

**Congregational Questions on Way Forward Discussion**  
**May 5, 2019 (Downtown) and May 11, 2019 (Green Wood)**  
***Revised and posted 6/6/19***

**NOTE:** These answers are provided by members of Leadership Council and the Way Forward Strategy Team. This is a lay-led effort as we work to keep members of our faith community informed about the decisions faced by our denomination.

**Bishop**

**Why has the Bishop offered learning sessions south of Lansing only? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Questions about the locations, dates, and reasons for the locations of the listening sessions are best directed to Bishop Bard: [bishop@michiganumc.org](mailto:bishop@michiganumc.org)*

*In a letter dated March 7, 2019, Bishop David Bard invited all to several Post-General Conference listening sessions to be held at:*

- *April 13, Southfield: Hope UMC, 10:30 am to 12:30pm*
- *April 27, Grand Rapids: Trinity UMC, 10:30am to 12:30pm*
- *May 14, East Lansing: University UMC, 7:00-9:00pm; this session will be livestreamed*
- *June 1, at Annual Conference in Acme, MI*

*The format for the sessions was to be a brief statement followed by questions and responses. Sessions were open to all persons.*

<https://michiganumc.org/news-stories/2019/03/27/bishop-announces-listening-sessions/>

**Clergy Impact**

**If we vote to disaffiliate prior to 1/1/2020, are our clergy governed by discipline and the penalties associated with disobedience to discipline? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*It's easiest to answer this question by breaking things down into steps. First: unless and until we actually disaffiliate, we continue to be bound in full by the Book of Discipline as it applies at any given time. Our congregation's vote alone would not accomplish disaffiliation--it would just trigger the process for disaffiliating. We wouldn't actually be able to disaffiliate until the Michigan Annual Conference votes to approve our disaffiliation.*

*So: until we disaffiliate (if we vote to do so), we're bound by the Book of Discipline. The Book of Discipline currently prohibits clergy being "self-avowed practicing homosexuals"; it currently prohibits same-sex weddings; and it currently states that "homosexuality" is contrary to the church's teachings. Violating any*

*of those provisions already have disciplinary consequences. Some of the most important new stuff that comes into effect on January 1, 2010 is: an expanded definition of SAPH and a harsh sanctions regime for conducting same-sex weddings. Neither of those restrictions applies now. After 1/1/20, however, they will begin to apply to unless and until we actually disaffiliate.*

*There's a related question here about the clergy's next steps more generally. What FUMC is ultimately able to offer the clergy will certainly have significant impact on their options. But the clergy will need to make their own independent decisions about their beliefs, faith journeys, futures, financial stability, long-term career opportunities, and many other issues. The timeline for those decisions is yet unknown.*

*In the meantime, we will continue to work together to learn as much as possible about the choices we need to make and how we can make the best choices in order to continue to respond as God calls us to respond.*

**What is the clergy's risk between implementation of the "Traditional Plan" on 1/1/20 and our decision (I'm assuming it's not aligned with the Traditional Plan), which has a deadline of 12/2023? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*They are subject to the full range of disciplinary sanctions as amended by the Traditional Plan. The application and enforcement of those sanctions, though, will depend (among many other things) on the discretionary choices made by the church hierarchy--including, but not limited to the Michigan Annual Conference. Beyond that, we don't yet have concrete answers -- but we are asking our District Superintendent and others about best practices to protect the clergy from any potential vulnerability while the lay-led research and investigation process unfolds.*

*This depends, too, on whether the clergy choose to stay in the United Methodist Church. If they choose to disaffiliate, they will no longer be at risk of sanctions. However, we don't know whether the bishop will allow them to stay at FUMC in that case.*

**What can the congregation do to help support Nancy and Nick through this difficult time? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Pray, share your support with them personally, show up, stay informed, and vote!*

