

WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING

# UNITY

MORE THAN A WORD

AUGUST 21, 2022

RANDY HARDY, DISTRICT 1 LAY LEADER

ING, PRAYING, GRACE-FILLED, GENEROUS, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CONNECTED, MISSIONAL, RESILIENT, DISCIPLE-MAKING, PRAYING, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING

#BeUMC

**DIFFERENCE** is inevitable. **DIVISION** is a choice.

**-Andy Stanley**

As we enter this season of discernment within the United Methodist Church, let us search for things that **UNIFY** us instead of focusing on that which will **DIVIDE**. Jesus' prayer for his disciples was that they would live in complete **UNITY**, as a powerful witness to the reality of God's love (John 17:23). What will our witness be during this time of discernment? Will we choose **UNITY** over division...**CONNECTION** over independence...**JESUS' WAY** over our own way?

We encourage you to begin this discernment process with a period of prayer, seeking openness to and guidance from the Holy Spirit. Determine to take good care of all relationships while in the decision-making experience. Spend time in quiet reflection studying scripture, listening to God's intimations about our church's future, and hints of God's direction. Looking for a place to begin? Perhaps you can start with these verses on **UNITY**:

Ephesians 4:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:10

Acts 4:32

Romans 12:16

2 Corinthians 13:11

John 13:35

Matthew 23:8

Galatians 3:28

Ephesians 4:16

Philippians 2:1

Philippians 2:2

Romans 6:5

Ephesians 1:10

Romans 14:19

Ephesians 4:3

2 Chronicles 30:12

Ephesians 4:11-13

Psalms 133:1

Romans 12:4

John 17:23

Ephesians 2:14

Galatians 3:26-28

ING, PRAYING, GRACE-FILLED, GENEROUS, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CONNECTED, FILLED, MISSIONAL, RESILIENT, DISCIPLE-MAKING, PRIORITIZING, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING

**#BeUMC**



## A Love Letter to United Methodists

*I was thinking...*

Dear People of The United Methodist Church,

I write this to you out of a nudge of my heart. There are forces that seek the demise and division of our branch of the Christian Church. Some are spreading misinformation filled with half-truths, at best, and outright lies at worst. Some are passionately eager to begin a new branch of Methodism of which I acknowledge as their prerogative. However, some tactics are insulting and off-putting. Therefore, I write this to help us be aware of the realities happening within the North Georgia Conference.

**I am proud to be a United Methodist Christian. All my life I have seen the joy of a balance of biblical preaching and teaching alongside social engagement in communities where United Methodist churches are located.** We are fully Christian on our way to perfection. We believe in God as creator, sustainer and wise beyond worldly wisdom. We believe in Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, as the Son of God, lived, was crucified, dead and buried. And we believe that on that third day, Jesus arose from the dead (Easter). We believe a post-resurrected Jesus walked the earth for forty days and nights and then ascended into heaven. On the fiftieth day the Holy Spirit descended with a power to invade life's realities and empower the living with heavenly power.

I am thankful for all the connections that have occurred through the power of Christ through the United Methodist Church. Together we have fed countless numbers of people, been first to arrive to assist during natural disasters, encouraged education of the mind as well as the soul, loved and embraced children around the world, and given our best talents to camp ministries for children through mature adolescence. We are local and we are global. We have agreed to disagree on many issues, which is our challenge as well as our legacy. We are United among diversity.

We are currently 12.5 million lay people across the globe. We are 50,000 plus clergy serving 43,000 places of ministry all over the world. We are in mission to more than 130 countries. We are 550 relief and refugee workers. We are health and welfare ministries serving more than 32 million people in 1,555 locations across the US. We are 52 hospitals and health care systems. We are 95 colleges and universities. We are over \$2 billion in charity care annually. (Note that some stats were only available as of 2019.)

But mostly I want to celebrate that **being a United Methodist means that no United Methodist Church stands alone.** Each UM Church is a part of a larger connection of shared purpose and mission that has been in existence for hundreds of years. This is at the core of who we are as United Methodists. **We are a part of something larger than ourselves...** together we reach the world to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I am proud to be United Methodist and wanted you to know why.

Always Thinking...

