

**Please note: We received too many questions that deserve in depth answers to address in 60 minutes. We will do our best in the panel format. The DTF has spent hours reading and researching for every single question submitted. We will discuss as many questions as time permits each Wednesday night. We will post more detailed answers on our DOF website.**

**Some of your questions were very similar in nature and some have been combined, so you might not see your exact wording. The DTF clarified the questions asked as a group. The DTF reviewed collaborative answers provided by DTF members, clergy and others to ensure the responses were balanced.**

**If anyone has any questions, comments or suggestions, please email the Discernment Taskforce at [Taskforce@FUMCShreveport.org](mailto:Taskforce@FUMCShreveport.org). We respectfully ask that you refrain from contacting any members of the Discernment Taskforce individually.**

A. It is difficult to predict the future. That would depend on future leaders at all church levels, including General conference, Bishops and appointed pastors.

A. These funds would not need to be raised. FUMCS is blessed because these funds could be available within hours.

A. No one entered this process with the desire to divide the church. The UMC is a divided denomination. Our discernment is about separating from or remaining with the UMC, not dividing FUMCS.

A. To be eligible, every voting person must be a professing member of the church and on the membership rolls of the church. This includes youth that have been through confirmation. While voting procedures have not been determined at FUMC-S, many larger churches have used a pre-registration system to confirm membership status as well as on-site registration. FUMC-S maintains excellent physical and electronic records.

Article 2553 (which calls for a Church Conference to vote on the issue of disaffiliation), **¶ 248** of the Book of Discipline which governs voting by the Church Conference and provides that only those members of the local church present at such meetings have the right to vote.

In addition, this is confirmed by the United Methodist Communications departments, which states:

*The Book of Discipline provides no means for persons not participating during a meeting to vote. There is no provision for proxy voting in the Book of Discipline.*<sup>III</sup>

- A. All members of our church are welcomed to educate themselves, join us in prayer and join us in voting, if that is the path our church chooses. We hope a large percentage of the active church membership will participate.
- B. Should the Church Council elect to exercise 2553, the Louisiana Annual Conference policy is that the membership is "frozen" on the day the District Superintendent issues his call for the Congregational Charge Conference.
- C. Para 2553 (3) of the 2019 Addendum to the UMC Book of Discipline states, "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."
- D. To clarify, no matter how a member votes, they will be welcome to remain members of our church.

- A. We need to make clear that the language of 2553 requires us to vote on the human sexuality issue. That being said, human sexuality is the symptom of the theological debate.
- B. One of the problems in the UMC is that we use many of the same words, but mean very different things. Traditional Wesleyans view all of scripture as "authoritative" and there are nuanced "interpretive" strategies within. Centrist and Progressives tend to "interpret" which scriptures are "authoritative" and which are more historical in nature. All claim to take the bible seriously, but these approaches yield widely different outcomes.
- C. No way we can answer this question in detail here tonight. I would encourage you to go to the "How We Got Here" Power Point presentation and video on our FirstShreveport.org website. There is a whole section in that presentation that outlines many of the differences.

1. Traditional Methodists believe that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant word of God. The Bible makes some clear statements that homosexuality (etc) is a sin. If the church begins to ordain ministers that teach it is not a sin, and celebrates same-sex unions, we have a problem.

This means one of two things - either (1) the church condones sin or (2) homosexuality is not a sin. I don't think either side is suggesting that the church can condone sin. Many on the progressive side are teaching that homosexuality is not sin.

If homosexuality is not sin then that has to mean at least one if not both of the following: either (1) God changed his mind regarding homosexuality (conflicts with other scripture) or (2) Words in scripture are incorrect (which calls into question Gods sovereignty).

Further if one word of the scripture is in error, that calls into question all of scripture. E.g., if the bible is wrong on homosexuality, maybe it is wrong on adultery, etc. This begins to undermine the basis of Christianity entirely.

2. Homosexuality is a unique problem. All Christians sin and fall short of the glory of God. But almost all other sins that we commit on a daily basis do not require us to question God's word. If I commit adultery, I will

not begin professing that adultery is OK. Conversely, progressive Methodists believe that calling homosexuality a sin directly conflicts with what scripture teaches about loving our neighbors. Deep discernment is required to understand what God has to tell us on these issues. How are we to love our neighbor, what is sin, what does the Bible tell us about how we should live our lives, what foundation should we be building upon – Holy Scripture, tradition, reason, experience; some combination of the four. Maybe we should include current social norms with the big four?

D. Getting back to the question. The issues around homosexuality are directly linked to other core Traditional Christian beliefs. This is what is meant by traditionalist when they state it is more about doctrine than human sexuality.

A. The Judicial Council, like our US Supreme Court, can clarify church law but has no power to enforce their decision. That power resides with the Bishops, who are only accountable to the other Bishops in their Jurisdiction. If those Bishops are in agreement, they can successfully disregard the Judicial Council's decisions. This is a crucial governmental problem within the UMC.