*Check in on them. Help them (and their families!) find ways to de-stress and know that they are supported and loved. This process is not only difficult for FUMC -- their place of employment and church community, it is difficult for them professionally and personally. They are needing to make important decisions about their futures and about their families' futures.*

*Recognize that how FUMC responds reflects on their leadership to the bishop and cabinet. So, it is important to make thoughtful and intentional decisions.*

**What are the implications of an exit for our retired clergy? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Wespath handles pensions and benefits for the United Methodist Church. They have created an FAQ webpage to answer questions that clergy and local churches are asking.*

*“Wespath continues to give thoughtful consideration to the decisions of the Special Session of the General Conference and the impact on pensions, benefits and liabilities funding. As we receive additional questions in the upcoming weeks, we expect to provide additional updates to the FAQs in order to provide accurate and consistent information to the Church.”*

<https://www.wespath.org/wayforwardwespathfaq/>

*From the website FAQ:*

*“Wespath is a service provider and fiduciary to all of its participants, beneficiaries, and plan sponsors. As such, Wespath follows the terms of the retirement plan documents and applicable federal and state law. Wespath is not the “behavior police” or enforcer of Church rules. ... participants’ pension and retirement benefits are secure.”*

**If we indicate an intention to take Gracious Exit, will our clergy be protected from punishments? This is a topic for Michigan Annual Conference assuming they are the "monitor" of clergy. There should be a grace period. (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We don't yet have an answer to that question but are asking our District Superintendent and others about best practices to protect the clergy from any potential vulnerability while the lay-led research and investigation process unfolds.*

*One approach would be to coordinate our exit with other churches intending to exit, thereby creating safety in numbers.*

### **Communication**

**Is there an email address we can direct further questions to? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes!*

*Ted Brokaw, Chair of Leadership Council: [tmbrokaw@comerica.com](mailto:tmbrokaw@comerica.com)*

*Rick Miller, Co-lead, Way Forward Strategy Team: [urmiller@umich.edu](mailto:urmiller@umich.edu)*

*Carrie Throm, Co-Lead, Way Forward Strategy Team: [carriethrom@hotmail.com](mailto:carriethrom@hotmail.com)*

**What are we going to do to let visitors know more visibly that we do not approve of the exclusionary church discipline? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We have added rainbow flags and buntings to both our Downtown and GreenWood properties, and soon we'll be hanging the large banner you see in the chancel on the outside east-facing wall of the Downtown sanctuary. We continue to use the welcoming statement on our bulletins and on our website, and our specific updates are being posted in church e-communications and via podcasts on the website.*

*Members of our church are encouraged to welcome everyone warmly and make sure we boldly live our welcoming statements.*

**Will the Leadership Council continue to have people available to talk with in person after each of the church services? That was helpful earlier in the year? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. We will look at staffing a table in Connections periodically (and informing you of those dates), as well as adding an “Ask me” or other button to LC members when they are in church so you can easily find us.*

**Will there be more announcements about paying the local church directly and not paying in to apportionments? If people don't read email, they might have missed the message. (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. We plan to continue announcements verbally and in the bulletin to this new option. We would welcome church members helping us spread the word to others about this option, too! Any questions can be directed to Marty Javornisky at the church office.*

**Will there be more opportunities for the church community to get together and talk/learn/process together? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. Our update on May 5 had so much information to convey that we missed the opportunity to answer questions in person. We will aim to have additional sessions that are more conversational in nature in the coming weeks and months.*

*We will also organize smaller groups in the fall that can come together for talking/learning/processing.*

**Please consider having another Q&A meet up allow for questions (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Our update on May 5 had so much information to convey that we missed the opportunity to answer questions in person. We will aim to have additional sessions that are more conversational in nature in the coming weeks and months.*

**How can folks get the news of the Michigan Conference. Where will the information be posted? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*The best resource for information will be at <https://michiganumc.org/>. You can also sign up for the e-newsletter MIConnect at that same website, which provides weekly updates from the conference and around the world.*

