



Questions and Answers

from The Gathering on September 13, 2022
Memorial Drive United Methodist Church

Is the Methodist Book of Discipline expected to change at the next General Conference?

The General Conference meets every four years and receives recommendations in the form of resolutions to make changes to The United Methodist Book of Discipline. At every General Conference, something has changed. So, the answer is yes. But, if you are asking in the question above if the General Conference in 2024 will change The Book of Discipline's stance on issues of human sexuality, i.e. that marriage is between a man and a woman or that self-avowed, practicing homosexuals cannot be ordained, that seems unlikely to occur in 2024 and/or the future.

I found the entire Gathering as a rah-rah session for what we are doing now and what we can join - men's groups, meditative prayer, new classes.

There are many exciting ways to follow Jesus at MDUMC.

How many members have actually left the church? Our conference?

As was mentioned, we have almost reached four hundred new souls participating at MDUMC during 2022. The metrics of attendance and giving are strong. To-date, 77 have either transferred, withdrawn, or otherwise left membership in 2022. But, most who withdraw do not let us know why. So, we do not have reliable stats on departures due to this issue. The Conference knows the number of churches that have and/or are voting to leave. But, as each church choosing to leave has people who will choose to remain and some who vote to stay have people who will leave, the numbers are uncertain. Roughly a third of the churches of the Texas Conference will likely leave but the population of those is closer to a quarter.

Will all the bishops of the world help dictate the direction of the Book of Discipline?

United Methodist Bishops preside at General Conference, but the delegates have voice and vote. Bishops do not set the direction of The Book of Discipline.

How many churches in the Houston area have left our conference?

At the time of the report, there were 189 churches of the Texas Conference in the official discernment process. At that time 55 had voted to leave. These numbers were shared in the video.

What are the financial ramifications if MDUMC left today? In 2023? In 2024?

The current process requires MDUMC to pay the pension liability of all clergy and to pay the next years apportionments. These rules are set by the Board of Trustees of the Annual Conference. This process remains consistent in 2023. And, is expected to remain consistent from 2024 and beyond.

Why does our church council and pastors think other churches have left the UMC?

The church council speaks for itself apart from the clergy. The clergy feel that fear and a false sense of urgency are driving some churches to depart the UMC.

I've heard that an Atlanta church could not leave the conference because of financial reasons. What happened there?

Many churches have individual stories and we're not familiar with this specific reference. But, there is a financial cost for any United Methodist Church that seeks to leave the denomination. We are a connectional system. In the event of their closure, all of our churches and their property and assets revert to the Conference. And, our clergy are ordained and supervised by the Conference. There are financial costs that have been incurred by the Conference for the church that must be re-paid for a church to expect to leave and take the property and assets that belong to the Conference with it.

Tonight is the first time I had heard of WhyUMC other than the sermons that told me nothing.

The website and www.mdumc.org/whyumc were presented on Sunday mornings and in sermons. However, a thorough discussion of these topics belongs in the format of the Gathering instead of Sunday mornings. It is a distraction from our main purpose and mission of Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.

I feel there was a lot of finger-pointing to the brothers and sisters in Christ who have left the UMC - is their call from God that different from ours? Do they not focus on making disciples?

Our hope is that all expressions of the Wesleyan movement will live into their mission fully of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Asserting with clarity the direction that we are heading and providing the justification to why is not "finger-pointing."

A lot has been said about new programs, classes, activities, etc. happening and being planned for The Journey - that's wonderful. Very little was said or seems to be happening for the Classic side of the campus - why?

Several of the classes mentioned are on the Main Campus. The idea that these classes were only on the West Campus is incorrect.

Are UMC preachers leaving the UMC churches? If so, how many? Is it anticipated that the UMC will lose preachers?

These numbers are not currently known.

Will MDUMC marry same sex people?

No. We uphold The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church.

At the 2024 general conference, I understand that there will be a vote to change the Book of Discipline. Depending on that vote, would MDUMC then vote to make a change?

Resolutions to change verbiage in The Book of Discipline on the topic of human sexuality have been submitted every General Conference since 1972. Should a change occur in '24 or any time in the future, we will review all of the options before MDUMC.

Would the clergy staff be open to hosting a conservative conversation about the denominational strife? It seems to be only progressive viewpoints being shared by our staff. Host a debate.

A divisive debate does not further the cause of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I find it odd that statistical information is never on the screen for very long. What I heard Brad saying is that we are staying because there is no reason to leave. I did not intend to leave but to fully understand the process. You did not address that topic. You posted information on your www.mdumc.org/whyumc website from many other sources, but very little from our church specifically. And just because the church council - the revolving door of the same people - agrees to ignore/avoid discussion of what exactly happens - for example, what happens to clergy who disagree with the conference decision in 2024?

There is no process for United Methodist Churches to stay United Methodist. If you are desiring information about the process churches are undertaking to leave the UMC, that is available at: TXCUMC.org/navigatingthewaters. The responsibilities and choices clergy have are available in The Book of Discipline which can be accessed at <https://www.umc.org/en/content/is-the-book-of-discipline-available-online>.

What if it is too late in the 11th hour to discern leaving?

There is not a time in which it would be too late for MDUMC to choose a different path.

What are the financial ramifications if we discern now?

The current process requires MDUMC to pay the pension liability of all clergy and to pay the next years apportionments. These rules are set by the Board of Trustees of the Annual Conference. This process remains consistent in 2023. And, is expected to remain consistent from 2024 and beyond.

When/if the Book of Discipline changes in 2024 - to include same sex marriage and transgender clergy - will our church council then vote to leave the UMC?

Should the UMC change its stance, the church council could review its position. We would not presume to speculate how they would vote. Any decisions regarding MDUMC departing the UMC, would require a Church Conference.