The Rev. Dr. Terry E. Walton  
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[terry.walton@ngumc.net](mailto:terry.walton@ngumc.net)

# CLEARING CONFUSION

*This season of discernment is fraught with **ANXIETY** and **CONFUSION**. It is ok if you are unsure what to believe. Know that God is not the author of confusion. If it feels unsettling, trust your heart. Pray and seek out truthful information. Make a **CHOICE** to live in God's **PEACE**.*

## ***You may have heard...***

The UMC is splitting at this time.

## ***You should know...***

The term “split” applies when there is a negotiated agreement within the denomination to divide assets and resources. No such agreement has been made in The United Methodist Church. The earliest point at which such an agreement could be made would be at the next General Conference to be held in 2024. A more accurate term, as suggested by the Rev. William Lawrence, retired dean of Perkins School of Theology and former member of the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church, is “splintering.” What is happening is that some traditionalist leaders have decided to create their own denomination (the Global Methodist Church). Leaders of that denomination and other unofficial advocacy groups, such as the Wesleyan Covenant Association, which created it, are encouraging like-minded United Methodist congregations and clergy to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and join their denomination instead.

## ***You may have heard...***

The UMC is in deep membership decline.

## ***You should know...***

There are overall trends in the United States away from church membership, regardless of denomination, and that trend is impacting UMC church membership. It is likely that the future UMC and other successor denominations will continue to decline in membership numbers, including the new Global Methodist Church (once the initial growth from member and church transfers from the UMC subside). Recent experience of other Methodist denominations, most of them more theologically conservative, more evangelism-oriented, and more organizationally streamlined than the UMC, are likewise showing decline (see The Free Methodist Church, The Church of the Nazarene). Within the UMC, membership gains outside the US have made up for membership loss in the United States, and thus the overall membership of the denomination has increased modestly over the past decade. For the Wesleysans, Free Methodists, Nazarenes, AME, AME Zion, and CME, membership gains outside the United States have likewise compensated for membership losses within the United States, and thus all of these traditions can think of themselves as growing churches as well, despite US membership trends.

# CLEARING CONFUSION

## ***You may have heard...***

If you are progressive, remain UMC. If you are traditionalist, join the GMC.

## ***You should know...***

The UMC will continue to be a denomination with traditionalists, centrists, and progressives. The UMC's position on human sexuality remains under the traditionalist plan passed at General Conference 2019 and cannot be modified until General Conference 2024. Even then, it is unclear what our policies will allow. The diversity of theological perspective remains a thriving aspect of our life together as United Methodists.

## ***You may have heard...***

The UMC will abandon its doctrine and will no longer believe in the Trinity, the Resurrection, the Lordship of Jesus, or the authority of the Bible.

## ***You should know...***

This is not true. The core of the current division within the UMC is about human sexuality and the systems of accountability in the UMC. Differences of opinion and interpretation regarding sexuality is not a convincing enough reason for many folks, so as emotions have risen, so has the rhetoric on topics like these. 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.

All of these positions are bedrock in the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church, more specifically in the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith. These cannot be altered without a two-thirds vote of the General Conference followed by a three-fourths aggregate approval of all annual conferences of The United Methodist Church worldwide. There is no basis to conclude such majorities can be achieved to alter the Articles and Confession for any reason.

# CLEARING CONFUSION

Here is what the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith say on these matters...and will continue to say.

## Virgin Birth and Divinity of Jesus

Articles of Religion, Article II:

"The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin."

Confession of Faith, Article II:

"We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably 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

Articles of Religion, Article III:

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 Saviour 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."



# CLEARING CONFUSION

## ***You may have heard...***

A liberal wave will soon take over the UMC.

## ***You should know...***

Setting aside an unhelpful political term that doesn't belong in the body of Christ, the deeper question is whether the UMC will abandon the core teachings of the faith and focus instead on being an issues-based church. The answer is no. Any church that takes Jesus away from the center, and places any social issue in Jesus' place, always declines. Are there outliers who are doing this? Yes. But they do not have strength or momentum.

## ***You may have heard...***

If we stay in the UMC, our congregation or pastor will be forced into allowing same sex weddings, performing same sex weddings, and receiving queer clergy.

## ***You should know...***

Church Trustees committees set wedding policies. Pastors always have the ability to choose which weddings they will officiate, same sex or otherwise. Bishops have no desire to hurt a church or a pastor by appointing someone who would not be received well. This has been true for women clergy and clergy of color for decades.

## ***You may have heard...***

The Duke Divinity School held a worship service to a "Queer God".