**When will Leadership survey the entire congregation for opinions and concerns -- an instrument everyone can take part in? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*This is a big priority of ours—to make sure that all members have the chance to be heard. The Way Forward Strategy Team will be looking at these types of solutions for maximum inclusivity.*

**We have to make sure nobody in our church are felt left out including people who strongly support the traditional plan. (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. This is a big priority of ours—to make sure that all members have the chance to be heard. The Way Forward Strategy Team will be looking at these types of solutions for maximum inclusivity.*

**How will you get congregational input? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*This is a big priority of ours—to make sure that all members have the chance to be heard. The Way Forward Strategy Team will be looking at these types of solutions for maximum inclusivity.*

**If you start the next meeting like this at 10:30 we may be able to have more time (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Excellent suggestion. Thank you!*

**Can you please share a copy of this presentation and/or PowerPoint on the website or in Thursday thoughts? I know of people at other UMC congregations who are in the dark on decisions, consequences, options, etc. (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. We will be looking at the most effective ways to communicate this information to our congregation that allows our congregation to be as informed as possible. The Way Forward Strategy Team is looking into the best ways to do that and will be pushing out this information accordingly.*

**Financial & Disaffiliation**

**How well have we assessed impacts (of disaffiliation) on an important income stream for the church and United Methodist organization --- namely, wills? Endowment income? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Our Endowment and trust accounts are in the name of FUMC-A2. Current principal, as well as future earnings income from these investments, belong to our local church. The income from the endowment will not be impacted by disaffiliation.*

*Any member who has included a designation in their will to the larger UMC organization or any of its specific ministries (camping, UMCOR, Haiti Hot Lunch, etc.) would need to decide if they wanted that designation to remain in their will or estate plan.*

**Can we avoid the fees prescribed to disaffiliate? For example, with civil disobedience? In other words, can we disaffiliate without paying them at all or with paying less than the prescribed amounts? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*It seems unlikely that we would be able to avoid the fees to disaffiliate, since ultimately the Michigan Annual Conference has to approve our disaffiliation request.*

*The Gracious Exit allows local churches to retain ownership of the local church properties, only if the payment for apportionments and pension have been met. The Conference cannot release properties from the UMC trust without meeting these conditions. Any local church wishing to disaffiliate must complete all*

*steps of the process prior to Dec. 31, 2023. Any church that has not met the requirements will not be permitted to leave under the terms of the Gracious Exit.*

*FUMC-A2 and other churches are studying this issue to fully understand any options available to reduce the financial burden of local churches wishing to disaffiliate.*

*There may be ways to practice civil disobedience alongside our willingness to pay, however. We're investigating this.*

**Can we devise a civil disobedience version of "the exit" that is less costly? If not for FUMC-A2, for stand in solidarity with smaller churches with resources to leave? (Green Wood Saturday, May 11)**

*It is unlikely that we can negotiate a less costly exit as an individual church. The traditional plan makes it clear that there is no negotiating. However, if a number of churches worked together, that would give us more leverage.*

**Can we get someone looking into healthcare for pastors if we disaffiliated? Do we know how the Western Jurisdiction is planning to do this? Or GR FUMC? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Most definitely we will be looking at the cost to support our pastors financially -- pension and health care -- if we decide to disaffiliate. We currently provide health insurance for our staff and use an insurance broker. The broker could provide cost information for healthcare for our 2 pastors. Pastoral health care is a cost we already pay out of our budget. Depending on the insurance plan offered, costs may increase, remain about the same or decrease.*

*We are not aware of how other churches or jurisdictions are planning to address this need, but we will be sure to include healthcare costs in our budget, regardless of our affiliation.*

**Can we get someone looking into a recommendation for paying pastors' pensions if we disaffiliated? Do we know how the Western Jurisdiction is planning to do this? Or GR FUMC? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We are exploring the retirement savings options for current and future pastors. These might include a 401(k)-style defined contribution plan, continued participation in one of the Methodist retirement programs, or joining the pension system of a different or new denomination.*

