




**FORWARD
IN FAITH
DISCERNING
OUR FUTURE**



Oct. 2, 2022

Dear Munholland members,

Churches in the United Methodist denomination will have to make a decision whether to stay in the UMC or disaffiliate. For those Church Councils that decide to enter a discernment process, that process will culminate in each church congregation voting whether to remain United Methodist, join a different Methodist denomination, or become an independent church.

Enclosed please find the result of several weeks of work by your Discernment Process Task Force (DPTF). The DPTF was authorized and charged by your Church Council to develop the process and material to help you discern how you believe our Church should proceed into the future. This has been a collaborative effort.

Great effort has been taken to be fair and balanced in the presentation of material. The material includes a schedule of meetings, definitions, and common questions and answers. Our website has additional information with links to materials on how the United Methodist Church got to this point and other articles and videos which will help you be informed. A “Minimum Parameters” document was given to the Church Council by our District Superintendent, Rev. Jan Curwick, which lays out the discernment process we are following. The District Superintendent ultimately controls the process and timing of some events.

This is an extremely important issue for the denomination and our Church. Many hours have been spent developing this Informational Packet. The DPTF hopes you will spend some time studying this material as well as attending at least one of the in-person sessions where you will be able to ask the questions you have and hear the answers to other’s questions.

DPTF members who have spent tremendous amounts of time developing this packet include Mary Kay Beck, Julie Cornett, Janet Davis, Ann Gilbert, Michael Lepper, Julia Lloyd, Ellaine Wilson, and Jonathan Beck.

Please be in intentional prayer over this issue. After our decision to accept Jesus Christ into our lives, it may well be the most important decision in our spiritual lives.

Please read Paul’s words to Philippi, “No matter what happens, conduct yourself in the manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ”, (Phil 1:27).

God’s Grace and Peace to you,

Michael Lepper,
Chair Church Council

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DISCERNMENT PROCESS SCHEDULE

Week of Oct. 3rd - Discernment packet goes out to the congregation by mail, email and church website. The 40 day discernment process begins.

Congregational Meetings with representatives from both sides of the disaffiliation issue:

Oct. 16th - (Sun 9:30 AM in the Fellowship Hall)

Oct. 19th - (Wed. 6:15 PM in the Fellowship Hall after Midweek)

Question and Answer Sessions with representatives from both sides of the disaffiliation issue:

Registration required with questions submitted ahead of time.

Oct. 23rd - (Sun 9:30 AM and 4:00 PM in the Fellowship Hall)

Oct. 24th - (Mon. 10 AM and 5:30 PM in the Fellowship Hall)

Oct 26th - (Wed. 6:15 PM in the Fellowship Hall after Midweek)

Congregational Meeting:

Oct. 30th - (Sun. 9:30 AM in the Fellowship Hall)

Listening Sessions (Craig Gilliam):

Registration required with questions submitted ahead of time.

Nov. 11-12th - (Fri.-Sat.) Times to be announced by Craig Gilliam.

