

Future of St. Luke's



Why would St. Luke's want to disaffiliate?

The Executive Lay Leadership Team, comprised of chairs and vice chairs of St. Luke's governance committees (Administrative Board, Board of Trustees, Finance Committee, Staff Parish Relations Committee, Management Council), unanimously recommend disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church denomination as the best path forward for St. Luke's.

After the past several years of study, prayer, and discernment, the Executive Lay Leadership Team and the clergy of St. Luke's all feel that God is calling the church to pursue disaffiliation because of the harsh language in the Book of Discipline in regard to issues of human sexuality. While the members of St. Luke's have differing beliefs on the matter, we are unified in our belief of God's grace, love, and mercy for all people. Our primary goal as a church and as followers of Christ, is to bring people closer to Him. Any language that ostracizes or condemns is not of God, is not Methodist, and does not reflect the values of St. Luke's.

"St. Luke's will always be Methodist."

Dr. Bob Long

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St. Luke's is Methodist

St. Luke's began on Sunday, April 28, 1889 when all the Methodists of the newly formed Oklahoma City met for worship. They met not as a single denomination, but as Methodist people following Christ. From that first Sunday, the people of St. Luke's have always been Christian first, then Methodist in their theology and practice, and then connected to the structure of the Methodist denomination (Methodist Episcopal South, The Methodist Church, and then The United Methodist Church.)

St. Luke's has always been and will continue to be Methodist. We recognize John Wesley as the founder of the Methodist movement and embrace a rich heritage that traces its roots back through the denominations of our past.

Synopsis of Oklahoma Annual Conference of the UMC Disaffiliation Agreement

1. The Administrative Board receives a request from church leadership to consider entering into an official discernment period.
 - The Executive Lay Leadership Team of St. Luke's met on December 7, 2022 and unanimously recommended that the Administrative Board vote to enter the official discernment process
 - The Administrative Board voted 60-0 on January 9, 2023 to enter the discernment phase of disaffiliation.
2. The District Superintendent calls a church conference for the purpose of a presentation from Oklahoma Annual Conference leadership on the UMC denomination.
 - After rescheduling per the request of Bishop Jimmy Nunn, the informational meeting was held February 13, 2023. St. Luke's clergy and leadership were not able to speak at the meeting, but church members were able to write questions for submission to the Annual Conference leaders.
3. The Administrative Board takes a vote to determine whether or not to continue in the disaffiliation process.
 - St. Luke's rescheduled the Administrative Board vote to February 20, 2023.
4. The local church has a vote on whether or not to disaffiliate according to the provisions of ¶2553.

By the provisions of the Oklahoma Annual Conference:

 - Church members must present proof of their identity and be present to vote;
 - Online voting is prohibited for church members;
 - The quorum is established by the number of ballots distributed to members;
 - To disaffiliate the church must have a 66.7% "yes" vote of all ballots distributed;
 - Ballots that are marked "no", "abstain", or not turned back in - will all be counted as a "no" vote;
 - Ballots are confidential and at the end of the evening are taken by the Annual Conference.
5. The church fulfill all the financial obligations set forth by the Oklahoma Annual Conference (any unpaid apportionments for 2022, 2023 apportionments x2; the church's portion of the retired clergy health liability, and the church's portion of the unfunded pension liability) and the required paperwork.
6. Before the disaffiliation is final, the Oklahoma Annual Conference must vote to ratify the disaffiliation. The approval vote is by simple majority.

"The Oklahoma Conference seeks to be fair, cautious, contextual, and Christ-like as we develop processes for congregations who disaffiliate and clergy who withdraw from the denomination."

Bishop Jimmy Nunn, OKUMC Bishop

Top Things to Know About Disaffiliation

1. ¶2553 of the UMC Book of Discipline allows a church to disaffiliate from the UMC denomination for reasons of conscience regarding the UMC denomination's handling of issues of human sexuality. Only the language of ¶2553 is used for voting purposes.
2. The Oklahoma Annual Conference of the UMC established the process for Oklahoma UM churches to disaffiliate and St. Luke's has been following that process.
3. ¶2553 sets aside the Trust Clause, which states that all local church properties and assets actually belong to the denomination rather than the local church. ¶2553 will expire 12/31/2023 and it is not known if another disaffiliation agreement will be created at the General Conference in 2024.
4. For the past few years, St. Luke's, like most other churches considering disaffiliation, has been: continuing to try to bring change within the UMC denominational structure, teaching on Biblical views regarding human sexuality and the UMC struggle with those issues; teaching on the UMC denomination in regards to its struggle and division over matters of human sexuality; and teaching on the historical and present status of the UMC denomination.