## ***What you should know...***

This reference comes from a chapel service at the school sponsored by an LGBTQ+ student group. The UMC notes the following: Duke Divinity School serves students of many denominations, not just United Methodists. And students of many denominations make up the LGBTQ+ student group that sponsored the service in question, as that service has been described in publications such as the blog "Juicy Ecumenism". None of the students named is identified as United Methodist." These kinds of "group sponsored" services do not represent the Divinity School; but rather a student organization, similar to one you may find on many college campuses. To attribute the actions of this group to the changing beliefs or views of the United Methodist Church is wholly inaccurate. As the UMC states; "General Conference establishes the official statements of The United Methodist Church and its ritual. Chapel services in a seminary do not."

# CLEARING CONFUSION

## ***You may have heard...***

All churches must make a decision on disaffiliation.

## ***You should know...***

There is nothing that a congregation must do in response to denominational turmoil. There is no mandate from our Bishop or from any District Superintendent to enter into discernment. The best and healthiest option for many local churches is to stay the course. Conservatives (both locally and nationally) are insisting that churches must act to disaffiliate now because we don't know who the next bishop will be or what General Conference will do in 2024. This is false urgency that aims at sowing fear.

## ***You may have heard...***

Churches can't afford to take their time to enter a discernment process - if we're going to disaffiliate, we need to do it in Fall 2022.

## ***You should know...***

Each church's timing with an agreed-upon process should be honored. A false urgency to decide quickly is guided by fear and will only cause disruption and division at the local church level. The disaffiliation paragraph found in the Book of Discipline, Paragraph 2553, does not expire until December 31, 2023. The North Georgia Conference is exploring whether we as an Annual Conference could vote on a resolution to extend it even longer to give churches more time to make such an important decision. Additionally, there are conversations happenings amongst General Conference delegates around the world about extending that timeline at the next General Conference in 2024. Most churches would find it helpful to wait until the GMC holds its Convening Conference in the Fall of 2023, when they will set their doctrines, church structure, and leadership, before making a decision. There is speculation among some about an incoming bishop making disaffiliation harder in 2023; please note, it is not the bishop that sets our disaffiliation policy, but our conference Board of Trustees.

## ***You may have heard...***

If our church is set on leaving, the Global Methodist Church is the best option for us.

## ***You should know...***

That can only be decided on a church-by-church basis. Notably, very few churches who have voted to disaffiliate from the UMC have joined the GMC to date. Some churches choosing to leave have chosen to join the Free Methodist Church, which has similar theological positions as the GMC, but 160 years of church leadership. AME Zion, CME, Wesleyan, and Nazarene are other denominational options, to name a few.



# CLEARING CONFUSION

## ***You may have heard...***

Disaffiliation will settle it. Churches are weary of uncertainty and ready to move on.

## ***You should know...***

Some amount of uncertainty and waiting will be inevitable for churches who chose to disaffiliate, as there are many decisions to be made post disaffiliation, whether you go independent or affiliate with another denomination. With respect to a new Methodist denomination for traditionalists, there is uncertainty and waiting as the Global Methodist Church (GMC) takes shape. Having launched May 1, 2022, the GMC does not have a final book of rules and structure, and will not until the GMC holds its Convening Conference in the Fall of 2023, when they will set their doctrines, church structure, and leadership. The existing documents represent a "transitional period of 12 to 18 months until its convening conference" ([globalmethodist.org](https://globalmethodist.org)).

Sources for this document:

Answers were adapted from "Ask the UMC" and "Is the UMC Really?" at [UMC.org](https://umc.org), [NGUMC.org](https://ngumc.org), [UMC.org/BeUMC](https://umc.org/BeUMC), quotes from the 2016 Book of Discipline, UM Insight (*US Membership Decline and the Rhetoric of the Global Church*) at <https://um-insight.net>, and resources from *That We May Be One* at <https://twmbo.org>.

# WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS?

Disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church is a **SERIOUS** decision, and one that our church should not take lightly. In fact, a vote to leave could have **DEVASTATING** ramifications for the **MISSION, MINISTRIES** and **WITNESS** of the church. So before a decision is made, you should thoughtfully consider some of the many practical implications, unintended consequences and potential challenges presented by disaffiliation.