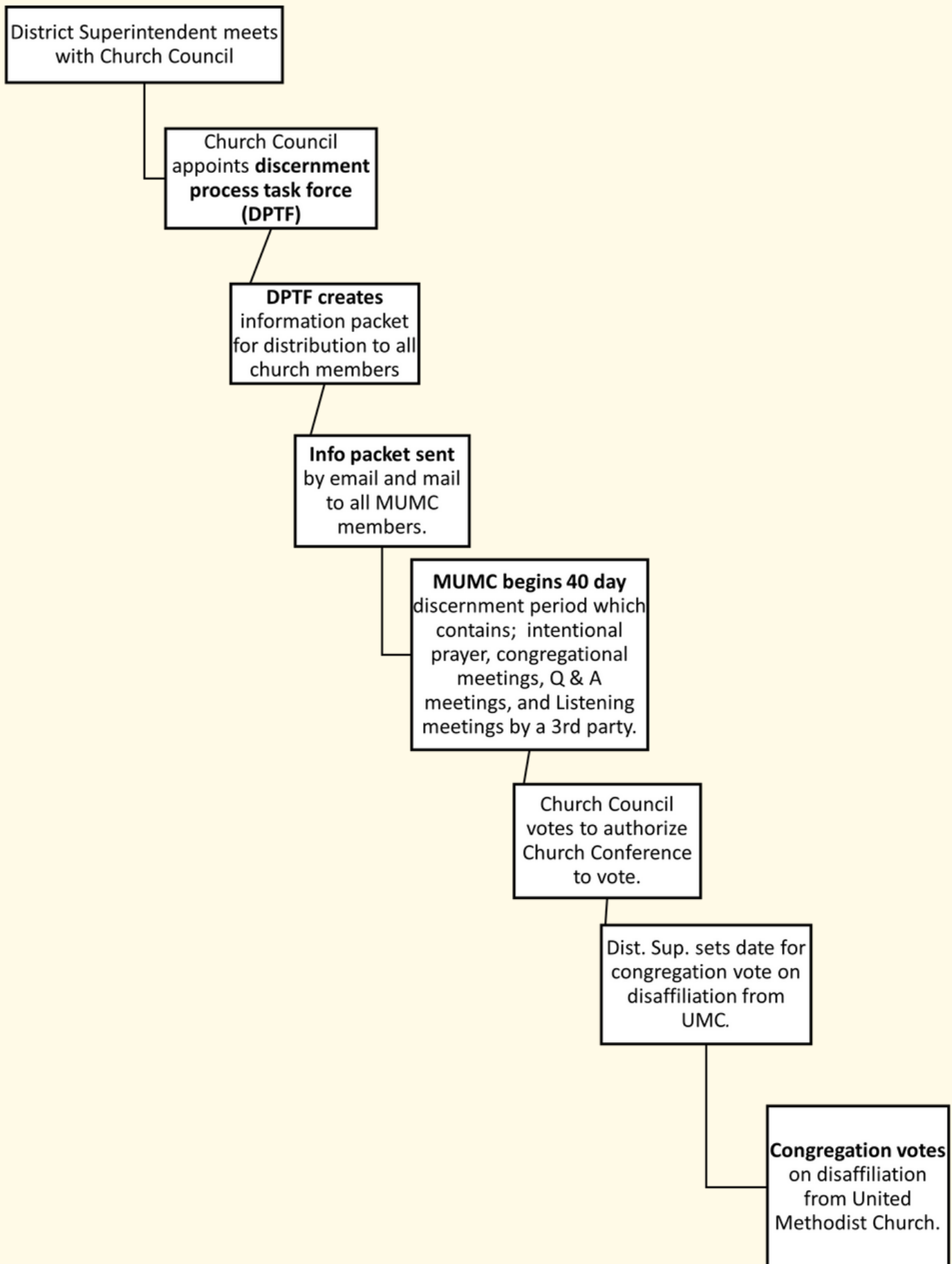
Church Council Meeting:

This date is to be determined subsequent to receipt of Craig Gilliam's report. The Council will decide at this time whether to authorize the congregation to vote and request a date from the District Superintendent.

Church Conference to vote on disaffiliation:

This date is to be determined by the District Superintendent subsequent to the Church Council's request.

DISCERNMENT PROCESS (DP)



DEFINITION OF TERMS

Organizational structure: The United Methodist Church does not have a central headquarters or a single executive leader. Duties are divided among bodies that include the **General Conference**, the **Council of Bishops** and the **Judicial Council**. General agencies are primarily accountable to the General Conference rather than to the Council of Bishops. Boards of directors, who are lay and clergy elected jointly by General Conference and regional organizations, govern their staffs. See below for **Structural Flow**.

General Conference: Is the denomination's top policy-making body, *convenes every four years*, and has sole authority to speak officially for the denomination. The General Conference has a maximum of 1,000 delegates (half clergy, half lay) from around the world. It revises church law and the "Social Principles" and adopts resolutions on various current moral, social, public policy and economic issues. It also approves plans and budgets for churchwide programs for the next four years.

Council of Bishops: A gathering of all bishops in the UMC. Our Bishop, Cynthia Fierro Harvey. Our District Superintendent is Rev. Jan Holloway Curwick.