An Honest Description of Our Current Reality

"We foresee a day coming soon when a local church will sacrifice its own health if we continue to apportion dollars as we do now."

"The sustained health of the connection is dependent on the sustained health of the local churches so we need to ensure that our churches have resources for making disciples."

"We need to shift from a system based on what the local church can bear to a system that empowers the local churches to make disciples."

Quotes from United Methodist Church
General Conference Finance and Administration

The Denominational Structure

The local church is where people are brought into a relationship with Christ and experience transformation. The UMC organizational structure was intended to support the local church. It was developed to help local churches take part in missions and be a part of things larger than what they could do alone. But with the internet and globalization, the world is smaller than ever before. Churches are able to develop missional contacts directly; there is no longer a need to go through a middle man which adds time, expense, and frustration to the process. As it stands, a church is given a greater amount if they grow, then must carry the additional load from churches that have declined. In essence, successful churches are hit twice.

A decline in membership and attendance naturally had an affect on the Annual Conference budget. Most concerning was a decrease to life-changing missional groups and agencies:

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change Since 2021	Change Since 2014
Camps and Conferences Programming	\$258,000	\$250,000	\$245,000	\$240,000	\$110,000	\$103,000	\$103,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	0%	-61.20%
Campus Ministry	\$975,000	\$748,500	\$663,500	\$578,500	\$496,000	\$481,120	\$481,120	\$481,120	\$481,120	\$481,120	0%	-50.70%
Circle of Care	\$700,000	\$654,500	\$607,685	\$560,000	\$510,000	\$484,500	\$484,500	\$484,500	\$400,000	\$400,000	-17.40%	-42.90%
Cookson Hills	\$70,000	\$65,450	\$59,869	\$55,000	\$50,000	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	0%	-32.10%
Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries	\$377,000	\$352,495	\$326,820	\$300,000	\$270,000	\$256,500	\$256,500	\$256,500	\$256,500	\$256,500	0%	-32.00%
Neighborhood Services Organization	\$22,000	\$20,570	\$18,130	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$9,500	\$9,500	\$9,500	\$9,500	\$10,750	13.20%	-51.10%
Oklahoma City University	\$975,000	\$877,500	\$782,500	\$687,500	\$589,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	0%	-48.70%
OIMC	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$114,000	\$114,000	\$114,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	5.30%	0%
Project Transformation	\$7,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$4,750	\$4,750	\$4,750	\$4,750	\$5,000	5.30%	-28.60%
Restore Hope/Skyline Urban Ministry	\$195,700	\$182,980	\$168,172	\$150,000	\$140,000	\$133,000	\$133,000	\$133,000	\$150,000	\$150,000	12.80%	-23.40%
Total	\$3,699,700	\$3,276,995	\$2,996,676	\$2,706,000	\$2,300,000	\$2,133,870	\$2,133,870	\$2,130,870	\$2,069,370	\$2,070,870	-2.8	-44.00%

Jurisdictional Conference Budget Amounts for Lydia Patterson Institute

In 2008 the budget for Lydia Patterson Institute was \$80,472

In 2009, that was decreased to \$78,892

In 2012, the amount was decreased to \$63,473

In 2017, the amount was increased by 1.2% to \$64,226

The current amount is 20.2% less than the amount that was budgeted in 2008

The Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church (OKUMC) guidelines for disaffiliating churches require that information be given out regarding the state of the UMC denomination as well as that of the local church.

In the early days of Methodism, the movement grew and quickly spread across the United States. The denomination continued to grow into the twentieth century. Things began to change in the late 1950s and into the 1960s. In 1968, The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren were both denominations that were experiencing a loss in members and worship attendance when they merged to form The United Methodist Church. Initially, the decline was minimal, but it would continue to increase.

Dr. Don House, a professional economist and former chair of the General Conference Council of Finance and Administration Economic Advisory Committee, with a long history of providing analysis to the United Methodist denomination, did an extensive study and said the following about the UMC in the United States:

“Between 1974 and 2002, we lost an average of 4,720 in worship attendance per year,” said Dr. Don House, a professional economist and former chair of GCFA’s Economic Advisory Committee. “But a major shift occurred in 2002. The rate skyrocketed to an annual rate of 52,383 between 2002 and 2012, and now we’ve seen losses of 62,571 (2012-2013), 75,671 (2013-2014), and 82,313 between 2014 and 2015. This is not sustainable. Today could be legitimately be called a time of crisis.”

The UMC denomination in the US decreased by 24% in average worship attendance from 2009-2019.