*The pension obligation for all pastors who served our church prior to disaffiliation will be fully satisfied when we pay the allocated pensions costs of the Annual Conference. The amount of this payment is unknown at this time.*

*We are not aware of how other churches or jurisdictions are planning to address this need, but we will be sure to include retirement savings in our budget, regardless of affiliation.*

**Why is there not option or negotiation to forgo some of the exit "costs" by committing to continue apportionments for missions? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We don't know for sure, but we presume that it would be too challenging and contentious to allow customized negotiations on reducing the exit costs.*

*The only exit option approved by the General Conference and upheld by the Judicial Council is the "Gracious Exit" plan as presented. Amendments and alternative proposals may be presented for consideration at the next General Conference, which takes place in May 2020. Our research and planning will assume the worst-case scenario of paying the entire fee, and if we vote to disaffiliate and we feel we have a strong negotiation case to make, we will.*

**Endowments: Do these belong to our church or the national organization? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*The endowment is in the name of FUMC-A2. The endowment will not be impacted by disaffiliation.*

**What changes would there be to the church building, if we disaffiliate? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*It would be allowed to marry other church buildings.*

*Beyond that, we will be exploring further specifics with the Annual Conference leadership in our research phase. Some obvious changes to the building would include signage and logos.*

*As part of the strategic planning process that started earlier this year, a group of members is considering how we might best utilize the vital resource of church owned properties. Options for potential building changes will focus on the needs of our congregation, regardless of our affiliation with the larger UMC.*

*We must also consider the fact that FUMC-A2 shares our facility with the Wesley Foundation. As both organizations consider the way forward, we will remain in close dialogue with the Foundation and may have to address complex questions of our integrated buildings.*

**Can we find out more information about the details of the apportionment pay-off to disaffiliate and have a way to directly contribute to raise that money? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. We will be compiling a list of very specific questions for conference leadership so that we can fully assess the ramifications of disaffiliation before any vote is taken. And yes, a fundraising effort is a logical option. We are considering how we will pay the apportionments and pension obligations, if the membership of the church votes to disaffiliate. We have a number of options available, including designated giving. As we get more information about the actual cost of disaffiliation, we will share that information with the congregation and seek input on how best to meet the financial obligations.*

**Is it possible to make an "ungracious" exit? What would the consequences of leaving without complying with the "mandatory" gracious exit plan? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Exiting the UMC outside of the approved Gracious Exit process would result in the loss of the church properties, which are held in trust by the UMC. We expect the "cost" of exiting would be small, relative to the value of our properties.*

*While we don't know all of the answers, at least three things seem clear:*

1. *We could lose our church building. All church properties are held in trust by the Methodist Church as a denomination. For more on this point, see Paragraph 2501 of the Book of Discipline, which provides: "All properties of United Methodist local churches and other United Methodist agencies and institutions are held, in trust, for the benefit of the entire denomination, and ownership and usage of church property is subject to the Discipline....The trust is and always has been irrevocable, except as provided in the Discipline."*
2. *Our pastors could face punishment that could potentially have significant personal, professional, and financial consequences for them personally.*
3. *Our congregation could face legal exposure for the Annual Conference to claim the funds owed. The plan was upheld by the UMC Judicial Council, so it would seem hard to dodge as a matter of church law. Unless there is some reason to think that the courts wouldn't enforce the consequence of the internal church legislative process--and courts are generally extremely reluctant to enter into an analysis of which side of an internal church dispute is right--this would put us on weak ground.*

**What will it cost to buy out of national FUMC's real estate? Green Wood and Downtown? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We will be asking this specific question to the conference leadership in our research phase.*