1. Seminaries are only affiliated with and funded in part by the UMC, but not governed by the UMC. Seminaries fall more in line with academic principles of higher education rather than church principles. There are few accountability measures to encourage, let alone enforce, a different pedagogy. This is relevant because we fund these 13 seminaries and the students and faculties are not necessarily Methodists.
2. The UMC sponsors 13 seminaries in the US including schools like Duke School of Divinity in Durham, NC, Perkins School of Theology at SMU in Dallas, Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta and Iliff School of Theology in Denver. You may be surprised to know that we also sponsor 5 seminaries in Africa. The UMC also supports 97 (if I counted correctly) colleges and universities around the globe including Centenary College here in Shreveport.
  - A. Most, if not all of these seminaries are independent institutions that accept financial support from the UMC as well as many other sources. Also, they are populated with many students and faculty members that are not Methodists nor, in many cases, even Christian.
  - B. Let me digress for a moment and consider the history of the Progressive Movement in our country's history.
    1. Through most of our early history, colleges were founded on classical, Western Christian principles – basically that education is about “forming the soul” – teaching students to think, reason and communicate through knowledge, wisdom and understanding.
    2. Thomas Jefferson, after leaving his presidency in 1809, embarked on a mission to change all that. Jefferson was a Deist and a Secular Humanist and rejected the religious traditions that had been the foundation for early universities and, in 1819, the first purely secular institution – the University of Virginia in Charlottesville – opened for business. Jefferson populated its faculty with Unitarians, barred religious activities and instruction from its curricula and, affirming its commitment to secularism, the university had no chaplain.

3. Before what's now known as the "Progressive Era of the late 1800's and early 1900's" America was plagued by low wages, unsafe factories, and high unemployment. Progressive education really took root during these times, aiming not to replace classical education, but to enhance it. Progressive education believes that "learning by doing" (progressive) is just as important as "learning by listening (classical) – a more vocational perspective on education. At the turn of the last century, John Dewey was widely accepted as its early champion and became known as the "Father of modern education".

C. The progressive movement has been alive and well in higher education ever since and seminaries have not been exempted. Here is an example taken from the UMC webpage showcasing the seminaries we support:

1. "The Iliff School of Theology is an independent graduate school related to The United Methodist Church that educates and develops leaders with courageous theological imaginations. Located in Denver, Colorado, it serves many faith traditions and is committed to social justice and inclusiveness. Iliff has been named one of the Seminaries that Change the World for three years running. The school, with an uncompromising commitment to diversity, justice, and peace, prepares students to enter courageous conversations grounded in tradition and energized with creative ideas."

2. Iliff also characterizes itself as a community of "Hindus, Universalists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, and agnostics," among others.

D. Churches pay apportionments each year for the UM's Ministerial Education Fund which primarily goes to help fund the 13 official UM Seminaries in the US. In 2022, the total apportioned to the MEF was \$26.9MM. This is a lot of money for sure but a mere pittance when you think about the total budgets for these schools. Moreover, the UMC Discipline requires that the majority of the MEF be used for UM student scholarships. So, the money the UMC spends to support UM sponsored seminaries has little if an impact on faculty or curricula much less accountability and enforcement.

- A. One of the solutions proposed is to use the Big Tent concept and remove the restrictive language regarding human sexuality from the Book of Discipline, thereby resolving noncompliance to the book of discipline.
- B. Traditionalists and some Progressives have determined that the UMC is ungovernable after trying for decades to amend the Book of Discipline, which resulted in little success in enforcing church law and restoring order to the church. It is noteworthy that Traditionalists have decided to leave the denomination, and to forgo control of General Conference and forego control of the overall financial and property assets of the denomination.

- A. There is a plethora of articles and videos available, many, but not all, are on our Discernment website (FirstShreveport.org – discernment tab)
- B. This would typically be the pederasty reference – older men taking advantage of young boys and there being no direct reference by Jesus to homosexuality. Additionally, they speak of the fact that Jesus never referenced homosexuality in general as a reason why there should be no prohibition against homosexuals being ordained.
- C. There is a focus on passages about love. The passages of scripture regarding homosexuality were only intended for a cultural time and place and have no bearing on our present context.

- A. IF we act prior to the expiration of 2553 (officially December 2023, but effectively June 2023 for the LA annual conference), then we can achieve full ownership of our campus and endowments. Outside of paragraph 2553, our property and endowments are held in trust by the Louisiana annual conference.
- B. We are not voting to divide the church or the assets. 2553 is a vote for the church and its assets to remain with or disaffiliate from the UMC.

- A. These numbers change weekly. We know that 9 disaffiliated at the June 2022 annual conference. Total 50-100 LA churches are in some form discernment. Of these, 30-60 LA churches are disaffiliating at the November 2022 special session.

These are more like snap shots from across the UMC than a complete picture. But it may be helpful since the Texas Churches are so close for reference points.

- a. Texas Annual Conference: 307 of 600 churches in discernment  
143 votes have been taken so far  
140 of 143 have cleared the 2/3 threshold to disaffiliate
- b. 82 disaffiliating churches were just approved by the Central Texas Conference special session. 72 expected to join the GMC.
- c. Woodland Methodist – Houston area – 14,000 members – has disaffiliated.
- d. Frazer UMC – Montgomery, AL – joining the Free Methodist Church
- e. Bethel Church – North GA – 10,000 members – along with 70 other congregations in No. GA
- f. South Georgia Annual Conference approved 62 disaffiliating churches in their recent special session.
- g. June, 2022, 35 AR churches began discernment process including First Methodist in Jonesboro, AR – 1300 members.
- h. 106 churches in FL leaving UMC.
- i. The Great Plains conference approved 55 disaffiliating churches recently.

A. Ordained clergy are following guidance from UMC leadership and allowing the lay members of the congregation to lead in this Discernment process.

B. Clergy are members of the annual conference, not the church. As such, the Louisiana AC leadership has interpreted this standard to discourage clergy from influencing their congregation regarding disaffiliation. Other annual conferences across the denomination have different interpretive standards in this regard.



A. FUMCS Finance committee: As I understand it, Wespath manages the UMC pensions and provides the liability numbers to each Annual Conference. Each Annual Conference determines how this liability is shared with the local churches within the Conference. In the case of our Louisiana Conference, the total liability is discounted by using 50% of asset reserves with the remaining 50% being divided proportionately among the local churches using their particular apportionment decimal which is determined by a formula based on their financial reporting every January. Every Conference is different.