The Oklahoma Annual Conference has worked hard to try to create new church growth and revitalize local churches. Yet despite the work of numerous devoted people, the OKUMC budgeted nearly \$7,000,000 from 2009-2019 for new church starts and church revitalization and saw the following statistics:

9.5% fewer churches

12.2% fewer church members

21.5% fewer people attending church

43.7% fewer people being baptized

Volunteers in Ministry

One of the shining stars of the OKUMC has been Volunteers in Mission. The strength and impact of OKVIM was known throughout the denomination. The leadership of Rev. Larry Acton and Rev. Tish Malloy helped churches who took part in VIM trips to develop missional mindsets in their ministry as well as make a difference in the world. It was exciting to visit the VIM website and see the numerous trips to places all around the state, country, and world hosted by churches of the OK annual conference.

In 2003, the OK VIM office processed 220 teams made up of 4,200 members serving areas throughout Oklahoma and the world.

This past year OK VIM sent 57 teams made up of 927 members to perform missions.

Retreat and Camp Ministry

One of the formative elements in the lives of many individuals has been the UM camp ministry. This past year saw the three UM camps, Egan, Cross Point, and Canyon Camp host 13,000 campers. That is 38% less than in 2009 where the three camps hosted more than 21,000 campers, but the decline in membership and the effects of the pandemic are still being felt.

Campus Ministry

Campus ministries is an important focus of the OKUMC. The number has decreased from 18 campus ministries in 2009 to the current level of 13. But these campus ministries are reaching students at formative seasons of their lives and helping to connect them to God.

St. Luke's has worked to bring change to the UMC denomination.

The current six clergy of St. Luke's (Dr. Bob Long, Rev. Wendy Lambert, Rev. Josh Attaway, Rev. Keith King, Rev. Dave Poteet, and Rev. Linda Harker) have served a combined total of more than 187 years on the following District, Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conference committees:

District Conference

- Board of Ministry
- Church Location and Building

Jurisdiction Conference

- Episcopal Committee
- Mission Council
- Jurisdictional Delegate

Annual Conference

- Council of Finance and Administration
- Equitable Compensation Committee
- Worship Committee
- Episcopal Committee
- Board of Pension and Benefits
- Oklahoma UMC Foundation Board of Trustees
- Emergency Management Committee
- Oklahoma City University Board of Trustees
- Russia Initiative
- Board of Ordained Ministry

General Conference

- Wespath (Formerly United Methodist Board of Pensions and Benefits)
- General Conference Delegate

The clergy have also served more than 40 times at the following UMC Conference Camps:

- Sonshine Camp
- Elementary Camp
- District Camp
- New Day Camp

In addition the clergy have served on medical mission trips, disaster relief missions, VBS mission trips, and trips to help UMC churches with construction and repair.

More importantly, the staff and laity of St. Luke's have served and given exponentially more hours to all of the UMC areas above and many more.

Helpful Terminology

Annual Conference

A regional, organizational unit of The United Methodist Church and the yearly business meeting of that unit, both presided over by a bishop. The business session is composed of equal numbers of clergy and laity. At least one layperson from each pastoral charge is a member.

Appointment

The annual assignment to a field of service of ministerial members active in an annual conference. The appointment may be to a pastoral charge or to special appointments beyond the local church.

Apportionment

The share each annual conference or local church pays to support international, national and regional (annual conference) mission.

Bishop

An elder (ordained minister) who is elected to the office of bishop. A United Methodist bishop is consecrated for the office of bishop by other United Methodist bishops. A bishop serves as a general superintendent of the denomination. It is a responsibility of the bishops to see that the rules, regulations, and responsibilities developed by the General Conference are understood and effectively carried out.

Central Conference

One of seven geographic areas outside the territorial United States, each composed of annual conferences as determined by the General Conference. Central Conferences have responsibilities similar to those of Jurisdictional Conferences. The seven central conferences are in Europe, Africa and the Philippines.

Charge Conference

The charge conference is the basic governing body of each United Methodist local church and is composed of all members of the church council. All members of the charge conference

must be members of the local church. The charge conference must meet at least once per year. The charge conference directs the work of the church and gives general oversight to the church council, reviews and evaluates the mission and ministry of the church, sets salaries for the pastor and staff, elects the members of the church council, and recommends candidates for ordained ministry.

Church Conference

The convening of the Charge Conference as a meeting in which all members of a local United Methodist church are invited to attend and are extended the privilege of vote. A Church Conference is called to have broad participation of the members of the congregation. The Church Conference may be authorized by the district superintendent.

College of Bishops

All active and retired bishops within a jurisdiction.

Council of Bishops

All active and retired bishops of The United Methodist Church. The council meets twice a year. According to The Book of Discipline 2000, "The Council of Bishops is...the collegial expression of episcopal leadership in the Church and through the Church into the world. The Church expects the Council of Bishops to speak to the Church and from the Church to the world, and to give leadership in the quest for Christian unity and interreligious relationships."