- *FUMC-A2 has 4 properties: Downtown, Green Wood and 2 parsonages. The downtown church building is physically integrated with the Wesley Foundation, yet the ownership is split between the two organizations.*
- *The "cost to buy out" is the cost associated with the Gracious Exit. So far, we know this to be 2 years of Apportionment payments (roughly \$350,000), plus the allocated share of unfunded pension liabilities for the Conference. This number is not yet known.*
- *The Gracious Exit allows our congregation to retain ownership of the properties after meeting the financial conditions of the exit plan. We believe the value of our properties exceeds the costs associated with the Gracious Exit.*

**What do we lose from disaffiliation? Access to missions? Camps? Congregational Resources, etc? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*As things stand at the moment, we would no longer have any connection to any United Methodist ministries. That would include all of the General Church and Conference mission programs, UMCOR, camping ministries, clergy and congregational support, stewardship resources, worship resources, etc.*

*However, everything is in flux. It is possible that some ministries will also disaffiliate. If a new Methodist denomination is formed, we could be in the same denomination with them. It is also possible that a new organizational structure will be passed at General Conference 2020 which allows churches that disaffiliate to stay connected with these General Church programs and resources.*



**Also we may want to consider the extra year of apportionments as the price of assuming ownership of our buildings (exit fee, sounds less like ransom). (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. If disaffiliation is approved by our congregation, the exit fee would be a short-term cost for a potential long-term good solution.*

*Viewed in this light, the cost of disaffiliation is very affordable. We continue to ask questions about the unfunded pension liability that will be assigned to our church. This is also part of the exit costs that needs to be considered. There is also the possibility that the Michigan Conference will add additional exit fees.*

### **FUMC and Wesley**

**How can any decision affect the relationship between A2FUMC and Wesley Foundation. We have joint property. (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Given A2FUMC and Wesley are currently physically indivisible, in terms of joint property ownership, A2FUMC will need to be in conversation with Wesley as affiliation decisions are discussed. The current relationship between A2FUMC and Wesley is fortunately very strong.*

**Will Wesley Foundation lose any apportionments? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*If apportionments paid to the conference decrease, all ministries supported by funding from the conference will over time also decrease. Wesley currently receives 28.5% of their operating budget from the Michigan Conference, 6.3% from the Heritage District, and 9.4% from local church's, putting a little over 44% of Wesley's operating budget at risk.*

**How is the Wesley Foundation affected by all of this? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Wesley just like A2 FUMC will be conducting discernment conversations during the months ahead.*

### **The Church's Future**

**What would it mean for FUMC to "disaffiliate"? Baptism, etc, without the Methodist Church sanction? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*As long as we have ordained clergy, the sacraments can be performed by them regardless of denominational affiliation.*

**What do we lose from disaffiliation? Access to missions? Camps? Congregational Resources, etc? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*See above*

**Will this church remain methodist regardless of what affiliation we choose? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Any decision about the church's future affiliation will be a decision of the members by a vote. We do share a common passion and connection for the Wesleyan faith and quite likely it would be a foundation of our future. But that is for the entire congregation to decide together. That's why we encourage all of you to stay informed and keep asking great questions!*

**Under the "traditional" plan, can a homosexual's baby/child be baptised in the UMC? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Children of a same-sex couple can be baptized in the UMC now and that will not change with the Traditional Plan.*

**Language/Culture**

**Why do we not refer to the recent decision as the "Restrictive Traditional Plan"? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We suspect people are just referring to the name of the legislation used at General Conference, notwithstanding the irony.*

**Missions/Global impact**

**Big Picture Question/Statement: As UMC, we've ministered to the world including places which differ culturally/morally. We now are feeling the effect. Do you foresee changes? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*The United Methodist Church has had a long-standing commitment to global missions as part of our Wesleyan heritage. It's likely that mission work will continue to be important but how it is organized will change as churches disaffiliate.*

