is a part of the holy catholic (universal) church, as we confess in the Apostles' Creed. In the church, Jesus Christ is proclaimed and professed as Lord and Savior. All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members in any local church in the connection (¶ 4). In the case of persons whose disabilities prevent them from reciting the vows, their legal guardian[s], themselves members in full covenant relationship with God and the Church, the community of faith, may recite the appropriate vows on their behalf.

¶ 304.3 Qualifications for Ordination

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals¹ are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.²

¶ 613 Responsibilities [of the conference council on finance]

The [conference council on finance and administration] shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions:

19. To ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The UMC "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic, nor shall it preclude funding for dialogs or educational events where the Church's official position is fairly and equally represented.

¶ 806.9 Fiscal Responsibilities [of the General Council on Finance and Administration]

[The General Council on Finance and Administration] shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The United Methodist Church "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures.¹⁸ It shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.

During the 2019 General Conference, these historical doctrines that have guided our church were challenged fervently but ultimately upheld by the vote of clergy and laypeople alike. Even though these doctrines were upheld, there are still notable violations of these doctrines operating freely in the United Methodist Church. Here are some examples that have made national headlines:

Bishop Karen Oliveto is the first openly lesbian bishop to be elected in the United Methodist Church. She was elected bishop on July 15, 2016, at the Western Jurisdictional Conference.

Rev. Michael Johnson publicly "came out" as a transgendered United Methodist minister, who is now changing his first name to Mary. His wife is Bishop Peggy Johnson.

Ms. Penny Cost is reportedly the first Drag Queen in the world to become a Certified Candidate for Ordination within the United Methodist Church. As a member of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the UMC, she works as the Associate Pastor at Hope United Methodist Church.

Three LGBTQ clergy were ordained or commissioned as United Methodist deacons by the Northern Illinois Conference, and the Baltimore-Washington Conference ordained an LGBTQ elder and commissioned a gay provisional deacon.

Both the Oregon-Idaho and New York conferences took steps to ensure LGBTQ individuals would be part of their General Conference delegations. The New York delegation has named two LGBTQ individuals as its co-chairs.

Members of Minnesota's United Methodist Church voted to commit to full inclusion of LGBT people. The Minnesota Annual Conference released a statement explaining its resolution as a "vision" that "expresses a commitment to value, amplify, and center marginalized voices in denominational and local church conversations — and to affirm each clergyperson's prayerful discernment about whether to officiate same-sex weddings."

- In March we were informed that General Conference would be postponed until 2024. Some of the implications of the postponement are still up in the air.
 - Will new delegates need to be elected?
 - Will the disaffiliation policy which currently expires in 2023 be changed and what will those changes be?
 - Will there be new resolutions made concerning a church split?
- On May 1, 2022, the Global Methodist Church will launch as a new denomination. The Global Methodist Church expresses traditional doctrinal values.
- We are actively investigating the disaffiliation process and the implications for our congregation. This does not mean we are going to disaffiliate; we are looking at all possibilities for our church.
 - There has been no decision regarding disaffiliation. This is a decision of the entire church membership, not a single committee.

- The committee has met with members of Trinity UMC to discuss their experience.
- As of right now in the South Georgia Annual Conference 18 churches have voted to disaffiliate this year.
- As of this March 2021 the cost for our church to disaffiliate would be \$165,822 in pension liability, and two years of apportionments which usually run around \$36,000 a year. This number can increase and decrease depending on the economy the final amount will be known at the time that the church chooses to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

Please understand that this is a process and that we must be patient as things beyond our control take place. There are many variables that must be considered when discussing the future of the United Methodist Church and Friendship United Methodist Church. This committee was formed to investigate and inform the congregation of the implications that will arise with the impending split of the United Methodist Church. We will continue to monitor the situation and inform the congregation when new developments occur.

We need your help, if you have any questions, please send them to us so that we can research the answers. The more questions that are asked the more answers we hope to have. You can submit questions through our app or personally ask a member of the committee. Please understand that not all questions are easily answered and that it may take time to research.

Signed,

Ronny Shingler
Homer Breckenridge
Wayne Worsham
Sheryl Cannington
Jim Jernigan
Craig Earnest
Bill Burke