Number of bishops in UMC: The United Methodist Church has **46 active bishops** in the United States for approximately 6 million members and 20 active bishops in Africa, Europe and the Philippines for approximately 6 million members. Bishops are elected every four years and serve until retirement. Bishops lead Annual Conferences as directed by the General Conference. They have power to appoint pastors.

Judicial Council: The highest judicial body (Supreme Court) of the UMC.

Church Conference: (this is at the local church level) is a meeting in which all members of Munholland UMC are invited to attend. Professing members who are present are able to vote. The Church Conference must be authorized by the district superintendent.

Book of Discipline: PP101. The General Book of Discipline contains the doctrine, polity, and discipline of the UMC. The Constitution and Doctrinal Standards, and The Ministry of All Christians sections are unalterable. Other sections dealing with doctrine, discipline, and polity can be amended by the General Conference which is the denominational decision-making body of the UMC.

Paragraph 2553: Para 2553 is titled Disaffiliation over Human Sexuality in the Book of Discipline (BoD). It allows disaffiliation due to conscience over the practice of human sexuality or the actions or inactions of its Annual Conference.

Discernment Process: The discernment process is our means of determining whether or not to disaffiliate from the UMC through prayer, study and education.

Disaffiliation: is to no longer be formally associated with an organization.

- Disaffiliation is a limited option ending Dec. 31, 2023 which suspends the Trust Clause of the UMC and allows a congregation to leave and take the property held in trust.

Structural Flow: Local church → District → Annual Conference → Jurisdiction → General Conference

Local church: is governed by a charge conference with a church council as the year-round supervisor. Each church in the United States is part of a district.

District: is an administrative and program grouping of 40-80 churches with a full-time superintendent. Districts are grouped into annual conferences.

Annual Conferences: are regional bodies that meet yearly for legislative purposes. Annual conferences approve programming and budget, elect delegates to General and Jurisdictional conferences, and examine and recommend candidates for ministry.

Louisiana Conference: has 6 geographical districts; Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Lake Charles-Acadiana, Monroe, New Orleans and Shreveport.

Jurisdiction/Division: there are 5 geographic jurisdictions (divisions) in the United States (that include 8-13 annual conferences each).

Jurisdictional conferences meet simultaneously every four years to elect and assign bishops and some members of general church agencies, and, in some cases, to develop jurisdictional programs.

Comparison between Disaffiliating from the UMC and Staying with the UMC

	Disaffiliate from the UMC	Stay with the UMC
Who is welcome to worship and membership at Munholland?	Absolutely everyone. Everyone is in need of God's grace and invited to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All are called to grow in discipleship.	Absolutely everyone. Everyone is in need of God's grace and invited to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All are called to grow in discipleship.
Bishops' Tenure	Independent or churches in Methodist Associations do not have bishops. Free Methodist and Global Methodist denominations limit bishops' terms.	Bishops are consecrated for life.
Bishops' Accountability	All Methodist denominations have processes to hold bishops accountable to their consecration vows.	The UMC has accountability processes which have been ineffective in stopping bishop and clergy disobedience.
NOLA Methodist churches	Munholland would be the only medium sized Methodist church that would follow traditional Methodist theology.	Munholland would be a medium sized church that would follow the theology of the UMC.
Human Sexuality	Marriage is defined as a covenantal relationship between one man and one woman. Christians are called to faithfulness in marriage and celibacy in singleness.	Prohibitive language about "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" being ordained, married, and performing same-sex marriages in UMC buildings might be removed from the Book of Discipline. Also, language about marriage being "between one man and one woman" might be removed.
Apportionments	No apportionments while temporarily independent. Other Methodist denominations have different percentages of apportionments.	In 2022 Munholland is paying \$76,501 in Annual Apportionments to support the structure and mission of the UMC.
Pastoral Leadership	Munholland will find her own pastoral leadership while independent. Some Methodist denominations have appointive and others hybrid models to select pastoral leadership.	Bishops have sole power of appointment. However, their custom is to consult with the pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee before appointive decisions are made.
Missions support and/or participation	UMCOR, The Salvation Army, United Methodist Children's Home, Mt. Zion, Hope Lodge, Cameroon, etc. Some missions funded through apportionments may change.	UMCOR, The Salvation Army, United Methodist Children's Home, Mt. Zion, Hope Lodge, Cameroon, etc. Other missions are funded through apportionments.
Camps and event places	Wesley Center, Camp Istrouma, Camp Caney	Wesley Center, Camp Istrouma, Camp Caney
Women's Ministry	United Women in Faith	United Women in Faith
Men's Ministry	Munholland Men's Ministry	United Methodist Men
Property, assets and endowments	Owned by Munholland church.	Owned by the Louisiana Annual Conference.

