

Where Do We Go from Here?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to God, and your paths will be straight. *Proverbs 3:5-6*

Caught in a fifty-year battle over human sexuality, with a denominational split once again postponed by COVID -19, both conservative and progressive churches are leaving The United Methodist Church. As we write this letter, we are still Kent Island United Methodist Church. Celebrating our past, remaining focused on our present-day mission, and praying for the future. This is a complex situation with a storied past. This letter unfortunately will not give this situation the full attention it needs. Nevertheless, we pray it serves as a great source of information.

Is Separation Necessary?

The United Methodist Church, as we know it, is dividing. Four years after the formation of The United Methodist Church, human sexuality was first debated from the floor at the General Conference in 1972 in Atlanta, Georgia. This resulted in the first statement of human sexuality in The United Methodist Church. The General Conference is the only body that can officially be the voice of the Church. At General Conference every delegate, from around the world, grapple with differing outlooks concerning social principles, doctrine, and ecclesial polity.

Since 1972, The United Methodist Church has been exchanging views about whether or how to include LGBTQAI persons in the Church. In 1972, the Social Principle surrounding human sexuality read:

“Everyone is of scared worth. We do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider it incompatible with Christian teaching. We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex.”

To date, this Social Principle has not changed in The Book of Discipline. A Social Principle is designated on part of the General Conference to reflect on human and social issues of our world from a Biblical and Theological foundation, as demonstrated in The United Methodist traditions. The Social Principles are to be lived out in both faith and practice.

Here is a brief history of the General Conference timeline as it relates to human sexuality.

- 1976 – bans use of church funds to promote homosexuality.
- 1980 – Position does not change.
- 1984 – Adoption for clergy, “fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness” and “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”
- 1988 – Language included, “... we affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.”
- 1992 – Position does not change.
- 1996 – Language included. “self-avowed practicing homosexual,” and a declaration that ceremonies to celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by United Methodist clergy or in United Methodist churches.
- 2000 – Language included, “we implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members and friends.”
- 2004 – A unity statement was approved, “As United Methodists, we remain in covenant with one another, even in the midst of disagreement, and affirm our commitment to work together for the common mission of making disciples throughout the world.”
- 2008 – A new resolution to oppose homophobia and heterosexism.
- 2012 – Two items added stating Christians have different opinions about homosexuality.

In 2016, the schism was widening, and the debate was getting heated. All voting at the 2016 General Conference was deferred and the issue of human sexuality was designated to a special commission. This body was called, “The Commission on a Way Forward.” It was made of 32 members – 8 bishops, 11 laity, 11 elders and 2 deacons. The Commission on a Way Forward began a full examination of whether to revise the paragraphs in The Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality. The Commission developed three plans: The One Church Plan, The Traditional Plan, and The Connection Plan.

The Council of Bishops called for a special session of the General Conference in early 2019 to adopt one of these plans. At the 2019 Special General Conference the delegates voted on the Traditional plan. The Traditional plan held true to the language that already existed in The Book of Discipline. Although approved, the adoption of this plan was not met favorably. There was a growing resistance and calls for the denomination to separate were increasing. At the 2019 Special General Conference, during plenary session, by a vote of 402-400, the General Conference enacted the new Taylor Disaffiliation Petition. This became paragraph 2553 and is known as the Taylor Disaffiliation Act. It reads as follows:

Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality

1. Basis-- 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.

2. Time Limits--The choice by a local church to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church under this paragraph shall be made in sufficient time for the process for exiting the denomination to be complete prior to December 31, 2023. The provisions of ¶ 2553 expire on December 31, 2023 and shall not be used after that date.

The Taylor Disaffiliation Act furnishes the suspension of the denomination's trust clause (allowing the local church to retain all property and financial resources) in exchange for:

- Local church's payment of 2 years of apportionments.
- Share of the conference pension liability.
- Share of retiree health benefits.
- Repayment of any loans issued from the Annual Conference to the local church.

Under the disaffiliation act our church's value is \$300,000.

After the 2019 Special General Conference, the *Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation* was introduced to explore amicable ways to move forward in a spirit of peace and solidarity. This was supported by progressives, traditionalists, and centrists. The protocol gave way for traditionalists to surrender The United Methodist title and proclaim a new Methodist denomination. A final vote on this protocol was set for the 2020 General Conference. Due to the pandemic the 2020 General Conference was rescheduled for the Fall of 2022. Once again, stating health concerns due to COVID, the General Conference was postponed and rescheduled for 2024. No longer does the Protocol have the support it needs to be passed at the 2024 General Conference.

On May 1, 2022, a new denomination (The Global Methodist Church) was launched. This allowed Churches to disaffiliate from the UMC and join the GMC.

Peninsula Delaware Conference.

To date 20 Churches have disaffiliated from The United Methodist Church in our Conference. In addition to the costs mentioned under the Taylor Disaffiliation Act, on March 28, 2022, the Conference Board of Trustees, and Bishop Easterling, voted to include the following additions for a local Church to disaffiliate in the Peninsula Delaware Conference:

- A mandatory two-month Bible Study.
- Payment of 50% of the Tax-Assessed value of the property. This would cost our Church \$5 million (yes million) on top of the \$300,000 value coming from the Taylor Disaffiliation Act.

The report of the Conference Board of Trustees (announcing these additions) was not included for clergy and laity in this year's Conference in June 2022.

Our Church.

Our Church has formed a Commission Moving Forward Committee. Formation of this Commission is constructed of volunteers from all three focus areas and the following committees: Trustees, Finance, and Staff Parish Relations Committee. In addition, representation includes, a staff member, and our Lay Leader.

We, the Kent Island United Methodist Church Commission have had three meetings: April 28, 2022, June 23, 2022, and July 14, 2022. To meet the deadline of July 1, 2022, the Kent Island Commission Moving Forward Committee invited the Servant Leadership Team to pray, discuss, and vote on starting the process to disaffiliate. The vote was unanimous to begin the process. **Note, this was a vote to begin the process of disaffiliation. This was not a vote to disaffiliate.**

On July 14, 2022, we received a letter from the Conference stating they recognize our desire to begin the process to disaffiliate but the 50% payment of our property value is still required. On the same date, we, the Kent Island Commission called a meeting, and invited The Servant Leadership Team, and the Trustees to discuss and vote on participating in a joint demand letter. The demand letter would be sent to Bishop Easterling asking for Conference additions to the Taylor Disaffiliation Act be removed. This was approved by the Servant Leadership Team and Trustees by a vote of 11 to 1. To date 63 United Methodist Churches in our Conference are participating in the Joint Demand Letter. The joint demand letter is being submitted in conjunction with legal counsel.

Town Hall Meeting.

On August 25, 2022, at 7:00 pm, we will hold a town hall meeting in the sanctuary. Everyone is invited. We will share updated information about this process and provide a time for questions and answers.

Remember a tab has been created on our website. This tab will serve to inform you about updated information and allow you to check for new developments. If you have questions, feel free to use this new email address: commission@kiumc.org. One of the Commission members will respond in a timely manner.

Thank You,

The Kent Island Commission Moving Forward