

## The Affiliation Question: Information for the Congregation of CUMC

On October 30, 2022, Culpeper United Methodist Church held a special called conference to discuss and vote on the “Program to Explore Possible Disaffiliation of CUMC from the United Methodist Church”. At that special called conference, the congregation in attendance voted to approve the exploratory program. As part of that program, focus groups were held during January and February 2023.

During those focus groups, the Leadership Team received feedback from members of the congregation that they wanted more information about the human sexuality issue within the UMC and possible disaffiliation from the UMC. At the same time, some members expressed a desire to share information with the congregation that they are using to make their decision on this issue.

**The information contained in this document was submitted by members of the congregation with the intention of sharing with the congregation.** This document is not an endorsement by the Leadership Team for or against a specific outcome of the affiliation question and upcoming vote.

As a next step, a vote will be held on April 16, 2023 for all professing members of CUMC to vote on whether to enter a 30-day discernment period with formal discussions with the District Superintendent for the decision to disaffiliate. **The vote will require a 2/3 (67%) majority of members present at that meeting to advance to the discernment period.**

More details regarding the time of the vote will be communicated to members of CUMC as we approach the date. Childcare will be provided.

This is a difficult time in the life of the UMC and CUMC. The Leadership Team is praying for wisdom and discernment for our congregation. May we keep our eyes focused on the calling God has placed on our church and our lives, and may we find unity in Christ Jesus. Please remain in prayer as you research these and other sources of information related to the affiliation question.

### Frequently Asked Questions:

#### 1. What does the Book of Discipline say about human sexuality?

BOD 161:G) Human Sexuality—We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift. Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. We deplore all forms of the commercialization, abuse, and exploitation of sex. We call for strict global enforcement of laws prohibiting the sexual exploitation of children and for adequate protection, guidance, and counseling for abused children. All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence. The Church should support the family in providing age-appropriate education regarding sexuality to children, youth, and adults.

We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice

incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

## **2. Is the UMC going to change its stance on human sexuality at the 2024 General Conference?**

The 2024 General Conference will consider legislative proposals that would drop several existing prohibitions. There are items that could authorize clergy who choose to do so to preside at same-sex weddings. There are several proposals to drop the statement "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." Some proposals would remove the current policy that forbids the licensing, commissioning, ordaining, or appointing of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals as clergy. Another would drop the prohibition on providing funding for any activity or publication that promotes "the acceptance of homosexuality." The General Conference must consider all legislative items (proposals) it receives. The General Conference would then vote whether to approve them.

## **3. Is the UMC going to force congregations to have a homosexual pastor?**

No. It is a chargeable offense in The United Methodist Church to be a clergy person or candidate who is a self-avowed, practicing homosexual. Bishops are forbidden to appoint those found through the complaint process to be self-avowed, practicing homosexuals. This has been the case since 1984.

## **4. Is the UMC going to require clergy and candidates to offer same-sex weddings?**

No. There are no proposals before the next General Conference to require clergy to perform same-sex weddings, nor have there ever been. Proposals to permit clergy who choose to preside at such ceremonies have come before previous General Conferences and will come before the 2024 General Conference.

## **5. Is the UMC ordaining drag queens?**

No, a United Methodist bishop has never ordained, commissioned, or licensed a drag queen. However, the Vermillion River District of The Illinois Great Rivers Conference voted unanimously to approve the certification of a candidate for ordained ministry in 2021. The Book of Discipline prohibits "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" from being certified as candidates for ordination. The candidate identifies as a gay man, but not as a practicing homosexual. He also performs under the drag name, Penny Cost, for the purposes of evangelism in audiences made up of people of many sexual and gender identities. The Book of Discipline does not disqualify persons who are gay but not practicing, or who perform in drag from consideration or certification as a candidate. The candidate in question was approved by a district committee for candidacy. Commissioning as clergy can occur only after completion of seminary educational requirements, supervision over a period of years, and approval for commissioning by a 3/4 vote of the clergy session of the annual conference.

## **6. Does the UMC believe in a queer God?**

No. The reference to supporting the worship of "Queer God" comes from a chapel service at Duke Divinity School sponsored by an LGBTQ+ student group. Duke Divinity School serves students of many denominations, not just United Methodists, and students of many denominations make up the LGBTQ group that sponsored the service in question. One of the students named is identified as United Methodist, and that student is, at this point, a candidate, not yet clergy in The United Methodist Church. Such "group sponsored" services represent the views of their sponsoring organization, not the Divinity

School, nor its faculty. Such services are not a basis for making any statements about the beliefs or views of The United Methodist Church. General Conference establishes the official statements of The United Methodist Church and its ritual.