- **Independent or Another Denomination:** There is a difference between being independent and being a part of a denomination. Being part of a denomination provides structure, guardrails, foundations, and an identity and sense of belonging. Churches considering going independent may be attracted to the freedom of making their own choices, but building a church's congregational life from scratch will have challenges of its own. Similarly, those joining startup or new denominations will endure a period of uncertainty as doctrine, structure and guardrails are built. Whatever destination a disaffiliating church chooses, navigating from a connectional structure and belonging that has become familiar to something unfamiliar could bring unintended consequences.
- **Congregational Losses:** Changes that disaffiliating congregations undergo may cause some people to leave. Potential membership losses should be considered, along with a potential decline in programming, ministry, and outreach. The congregation should make a realistic assessment of their potential to replace the potential loss of members.
- **Pastoral Issues:** An independent church will have the responsibility of searching for, vetting, and selecting their own minister. They will be responsible for determining the educational standards of future clergy while perhaps not understanding fully the value of theological education and ministerial training. Churches which align with another denomination may have a pool of clergy from which their pastor can come, but the qualifications of such clergy and appointment processes may differ from the rigorous, tested processes and requirements of the UMC developed from decades of experience. Churches may lose momentum due to extended periods without pastoral leadership, during which time an interim person or a lay person leads. Independent churches retaining or receiving these pastors will need to determine their own system of ordination/licensing for their pastors. The pastor and church will have to negotiate salary, benefits, medical leave, family leave, vacation leave, and housing without the structure and support they have relied on unless they join with a denomination that provides such structure.
- **Loss of UMC Personnel and Staff:** United Methodist local pastors and provisional members who disaffiliate must surrender their pastoral license, and clergy who are

# WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS?

ordained will no longer be considered ordained in the UMC. Staff with positions at the conference level will likewise be impacted. If a church votes to disaffiliate, they may lose a beloved pastor or staff member if that person chooses to stay in the United Methodist Church.

- **Structure and Processes:** Independent churches will have to develop new structures and processes for church governance. Independent congregations have been known to go from having democratic processes to authoritarian processes (which may be headed by the pastor or powerful lay person). Deciding what church structure should look like will be important but also difficult as a church seeks to find consensus in these matters.
- **Theology:** Deciding what theological perspective your church will stand on will be imperative. This is especially true for independent congregations, which have been known to go from Wesleyan theology to a Reformed or Pentecostal theology because they didn't decide this and use it to vet new pastors and leaders. This decision will impact everything from selecting clergy to choosing Revival speakers and youth leaders to choosing VBS and Sunday School materials. Familiarizing the leadership and/or whole congregation with the polity, doctrine, and theology of other denominations or affiliations will be a challenging task since these issues will be unfamiliar or unknown to many members, especially in relation to church polity.
- **Loss of UMC Connectional Benefits:** Disaffiliating churches will be severing their church from the connectional benefits of the United Methodist Church (like UMCOR, World Service, Ministry Grants, Ministerial Education Fund) and the more localized benefits of our Conference staff and resources (like equitable compensation support, CLM training, other leadership training events, clergy continuing education, our online communications and resources, disaster relief, camps, campus ministry, and conference-led missions).
- **Legal and Strategic Support:** Disaffiliating churches will lose denominational and conference support for legal matters and defense, as well as strategic decisions concerning their property unless they join another denomination providing such support.
- **Risks of New Denominations:** You may have the impression based on a well-designed website and mission statement that the "Global Methodist Church" ("GMC") is a real entity. It did officially form in May of 2022, but churches are still in the process of joining it. There are many unknowns about how the church may function when it actually begins operating. The UMC is not perfect, yet it is the most evenly widespread denomination in the United States and the second largest Protestant denomination on the continent. A proven track record of effective ministry is better than hopes of an ideal future.

# WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS?

- **Reaching Young People:** Young people might have a hard time with a new so-called traditionalist denomination. No matter what we might disagree on regarding matters that are important (but secondary to the gospel of Jesus Christ and our historic creeds), the essence of what it means to be a Christian is to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. This is what Jesus said, and this what John Wesley said, too. We are called to do this by remaining at the table together, loving, accepting, and affirming everyone who comes through our doors. Young people, especially, understand this and many will not participate in a church that they perceive as judgmental or unwelcoming towards LGBTQ+ persons.
- **Costs of Removal of UMC Branding:** Use of the Cross and Flame symbol on signage, stationery, buildings, websites, and even stained glass windows in the new denomination is prohibited and would require removal.
- **Churches Left Behind:** The UMC has had a long history of supporting small churches, inner city churches, rural churches, “fresh expressions,” and many other forms of church. These types of churches face an uncertain future. The appointment system would be dramatically changed. Multi-point charges that enable small churches to afford pastors could be disbanded. There are simply no guarantees (and there is certainly no system in place). In The United Methodist Church, we have demonstrated a history of facilitating local ministry in small and rural churches. Many of the leaders of the WCA and other breakaway Methodist organizations come from large membership churches who have the resources to do ministry on their own without denominational support and can bear the costs to transition into a new Methodist denomination themselves. In some cases, their churches have been withholding their tithes to The United Methodist Church and advocating for significantly lower giving in the future. We believe rural and small membership churches will feel the negative and unforeseen consequences of this the most.