“WHAT’S GOING ON AT MUNHOLLAND?” Q & A

What does it mean for us to enter a discernment process?

Spiritual discernment is setting ourselves apart for a time of deep listening for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom, insight, and calling. It is not judging others (Matt 7:1-2) but encountering God’s wisdom and understanding. We listen to what God is saying in Scripture, prayer, and holy conversation. Our discernment process will consist of corporate and individual prayer, congregational information sessions, Q&A groups, and listening groups. The listening groups will be led by someone outside of Munholland.

Munholland and the UMC have a decision-making process that we will follow as we consider the future of our affiliation with the UMC.

- The Church Council votes to enter a discernment process.
- An appropriate discernment process is held.
- The Church Council votes by simple majority to authorize a Church Conference to vote whether or not to disaffiliate.
- The District Superintendent appoints a date for a Church Conference to convene.
- The Church Conference votes. The threshold for disaffiliation is two thirds of Professing Members present.

What is our Discernment Process?

Munholland is entering into an intentional process to discern how we will go forward in faith and ministry. All members who intend to vote are encouraged to attend at least one session during the discernment process.

- **Prayer:** Invitations throughout the process for congregational and personal prayer.
- **Churchwide meetings** are opportunities for the congregation as a whole to hear the same information about the discernment process and reasons that a person might vote to stay with the UMC or to disaffiliate.
- **Q & A Groups** will give space for small groups to ask specific questions about the information they have already received, reasons why they may want to leave or stay in the UMC, practical aspects of disaffiliation, and how a vote might impact Munholland’s future. Pre-registration is required for these groups.
- **Listening Groups** will be led by Rev. Craig Gilliam who is an organizational consultant, UMC Elder, and has been recommended by our District Superintendent, Jan Curwick. The Listening Groups will be small groups so that everyone can express their thoughts and feelings about the process, the information they have received, and the very idea of their church pursuing a vote for disaffiliation. Following those meetings, Craig Gilliam will give a recommendation to the Church Council about how to proceed. Pre-registration is required for these groups.

Upon the completion of the Discernment Process, Munholland’s Church Council will make one of three choices.

1. Authorize the congregation to vote on whether to disaffiliate from the UMC or stay in the UMC.
2. Stay in the UMC and not authorize a congregational vote.
3. Continue in the discernment process.

What does it mean to ‘disaffiliate’?

Disaffiliation means to leave the UMC denominational structure. We would no longer remain United Methodist although we would retain our Methodist heritage.

Does a church have to vote about disaffiliation?

No. However, one needs to understand that the UMC is not going to remain the same. It will change as regards to its membership, structure, and finances. As traditional churches leave, the remaining UMC decision-making bodies may become more progressive in makeup. Change is going to happen no matter how the church votes. Churches need to vote to choose the change that resonates with their theology, mission, and core values.

“WHAT’S GOING ON AT MUNHOLLAND?” Q & A

Will Munholland be part of another denomination if we leave?

The vote to leave the UMC is just that. It is not a vote to join another denomination. Disaffiliating churches will decide later whether to become independent, part of another Methodist denomination, or part of a Methodist association (of disaffiliated UMC churches).

Why can’t we just all stay together in the UMC and simply agree to disagree?