District Conference

The meeting held to conduct necessary work of the district. The annual conference determines what the membership of a district conference shall be. Generally, it consists of the clergy of the district and one or more delegates from each pastoral charge. It is presided over by the district superintendent.

District Superintendent

An ordained minister appointed by a bishop to oversee the pastors and local churches in

a district. A district superintendent may not serve in that capacity more than six years in any consecutive nine years. No minister may serve more than a total of twelve years as a superintendent.

General Conference

The highest legislative body in The United Methodist Church. The voting membership consists of an equal number of clergy and lay delegates elected by the annual conferences. General Conference convenes every quadrennium (four years) to determine the denomination's future direction. It is the only body that can speak officially for the denomination.

Judicial Council

Nine persons elected by General Conference who rule on questions of constitutionality in church law and practice.

Jurisdictional Conference

The quadrennial meeting of clergy and lay delegates from the annual conferences within the boundaries of one of five U.S. jurisdictions: North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern and Western. Jurisdictional Conferences convene every four years. The business includes the election and assignment of bishops.

Trust Clause

The clause that must be included in the deeds of all United Methodist properties. All properties held by the General, Jurisdictional, Annual, and District Conferences or by a local church or by any agency or institution of the denomination are to be held in trust for the denomination. The titles are not held by "The United Methodist Church" since it is a connectional structure and not a legal entity in and of itself. The titles to the properties are held by boards of trustees established for the purpose of holding and administering property.

Sample Ballot

From the Addendum to The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016, ¶12553

St. Luke's UMC is taking a vote to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church based upon these grounds:

"for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality."

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 and clergy (active and retired) relating to the local church present at the church conference.

Abstentions will be separately counted in order to determine whether the required approval of "two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the professing members present at the church conference" is obtained.

Please vote for Yes or No on the motion using a checkmark (✓) or by marking X next to your choice below, or you may abstain from voting by using a checkmark (✓) or by marking X next to the Abstain blank below. Only one space should be marked or your ballot will be void.

_____ YES (In favor of Disaffiliation)

_____ NO (against Disaffiliation)

_____ ABSTAIN (not taking a position on the question)

Paragraph 2553

¶ 2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality

1. 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.

3. Decision Making Process - The church conference shall be conducted in accordance with ¶ 248 and shall be held within one hundred twenty (120) days after the district superintendent calls for the church conference. In addition to the provisions of ¶ 246.8, special attention shall be made to give broad notice to the full professing membership of the local church regarding the time and place of a church conference called for this purpose and to use all means necessary, including electronic communication where possible, to communicate. 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.

4. Process Following Decision to Disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church - If the church conference votes to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church, the terms and conditions for that disaffiliation shall be established by the board of trustees of the applicable annual conference, with the advice of the cabinet, the annual conference treasurer, the annual conference benefits officer, the director of connectional ministries, and the annual conference chancellor. The terms and conditions, including the effective date of disaffiliation, shall be memorialized in a binding Disaffiliation Agreement between the annual conference and the trustees of the local church, acting on behalf of the members. That agreement must be consistent with the following provisions:

a) Standard Terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement. - The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth in ¶ 807.9. The agreement shall include a recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶

2501, notwithstanding the release of property therefrom. Annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.

b) Apportionments - The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionments.

c) Property - A disaffiliating local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property. All transfers of property shall be made prior to disaffiliation. All costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.

d) Pension Liabilities - The local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which the annual conference will determine the local church's share.

e) Other Liabilities - The local church shall satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation.

f) Payment Terms - Payment shall occur prior to the effective date of departure.

g) Disaffiliating Churches Continuing as Plan Sponsors of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits Plans - The United Methodist Church believes that a local church disaffiliating under ¶ 2553 shall continue to share common religious bonds and convictions with The United Methodist Church based on shared Wesleyan theology and tradition and Methodist roots, unless the local church expressly resolves to the contrary. As such, a local church disaffiliating under ¶ 2553 shall continue to be eligible to sponsor voluntary employee benefit plans through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits under ¶ 1504.2, subject to the applicable terms and conditions of the plans.

h) Once the disaffiliating local church has reimbursed the applicable annual conference for all funds due under the agreement, and provided that there are no other outstanding liabilities or claims against The United Methodist Church as a result of the disaffiliation, in consideration of the provisions of this paragraph, the applicable annual conference shall release any claims that it may have under ¶ 2501 and other paragraphs of The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church commonly referred to as the trust clause, or under the agreement.

From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2019 Addendum. © 2019 by The United