Sources for this document:

Answers were adapted from Stay UMC Coalition of North Alabama at <https://www.stayumc.com> and Abide South Georgia at <https://www.abidesga.com>.

# WHY STAY UMC?

**THE UMC IS OUR HOME.** Not only did we make membership vows (and in some cases ordination vows) to support The UMC with our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness, we have countless warm memories and relational connections we just don't want to sever. Many of us were baptized at a United Methodist font. We have been blessed by a special United Methodist pastor or the influence of a wise Sunday School teacher. We remember when the presence of Christ in Holy Communion first felt real at a United Methodist altar. We felt loved and accepted by a United Methodist Church family. We have made commitments at a United Methodist kneeling rail. Many of us have grown up at Camp Glisson or gone on a Walk to Emmaus here. Some of us have gone to Young Harris or Reinhardt College or attended a Wesley Foundation at our school. These are things that we do not wish to give up.

**WE DON'T ALL THINK ALIKE.** One of the things we love most about The United Methodist Church is that we don't all think the same. We are traditionalists, centrists, and progressives who love to live and learn together. We actually like the fact that we don't see eye to eye. The United Methodist Church has uniquely connected the head and heart, belief and action, and personal and social holiness. The call phrase, "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." ties United Methodists together despite our differences and maintains an inviting presence to our world. As John Wesley said, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences."

**WE CAN DO MORE TOGETHER THAN ON OUR OWN.** In the excitement of starting a new denomination, one can forget there is great uncertainty about whether we can still support the things that are important to us. But we believe it is The UMC's "connection" that has created ministries that impact the world and make disciples of Jesus Christ beyond the ability of a local church or Annual Conference. These ministries include Discipleship Ministries, United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), VIM (Volunteers in Mission), General Commission on Archives and History, NOMADS (RV Mission Volunteers), General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Communications, Board of Global Ministries, Commission on Religion and Race, The Upper Room (including the Daily Devotional, the Walk to Emmaus, the Academy of Spiritual Formation, and related programs), Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the United Methodist Publishing House, Wespeth, and hundreds of other ministries. Some of these programs impact people's spiritual lives and your local church's vitality directly. Some of these are missions that touch lives for Jesus Christ in ways we just can't do on our own. Some are part of the important social witness of the church. Could this possibly be replicated in a new denomination with limited resources and geographic reach?

# WHY STAY UMC?

**WE VALUE HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAMPUS MINISTRY.** Through the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church supports 112 schools and colleges, including 13 seminaries and divinity schools affiliated with The UMC. We support students through loans and scholarships and the Black College Fund and assist those with a call to ministry with ministerial scholarships. This is our present legacy, but we are also proud that The UMC and our predecessor denominations have started more colleges and universities than any other faith group in the United States. In Georgia (and beyond), college students connect to The UMC through Wesley Foundations. Wesley Foundations, and the clergy and staff who minister through them, provide students in North Georgia with a uniquely Wesleyan spiritual experience.

**WE DO MINISTRY BEYOND THE LOCAL CHURCH THAT IS IMPORTANT.** Both The United Methodist Church denomination and the North Georgia Conference work with many ministry partners who have come to rely on and value our support. Through these relationships, we extend our ministry. These include positions like campus ministers, hospital and military chaplains, counselors, and directors of social service agencies, all of whom have trusted relationships with The United Methodist Church. The United Methodist Board of Church and Society is a consultant with the United Nations and has offices in our nation's capital (the only non-governmental building on Capitol Hill). The UMC provides a witness in American and worldwide governance. We are inspired to work for justice by Our Social Creed and the United Methodist Social Principles. Our Social Principles are clearly enumerated.