Every General Conference since 1972 has become more and more contentious until there have been clergy and bishops who have disobeyed the General Conference’s decisions. Many think that this conflict cannot be resolved by churches simply staying together in one denomination. In 2019, Bishop Harvey of the Louisiana Annual Conference cosigned a [Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation](#) which “propose[d] restructuring The United Methodist Church by separation as the best means to resolve our differences, allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person.”

Why are traditional UMCs leaving when the doctrine of the UMC is traditional?

The written doctrine of the UMC doesn’t matter if it is not practiced by the clergy of the denomination, especially the bishops. The will of the General Conference has been increasingly disregarded and the Judicial Council ignored by progressive clergy, bishops and congregations. They are changing the denomination by disobeying the rules which causes further disunity and disorder. Since some of the progressive branch will neither obey the Discipline nor leave the UMC using Paragraph 2553, some traditionalists are choosing to leave.

Why aren’t clergy and bishops held accountable for their disobedience?

The Judicial Council, like our US Supreme Court, can clarify law but has no power to enforce their decisions. Bishops have the power to hold clergy accountable. The Jurisdiction has authority to hold bishops accountable. If a bishop or Jurisdiction refuses to do so, there is effectively no accountability.

Why are Bishops and Jurisdictions refusing to enforce accountability to the BoD?

Many feel that this is a situation that calls for disobedience in order to follow their theological understanding of scripture.

Is there any hope for accountability in the future?

Issues of accountability will be addressed at the next General Conference (2024).

What would change if Munholland left the UMC?

- Munholland would be able to determine her future rather than UMC bishops and the General Conference. Her congregation would freely determine her future in alignment with her calling, values, and mission while maintaining her heritage.
- Munholland would own her property and assets including endowments and scholarships.
- Munholland would have both the privilege and responsibility to seek new pastoral leadership if she is independent or part of another Methodist association.
- Members of Munholland would no longer be United Methodist, but would remain members of Munholland Church. Your membership vows to Munholland Church are honored regardless of denominational affiliation.
- Munholland would no longer use the logos of the UMC.
- Munholland would have a new name. She has had a few names - Metairie Ridge Methodist Episcopal Church South, Metairie Ridge Methodist Church (USA), Munholland Memorial Methodist Church (USA), and Munholland United Methodist Church. We would have a new name that would likely retain ‘Munholland’ and ‘Methodist’.

What would stay the same about Munholland?

- We could continue in missions with: UMCOR, the Salvation Army, The United Methodist Children’s Home, Mt. Zion UMC mission, Hope Lodge, Hope Services in Cameroon, Greater Concerns Ethiopia, etc.
- We could continue to use the same ministry event venues such as the Wesley Center, Camp Istrouma, and Camp Caney.
- We could continue to be active in Cursillo and KAIROS transformational retreats. Those ministries and camps already serve many different denominations.
- We would still have a United Women in Faith chapter.
- The UM Men would become a Men’s Ministry and continue with studies, discipleship, and service.
- Our Sunday School classes and small groups would continue to pick their own materials including those who want to use UMC materials for study.

What does the Book of Discipline say about same-sex practice and ordination?

Munholland has long held traditional Methodist views on human sexuality and has always welcomed LGBTQIA+ people into our congregation. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* has been the same on this matter since 1972.

The Book of Discipline under the heading “Human Sexuality” beautifully reads, “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.” The disagreement is over a different passage. “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”, and “Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.”

Are LGBTQIA+ persons welcome at our church?

Absolutely. Everyone including LGBTQIA+ people have been and always will be welcomed here at Munholland. While our position on human sexuality is orthodox, our posture is love. All people are made in the image of God and, therefore, everyone is invited to participate in the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. We extend welcome, grace, and respect to all who all come to Munholland.

Would individuals identifying as LGBTQIA+ have opportunities for lay leadership and participation on committees?

There are no prohibitions for those who identify as LGBTQIA+ to serve in a lay leadership capacity in the UMC per the 2016 Book of Discipline. Munholland would continue that policy if we disaffiliate. Munholland allows all people to serve. However, positions of leadership are decided on an individual basis for both heterosexuals and those identifying as LGBTQIA+.

What is the financial impact if the vote is to disaffiliate and how would we cover it?