**Many Methodists value the global missions reach of our church. How will this be maintained if we disaffiliate? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We already have global mission programs such as Kenya that are exclusive to our congregation. We are likely to develop other programs like that or to work in collaboration with other congregations that have disaffiliated. If we join a new Methodist denomination, that denomination will almost certainly have mission programs we can be involved in, as well.*

**Other Churches/Michigan Conference**

**Is there a group of churches already discussing forming a new church or organization? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. A group of progressive-minded churches, both within Michigan and throughout the U.S., are finding connection and discussing what the future holds. FUMC-A2 is a part of these ongoing conversations.*

**Do you have a ballpark estimate of the % of Michigan congregations that identify as progressive?**

**(Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*The results of the straw poll taken at Annual Conference were: 69% of delegates (clergy and laity) in favor of a more inclusive church, and 31% favoring the more traditional plan.*

**Is there any sense of what percentage of churches are considering exiting? In Michigan? In the USA?**

**Globally? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*There is a variety of ways of answering this. There are already whole conferences and one whole jurisdiction (the western jurisdiction) that have said they will not follow the Traditional Plan. However, they have not yet announced the intention to disaffiliate. Rather, they will practice civil disobedience until a new denomination is formed or an alternative structure for the UMC is in place that allows for same-sex weddings and LGBTQ+ clergy. Other Annual conferences are considering straw polls at their upcoming meetings, including Michigan, where 69% supported more inclusiveness.*

**What are the chances that the entire Michigan conference would reject the traditional plan?**

**(Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*You can read about the Annual Conference's votes on toward greater inclusion [here](#). The relevant legislation all had votes around the 70% range to support inclusiveness.*

**Who are our representatives at Michigan Conference? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Nancy Lynn, Nick Berlanga, Jean Bush-Bacelis, Wendy Everett, Em Howard, Rick Miller, Keith Radak, Shonagh Taruza, Carrie Throm, and Josh Warn*

**Is anything happening amongst the FUMC churches as a group, who do not align with the traditional plan? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. A group of progressive-minded churches are finding connection and discussing what the future holds. FUMC-A2 is a part of these ongoing conversations.*

**Will FUMC have representatives at Adam Hamilton's gathering? If not, who is representing Michigan?**

**(Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*FUMC-A2 does not have any representatives, but our Bishop David Bard attended. Other Michigan representatives going are Bridget Cabrera, Melanie Carey, Elbert Dulworth, Paul Perez, Alex Plum, Tom Russell, Kevin Smalls, Nichea VerVer Guy, Megan Walther, Laura Witkowski*

**What is our guess about the likelihood of the simple majority vote needed to approve "Gracious Exit" by Michigan Annual Conference? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We anticipate it would be approved.*

**What is the likelihood that the Michigan UMC Annual Conference would not approve our exit, if 2/3 of our congregation voted to disaffiliate? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We anticipate this to be an unlikely scenario. While the Traditional Plan's Gracious Exit provision allows some flex in the exit negotiations between individual churches and their annual conferences, its core provisions--both the obligations of the local church and the rights of the local church--are expressed as mandatory.*

**Could you speak to the possibility of UMC USA becoming a Central Conference (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*A petition supporting this idea was approved at Michigan Annual Conference, which means it will be brought before General Conference 2020 for consideration. The Council of Bishops is also working with the Connectional Table to send legislation to General Conference 2020 which would create a US Central Conference.*

**There was a potential option for an American/ North American Conference which would allow more flexibility based on US norms and culture. Has any more be heard about this potential? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*A petition supporting this idea was approved at Michigan Annual Conference, which means it will be brought before General Conference 2020 for consideration.*

### **Process/Voting**

**How do we plan to make the decision? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We will hold a charge conference, inviting all members to participate.*

**Is the 2/3 vote of full membership? Or 2/3 of those present at a conference? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*The Gracious Exit plan states  $\frac{2}{3}$  of those present at a charge conference.*