**WE VALUE RURAL MINISTRY AND SMALL-MEMBERSHIP CHURCHES.** There are over 30,000 United Methodist Churches in the United States located in almost every county and zip code. One writer states that, "We have more local missional outposts than the US Post Office." Our denomination has a system that provides vital ministry in small and rural communities throughout North Georgia. The UMC calls, equips, and trains licensed local pastors. It facilitates multi-point charges, and provides grants that support rural ministry.

**WOMEN ARE VITAL LEADERS IN THE UMC.** Female leadership among the laity in our local churches and the clergy of our Conference is essential for ministry in The UMC in North Georgia. We must continue to provide support to ensure women receive equal opportunity in all aspects, including clergy appointments and compensation. Our United Methodist organization ensures that female clergy have places to serve.

Sources for this document: Answers were adapted from Stay UMC Coalition of North Alabama at <https://www.stayumc.com>.



# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**BE A CALMING PRESENCE.** There is too much anxiety and confusion among us. Gently point out when a speaker is speaking in a spirit of fear. Witness to the peace of Christ and refuse to spread fear or sow discord and division. We are not enemies! We are co-laborers in the kingdom of God.

**EARNESTLY PRAY AND ADVOCATE FOR UNITY.** Offer to facilitate a Bible study or a devotional series at your church, in your home or as part of committee meetings. The UMC has developed a great resource intended for small groups (<https://www.ngumc.org/beumc>). In your conversations, model a genuine and grace-filled attitude. In disagreement, do not disparage or attack. Share helpful resources by presenting information and educating others on what is going on.

**EXPRESS YOUR CONCERNS AND ASK QUESTIONS.** Talk to members of your church's committees (Church Council, Trustees, lay leader, etc). Communicate with your pastor and district superintendent. If things don't make sense, be persistent in getting the answers you seek.

**ADVOCATE FOR FAIR REPRESENTATION.** Seek voices of different theological perspectives on theology and the future of the denomination, and advocate against a biased or one-sided discernment process at your church.

**PRACTICE PATIENCE.** Call out the false urgency to disaffiliate or join the Global Methodist Church (GMC). It's a brand new denomination that won't officially set up its doctrine, missions, pastor appointment system, and structure for at least another year. The GMC is not officially recognized by the World Methodist Council. Its book of rules and structure is transitional and offers a set of intentions rather than official church law. To be viable as a new denomination, the GMC is dependent upon local churches disaffiliating and quickly. Nothing has changed in the UMC and won't until 2024, at the earliest. It's okay to wait and see. A rushed discernment process clouded in fear is not helpful to the vitality of a local church.

**ENCOURAGE TURNOUT.** Paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline says "The decision to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church must be approved by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members of the local church present at the church conference." A church conference is the entire membership of your church. Do everything you can to get as many church members present to vote as possible. It should not be a small percentage of a congregation making such an important decision.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**BE A WATCHDOG FOR MISINFORMATION, OMISSIONS, MISCHARACTERIZATIONS AND A FAIR PROCESS.** Many leaders and laity are sharing talking points designed to portray the remaining UMC as engaging in theological drift by abandoning Biblical authority, questioning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, forsaking our doctrinal standards, promoting an open canon, and other similar things. These are strawman arguments typically based on some extreme anecdote. Ask those who assert such things for specific examples in the North Georgia Conference of such things. When single instances are cited, point out that one cannot represent the part for the whole. All institutions have people on the extreme ends. Use the opportunity to ask for a different perspective to be offered.

**USE YOUR VOICE.** Make sure to speak up in public meetings, Sunday school classes, discernment process gatherings, and other events. It can be uncomfortable for some people to speak in public (especially if it's into a microphone), but the loudest voices are often on the extremes, and the worst thing is for the "silent majority" to stay silent.

Sources for this document: Answers were adapted from Stay UMC Coalition of North Alabama at <https://www.stayumc.com> and resources from *That We May Be One* at <https://twmbo.org>.

**#BeUMC**

# UNITY

It's not just a word

# CONNECTION

It's not just an idea

ING, PRAYING, GRACE-FILLED, GENEROUS, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CONNECTED, FILLED, MISSIONAL, RESILIENT, DISCIPLE-MAKING, PRAYING, WELCOMING, DEEPLY ROOTED, JESUS-SEEKING, DIVERSE, GROUNDED IN CHRIST, FAITHFUL, JUSTICE-SEEKING, CHRIST-CENTERED, WORLD-CHANGING, COMMITTED, JUSTICE-SEEKING

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