- The Louisiana Annual Conference requires disaffiliating churches to 1) be current on this year’s apportionments and pay 24 months of additional apportionments and 2) pay in full unfunded pension liability. The total cost given by our District Superintendent, Jan Curwick, is \$371,142. There will be other minimal fees included in change of title, establishing a 501(c)3, removing logos, etc.
- Munholland is working toward covering the potential costs by taking out a loan that does not use current UMC properties as collateral.

What is the legal risk of leaving the denomination?

There is no risk or liability associated with disaffiliation by following the prescribed steps for completing the process. The risk of litigation increases in cases where churches take steps to disaffiliate outside the prescribed process.

Where do our pastor and staff stand on this issue? Do they support leaving the denomination?

Dr. Beck is in a period of discernment. Munholland and Dr. Beck each have their own decisions to make.

“WHAT’S GOING ON AT MUNHOLLAND?” Q & A

Munholland’s staff are individually in a period of discernment along with the rest of the congregation about whether to disaffiliate or not.

How would our staff be impacted by a transition away from the UMC?

Non-clergy staff compensation would remain the same. Staff employment terms would not change.

What would happen to the church’s 501(c)3 status?

Munholland currently operates under the umbrella of the UMC 501c3 status. If we disaffiliate, we will create a new 501c3 entity in order for your gifts to Munholland to continue to be tax deductible.

Are there other United Methodist Churches in NOLA that are considering disaffiliation?

One small NOLA Church has disaffiliated. However, Munholland is the only mid-size United Methodist Church in NOLA that is considering disaffiliation. Rayne Memorial UMC and First Grace UMC will remain vibrant churches in the United Methodist denomination. If Munholland disaffiliated, it would be the only medium size church for theologically traditional United Methodists to worship in after the disaffiliation process for churches is completed.

What are the larger churches in the Louisiana Annual Conference doing?

The top five LA UMC churches by attendance

1. St. Timothy on the North Shore, Mandeville – discerning disaffiliation
2. Live Oak UMC, Watson – discerning disaffiliation
3. First UMC Shreveport – discerning disaffiliation
4. First UMC, Baton Rouge – Staying
5. Broadmoor UMC, Baton Rouge – Staying

Also, 9 churches have already disaffiliated with 70+ in the process at this time. In 2020, there were over 400 total churches in the LA Conference.

What are the larger UM churches in the United States doing?

Top 5 as of 2018 (last numbers available)

1. Windsor Village UMC, Houston, TX - discerning disaffiliation
2. Church of the Resurrection UMC, Leawood KS – staying
3. White’s Chapel UMC, Southlake, TX - discerning disaffiliation
4. Highland Park UMC, Dallas, TX – staying
5. The Woodlands UMC, Woodlands, TX – already voted to disaffiliate

What happens after the Munholland Church Conference vote is completed?

1. Vote to disaffiliate does not pass.
 - a. If the vote does not pass, our church will remain Munholland United Methodist Church.
2. Vote to disaffiliate does pass.
 - a. Munholland will disaffiliate from the UMC.
 - b. Money will need to be paid – the congregation must be current on apportionments and pay another two years apportionments before disaffiliation. It must also pay its pro rata share of unfunded pension liabilities and all fees for change of title, etc.
 - c. Titles to properties and assets will be transferred to Munholland.
 - d. Materials bearing UMC wording or Logos (i.e. cross and flame) will be removed from church property.
 - e. Munholland will then have further discussions and another vote to decide if the church will remain as an independent church OR if the church will join another denomination.
3. What do the people do if the vote does not turn out the way they want?
 - a. No one will be required or asked to leave the church regardless of voting outcome.
 - b. Each person will decide for themselves if they will move forward with Munholland or if they will seek an alternative church that resonates with their theology, mission and core values.