**Do we have an idea of where the membership of the church fall? How much work do we need to be doing to convince people if the majority of already are on-board to do something? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We haven't yet taken an accurate straw poll of our membership but may consider doing so before any formal vote is taken. We encourage all members to stay informed on the issues.*

**A 2/3 majority of what? Those who show up or all those who are listed as members? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*The Gracious Exit plan states  $\frac{2}{3}$  of those present at a charge conference.*

**How will we validate that those voting are actual members of the church? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We can verify membership when people check in at the meeting*

**How will all of these decisions be made along the way? Formal vote? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Yes. We will hold a charge conference for all church members for a formal vote. Leading up to the vote, the Leadership Council and the Way Forward Strategy Team will compile thorough research on all the ramifications.*

## **Timeline**

**Are we going to try to vote before this June's Annual Conference? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*That would be an aggressive timeline, as we need to be sure we have all the information to make a reasoned plan for the future so that people can vote confidently.*

**So everything goes into effect January 2020. Yet, we could possibly be in a situation of wanting to exit by 2023, but not fully ready to wrap-up that process by January 2020. Does that mean we could be in a situation of our pastors being "punished" for pro-LGBTQ+ behavior between January 1 and our actual exit date? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*That could likely be the scenario, so we are asking those questions so we understand fully the ramifications of any actions we take and the timing thereof.*

**Do we vote on disaffiliation before 12/31/2019 or before 12/31/2023? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We can vote on disaffiliation at any time, so long as that vote leaves enough time for the process of approval by the Michigan Annual Conference before 12/31/2023. The date on which the Traditional Plan's new substantive restrictions come into effect (1/1/2020) is irrelevant to our right to vote to disaffiliate. But until we disaffiliate, we are bound by the Book of Discipline (which means that after 1/1/20 we'll be bound by the amended version).*

**Is there a date by which FUMC has to make decisions about how to proceed? Is it FUMC or the diocese that will decide? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Our congregation will make its own decision about whether to disaffiliate. We must complete disaffiliation--including securing approval by the Michigan Annual Conference--by 12/31/2023.*

**Since the new rules are being enforced as of January 2020, do we need to make our decision by then (rather than wait until 2023) to avoid sanctions? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*That could likely be the scenario, so we are asking those questions so we understand fully the ramifications of any actions we take and the timing thereof.*

**Leaving before the 2023, say in 2020, does that mean paying less to the required amount to unaffiliate? In other words - is leaving early saving of funds? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*Our current understanding is that the exit fee is a flat fee applicable whenever the congregation disaffiliates. The obligation to “catch up” and make good on our unpaid annual apportionments, however, is capped at 12 months worth of apportionments. So it appears that there is no financial benefit to leaving early.*

**Is there any potential difficulty getting the Michigan Conference’s approval, if we wait until closer to the 2023 deadline? That is, if we wait too long could it be possible that progressive churches would be gone from the conference and the remaining churches wouldn’t support us leaving? (Is there benefit in leaving earlier rather than waiting?) (Green Wood, Saturday, May 11)**

*That is a possible scenario; however, there really are too many unknowns to even speculate right now. Timing on disaffiliation will be critical, as well as knowing what the pulse of the conference is. We should learn more about what other churches across Michigan are thinking in the coming months. We should also have a better idea of whether there will be support in the Conference for churches leaving.*

### **Why Wait?/Why Stay?**

**Is not "Stay and Fight" a lost option, since some progressive congregations have already left? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*No churches have yet disaffiliated under Gracious Exit--this will require approval by their respective annual conferences. The larger question is whether staying until 2023 allows us to take the long view and hope to impact the future UMC. But yes, it becomes more difficult if fewer voices remain.*

**The Traditional Plan people doubled-down. They made their stance very clear. Thus, no more dialogue and prayers --> EXIT NOW!! Embracing and celebrating our LGBTQ+ pastors and congregants deserve immediate action. We would never wait for domestic violence to end or for child abuse to end. So WHY are we WAITING?!?!?! (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We feel we need to gather sufficient information about what “leaving” would look like, and cost, and how would we protect our clergy, before jumping into a new paradigm. We do recognize the urgency, though. We know people are angry and frustrated, and we know we need to make such a significant decision with clear heads.*