### **7. Is the UMC ignoring or refusing to implement the Discipline's statements, restrictions, and requirements regarding practicing homosexuals and same sex weddings?**

In the majority of conferences, no. In some conferences, it may appear so. The bishops of the Western Jurisdiction have publicly stated that they will not "withhold or challenge ordination based on a candidate's gender identity or sexual orientation". The Book of Discipline nowhere states that gender identity or sexual orientation is a basis for withholding or challenging ordination. The Discipline does prohibit certifying as candidates or licensing, commissioning, ordaining, or appointing as clergy persons who are "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals". To state that one is homosexual is not disqualifying. What is disqualifying is being or being proven to a jury of peers in a church trial to be a self-avowed, practicing homosexual. The statement by the bishops of the Western Jurisdiction also says, "We are unwilling to punish clergy who celebrate the marriage of two adults of any gender or sexual orientation seeking the blessing of God and the Church for their covenanted life together." Bishops do not apply "punishments" as part of the complaint process. Rather, bishops oversee the process. If a church trial is necessary, bishops preside at the church trial. If guilt is found in a church trial, it is not the bishop who imposes a "sentence", It is the jury of peers who both reach a verdict and set a sentence. Though the Judicial Council ruled that the election of Karen Oliveto as a bishop in 2016 violated the Book of Discipline (self-avowed, practicing homosexual), the bishops in the Western Jurisdiction have not reviewed her election and are still standing in defiance of the Judicial Council's ruling.

The district superintendents in the Iowa Conference have announced they will "grant contextual permission" for clergy of the conference to preside at same-sex weddings in Iowa effective in January 2022.

### **8. Why isn't the UMC punishing those who violate the Discipline?**

The complaint process begins with someone filing a written complaint alleging one or more chargeable offenses. Next, the complaint is investigated to determine whether it merits moving to adjudication or dismissal. If the case moves to adjudication, the matter may be addressed through a just resolution agreement or proceed to a trial. At a trial, the presiding officer is a district superintendent for laity, and a bishop for clergy or other bishops. The jury is made up of peers. The jury determines whether the charges apply in the case, and, if so, what action to take in response. Complaint processes are confidential. The intention is to protect the integrity and dignity of all parties involved.

A number of bishops and some cabinets have indicated their commitment to hold in abeyance or delay all administrative and judicial complaint processes addressing restrictions in the Book of Discipline regarding gay and lesbian clergy and/or same-sex weddings until after General Conference meets and action related to the separation of the denomination can be considered.

### **9. Can we disaffiliate because we pay too much in apportionments, disagree with some of the UMC positions, and disagree with Bishop appointments? This is our chance to get out with our building.**

Paragraph 2553 of The Book of Discipline states the basis for a church to disaffiliate from The UMC as follows:

"Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, 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 which follow.”

Reasons such as connectional giving or property are not related to the basis for ¶ 2553 and would not be applicable to disaffiliation under this provision.

### **Other Information:**

While paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline states, “a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, 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 which follow.”, some members of the congregation feel strongly about some issues that may be related or outside the scope of the provision of paragraph 2553. Information shared by the congregation about those issues is contained in this section.

### **Abortion**

- <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/abortion-and-methodist-split.html>
- <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-is-the-umc-really-part-3#abortion>

### **Candidates that are Homosexual or Drag Queen**

- <https://religionnews.com/2021/04/15/first-drag-queen-certified-as-a-candidate-for-united-methodist-ministry-speaking-in-a-new-way-to-new-people>

### **Dissolution of scriptures/Christ**

- <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-is-the-umc-really-part-1#Christology>

### **How long can a Bishop serve?**

- In the U.S., bishops normally serve in one area for up to two terms, but they can continue for a third term with special approval of the jurisdictional conference. Bishops are elected for life and serve in their assignment until retirement (required by the Book of Discipline to be the jurisdictional conference following their 68th birthday).

### **Newly Elected Bishops**

- **Sue Haupt-Johnson:** As one of her last acts as Bishop of the North Georgia Conference, she “suspended” acceptance of disaffiliation requests until the conclusion of the General Conference in 2024
  - <https://www.ngumc.org/newsdetail/north-georgia-conference-to-pause-disaffiliation-process-17216662>
  - [North Georgia UMC to seize Mt. Bethel assets, manage church - East Cobb News](#)
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=xt3q1jiypfo>

- **Tom Berlin:** "What's being said in private conversations, is that if the traditional plan, the majority plan, is voted in today, you will be putting a virus into the American church that will make it very sick... They feel that their church is exhibiting itself as being against gay people... It's not your intention, I know"
  - <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/general-conference-2019-video-feb-26-morning-session-2> (42:00 min mark)
- **Dottie Escobedo-Frank:** Dottie believes we are living in a time of epochal change, which requires the church find sacred ways to die in order to be reborn. **She calls for heretics and edge-dwellers to lead the church forward.** Now is the time, she says, to push these new leaders to the forefront of church restarts. (<https://revdottie.org/about/>)
- **Kennethha Bigham-Tsai (from an interview in 2016):** "In a elegation interview last month, this top CT staffer was asked if it was important for United Methodists to at least agree on who Jesus is. In response, Bigham-Tsai confidently declared, "No, it is not important that we agree on who Christ is." She went on to raise questions of if she really believes in basic orthodox doctrine of the incarnation, of God becoming flesh in a particular human body in a particular time and particular place. In Bigham-Tsai's words: "God became flesh, but not particular flesh. There's no particularity around that. God became incarnate in a culture, but not one culture."
- **Cedrick D. Bridgeforth:** He becomes the first openly gay African American man to be elected a bishop in The United Methodist Church. (From the Western Jurisdiction web site: <https://westernjurisdictionumc.org/wj-2022-elects-cedrick-bridgeforth-as-bishop/>)

#### UMC's statements on human sexuality and disaffiliation

- <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-series-is-the-umc-really>

#### UMC is veering from traditional values

- <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/church-to-start-counting-non-binary-members>