CONCERNS OF THOSE WHO WISH TO REMAIN UNITED METHODIST

The United Methodist Church is going through a period of discernment during which some congregations may choose to leave the UMC (i.e., disaffiliate). Those wanting Munholland to stay UMC value and uphold the following:

1. **Strength in Diversity:** Diversity of the world-wide UMC is well-established: conservatives, moderates, liberals and everything in between. Our differences challenge us to question our assumptions and learn from one another. We are stronger together.
2. **International Ministries and Missions:** Global and local ministries beyond Munholland depend upon the support of a large organization's ability to project and collect funding on an ongoing basis. 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 United UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief, VIM (Volunteers in Mission) The Upper Room, United Methodist Publishing House, and many others.
3. **Wesleyan Theology:** The UMC doctrines of the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, salvation through Christ alone, and the manifestations of grace (prevenient, justifying, sanctifying) are bedrock in the doctrinal standards of the UMC and cannot be changed without massive support of the global church. There is concern that leaving the UMC could result in limiting the application of UMC doctrine.
4. **Guaranteed Pastoral Supply:** In the UMC each congregation is guaranteed a Wesleyan trained and qualified pastor. Should Munholland (MUMC) leave the UMC, there will be no guaranteed appointments for clergy.
5. **Obedience to the Current UMC Book of Discipline (BoD):** We value staying in the UMC in support of its existing BoD. Should unacceptable changes occur in the future, decisions can be made at that time. There have been Protestant denominational separations in recent decades over similar issues in North America. We uphold our vow to "uphold the UMC [and MUMC] with our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness".
6. **Financial Stability:** The costs of leaving the UMC under current guidelines is over \$371,000 in addition to other expenses involved in establishing a new church. This financial burden could be overwhelming after disaffiliation due to reductions in membership and tithing.
7. **Church Growth:** Leaning into the UMC values of "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors" has proven to be inviting to many, especially to younger persons. The future of the church depends upon its youth and young adults, who have been shown to value diversity and equality.
8. **Social Justice:** Personal salvation and social justice are inextricably linked. Attention to exclusion of marginalized persons and groups is required for living into our faith. We believe the current UMC has consistently demonstrated a commitment to these values.
9. **Leadership of the UMC:** The leadership of the UMC are dedicated, committed people who in their flawed humanity do their best to lead the global UMC effectively and faithfully.

CONCERNS OF THOSE WHO WISH TO DISAFFILIATE

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is changing. Traditional churches across the country are electing to leave the United Methodist Church. Munholland is currently considering the following issues in our discussion of disaffiliation:

1. **Theological differences:** There are theological differences for some in the UMC that are related to the interpretation of the scriptures with some questioning the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin birth, the crucifixion, and the physical resurrection upon which our faith rests.
2. **Disobedience:** Many Bishops and Clergy have chosen to act in open defiance of the BOD without experiencing any retribution or punishment from the Judicial Council for doing so.
3. **Sexuality:** Traditionalists seek to uphold the standards for sexuality as defined in the Book of Discipline and Scripture.
4. **Seminary teachings:** At least nine out of our thirteen official United Methodist seminaries offer courses and/or training for our UMC Elders and Deacons in non-traditional Christian theology and/or worship.
5. **Trust Clause:** The Trust Clause is the document that has given ownership of our assets to the Annual Conference. Churches will no longer be able to disaffiliate with property and assets after December 31, 2023. In the Louisiana Conference, the ability to disaffiliate ends in June unless a special Annual Conference is called for later in the year. If we disaffiliate, ownership of the assets of the church would belong to Munholland. If disaffiliation does not happen by this date there is no clear path forward that would ever allow Munholland to leave the United Methodist church with any of its property. This one issue is why, for those churches who wish to disaffiliate, the process needs to happen prior to the end of December, 2023.
6. **Financial Stability:** The financial stability of Munholland will be at risk as a result of the number of individuals who will choose to leave. It is apparent that some people will leave Munholland as a result of the outcome of this vote. But if Munholland continues to follow the traditional standards as defined in the Book of Discipline it will be the only mid-sized traditional Methodist church in the New Orleans area and Munholland could attract many others who are seeking a church home with traditional values.

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S MINIMUM PARAMETERS FOR THE PROCESS

This document was given to the Church Council by District Superintendent Jan Curwick.

Minimum Parameters for Medium/Large Church discernment processes.