*There is information about exiting that we don’t have yet. If we exit too soon, we could lose our property and buildings. So, even though many of us are anxious to exit, we have a lot to gain by waiting.*

**If FUMC North America Representation was not aligned with the "Traditional Plan", why should we stay globally organized? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*That would be one argument against remaining affiliated with the larger church. The question is what kinds of disagreements within a denomination are so profound that they require separation. It is plausible that this disagreement might be in that category.*

*It is likely that within the coming year, a new organizational plan will be developed so that the UMC is no longer globally organized and can give greater autonomy to churches, conferences, and jurisdictions. However, that hasn't happened yet. So, one question is whether our church is willing to wait.*

**Can we just exit now in 2019 and reconnect with the new Methodist denomination on the other side or does that have to be figured out first? It seems unlikely all that will be hammered out by June, but I also don't get the sense our congregation is willing to wait until June 2020? (Downtown Sunday May 5)**

*We feel we need to gather sufficient information about what "leaving" would look like, and cost, and how would we protect our clergy, before jumping into a new paradigm. It is unlikely that we will have all of the information about the pension portion of the Gracious Exit before the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference. Best estimates would be the Annual Conference in 2020. We do recognize the urgency, though; and don't want anyone to feel we aren't taking everything seriously.*

**What is the history of the United Methodist Church's perspective on the LGBTQ+ inclusion?**

*A good overview is available at [http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_umc6.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_umc6.htm).*

*Here is a summary:*

*It was first in 1972, that the UMC General Conference passed a motion which added the following statement to the denomination's "Social Principles" document. This followed a four year study into homosexuality:*

*"Homosexuals no less than heterosexuals are person of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Further we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured, although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."*

*The final phrase "although...teaching" was added to the statement after a floor debate. This motion has since been reaffirmed in subsequent conferences. In 1992, it was passed again with a vote of 75% in favor.*

*1976: They adopted reports which terminated all funding of gay/lesbian support groups with church money.*

*1980: A motion was proposed to add the following phrase to Paragraph 404 of the Book:*

*"no self-avowed practicing homosexual therefore shall be ordained or appointed in The United Methodist Church" It failed to pass.*

*It was only in May 1984 that the United Methodist Church became more restrictive:*

*They passed a "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness" statement (Paragraph 402.2) which stated: "Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church."*

*History of Reconciling Ministries: <https://rmnetwork.org/who-we-are/history/>*

*In the early morning after the May 1984 General Conference, following the vote on the ordination ban, about a dozen Affirmation members gathered outside the Civic Center in Baltimore and pass out brochures to General Conference delegates and visitors inviting their congregations to become Reconciling Congregations (RCs), in essence to dissent from the unwelcoming policies approved by the UMC. Within one month, two congregations vote to become RCs—symbolically located on both ends of the continent—Washington Square UMC in New York City and Wesley UMC in Fresno, California.*

*By the end of 1984, there were 9 reconciling churches..*

*More information about Reconciling Congregations is available at: <https://rmnetwork.org/>*

*There are currently 40,387 individuals identified as Reconciling United Methodists and 1,013 official Reconciling Churches and Communities.*

*“Dozens of statements, open letters, and bold refutations of GC2019’s shameful decisions have emerged from the people, communities, and churches of the Reconciling movement across the connection. Since GC2019, this people who call themselves Reconciling have borne witness for justice in media outlets, performed same-gender weddings, organized gatherings, and continued in faithful ministry as called by their Creator.”*

**Is FUMC an official Reconciling Church? What would it take to become one?**

FUMC is a reconciling church. In fact, we are the first church listed for the state of Michigan on the Reconciling Ministries Network website.