The primary goals of this discernment process are:

- To invite and provide congregation-wide opportunities for church members to understand the “why” behind this call for discernment and engage God in personal and corporate times of prayerful discernment.
- Provide space for respectful, compassionate, informative conversations related to the congregation’s future with The United Methodist Church.
- To focus shared information on accurate, positive expressions of reality.
- To help inform the congregation’s leadership as decisions are being made regarding the congregation's thoughts, opinions and impressions on remaining United Methodist.

The basic requirements of a local congregation’s discernment plan include:

- A standardization of an information packet provided to the congregation regarding remaining in the UMC. This shall include:
 - Balanced, multi-perspective, minimally biased, factual information.
 - Any information shared from any source may only include positive information about the respective institution, denomination or source providing the information. That is, any information shared from The United Methodist Church can only contain information about the UMC. It cannot degrade, devalue or describe any other denomination or stance. Likewise, information shared by/on any other denomination, its advocates or an individual antithetical to the UMC can only contain information about that denomination or stance. It cannot degrade, devalue or describe any other denomination or stance. For example, Denomination X, or anyone who advocates for it, or for a particular stance, can only say what is good and right about Denomination X, it may not present “what is wrong” with any other denomination or stance.
 - At any point, the congregation’s DS may be invited in to clarify murky information or, at their discretion, a DS may request to review the information packet before it is sent out.
- A gathering of “conversation groups” designed for open, respectful conversations on the information packets provided to the congregation. The purpose of these conversations is to learn from one another, not debate any issue. The guideline of only speaking positively about one’s own thoughts and not speaking negatively about any others will be in place. These conversations shall:
 - Be facilitated by 2 members of a leadership/discernment team. One facilitator shall personally lean toward remaining with the UMC, while the other facilitator shall lean toward potentially leaving the UMC. The facilitators should be trained and skilled in presenting/facilitating minimally biased, compassionate, respectful conversation and should be skilled, active listeners. Ideally, a 3rd member of a leadership/discernment team should be present to record key comments and impressions, though this may be accomplished by one of the facilitators.
 - A minimum attendance number of unique individual church members equal to 65% of the congregation's reported 2019 Average Worship Attendance should be targeted. (However, every member of the congregation should receive the information packet and should be invited to attend one of the conversation sessions.) Those in attendance at the Information Meeting with the District Superintendent can be counted toward that target number.

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT'S MINIMUM PARAMETERS FOR THE PROCESS

- Conversation groups shall be limited to 12-25 persons, except in cases where to do so would unnecessarily prolong the process to hit the 65% AWA target. Care should be taken in larger groups to manage those who tend to dominate conversations and to draw out those who are hesitant to speak in groups.
- In addition, to any other conversation led by the facilitators these questions need to be asked:
 - What we would gain by no longer being a United Methodist Congregation?
 - What we would lose by no longer being a United Methodist Congregation?
 - How do you feel/what are your thoughts about being in a denomination where everyone believes exactly the same?
 - At this particular moment, what do you hear God saying to you about our congregation?
 - What signs would you look for to confirm for you that the congregation is on the right path?
- From the point of the beginning of the discernment process to the time of a church conference, if such is requested, members of the congregation's administrative bodies, discernment team, facilitators, pastors and staff must covenant to not engage in the speaking, sharing, or disseminating, in any form, any information that speaks disparagingly of others, any denomination, or other perspective. This is not intended to prevent anyone of speaking their convictions, but rather limits that communication to what is positive about their supported denomination or perspective. Again, this covenant restricts individuals and bodies from saying "what is wrong" with any other denomination, person or perspective.
- After the appropriate number of conversation groups have been convened, the leadership/discernment team shall meet, review the recorder's notes and discern the next step forward.
- The Congregation's DS may require approval of the leadership/discernment team's plans before they are implemented. Note that failure to meet a DS's expectation of a discernment process may delay when that DS calls for a church conference.
- A commitment by all portions of the congregation, especially pastors, staff and leadership, to avoid "parking lot", secretive, or extra-process conversations that degrade, devalue, denigrate or disparage any person, perspective or denomination should be made.

FORWARD IN FAITH

MUNHOLLAND UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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