

The Way Forward

Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT DOES DISAFFILIATION MEAN?

By disaffiliation, we mean that we are leaving the United Methodist Church and the associated leadership, organization, and financial responsibilities that come with affiliation.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING IN THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

The United Methodist Church is in great turmoil and has been heading towards a split for some time. The troubles are complex and multi layered. But, at the heart of this turbulence is a decades-long struggle over what faithful Christian living looks like around human sexuality.

Complicating matters further, those who wish to change our denomination's positions have taken to outright defiance of the United Methodist Church's rules around ordination and same-sex weddings. This has led to the widespread undermining of our covenant and life together as a denomination.

A two part historical survey of how the United Methodist Church came to this point is available here:

[How We Got Here: The History of UM Conflict \(Part 1\) - Good News Magazine](#)

[How We Got Here: The History of UM Conflict \(Part 2\) - Good News Magazine](#)

WHY IS THRIVE PURSUING DISAFFILIATION?

The changing complexion of the UMC is going to make it increasingly difficult for Thrive Church to operate as we have throughout our 150-year history. Ironically, we believe the best way for Thrive to remain the same is to leave. The stated direction of the Michigan Annual Conference—as well as the denomination as a whole—is to redefine marriage along progressive, secular lines. The unraveling discipline, governance and theological identity of the United Methodist Church is a threat to the gospel witness of Thrive Church.

WHY ARE WE CONSIDERING DISAFFILIATION NOW?

The 2019 General Conference, in response to decades of debate and acrimony around issues surrounding human sexuality, laid out a process for churches seeking to disaffiliate from the UMC. This process, spelled out in Paragraph 2553 of our United Methodist Book of Discipline, sunsets at the end of 2023, with no other paths for separation promised. Several thousand UM churches across the country – with beliefs similar to our own – have already disaffiliated or are moving now to disaffiliate. With their voices gone from the debate within the denomination, we cannot assume circumstances will improve in the future. Regrettably, disaffiliation has become the best path forward.

Our F.A.S.T. Team, made up of staff and non-staff who give leadership to Thrive's day-to-day work, has been in lengthy prayer and discussion. We have commissioned several educational events in the church over the last three years. In the end, we all felt strongly that God was leading us towards disaffiliation. The Lord showed himself faithful throughout!

HOW WILL THRIVE CHANGE?

It is our hope that, in leaving the UMC, Thrive Church remains the same, and we will continue seeking our vision to be a thriving church where families can connect with God, grow in the Spirit and serve generously.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR LEAVING?

We holding two major town hall meetings. One is focused on the reasons for staying in the UMC. The other is focused on the reasons for joining the new Global Methodist Church. This process culminates with a vote open to all members of Thrive Church with a two-thirds majority required to disaffiliate.

WHY JOIN THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH?

Joining the GMC enables us to move into the future while maintaining our theological, connectional and Wesleyan heritage. We will gain ownership and control of our property. Our Christian witness will be supported and encouraged by a world-wide network of like-minded churches. The denomination will be streamlined and require significantly less funding. We'll be part of an exciting movement to plant new churches and reach new people for Christ. We'll have a greatly enhanced role in the selection of pastoral leadership.

CAN SOMEONE BECOME A MEMBER BEFORE THE VOTE?

Unfortunately, no. All persons interested in becoming a member of Thrive Church must go through our Discover the Christian Life CLASS 101. There will not be another completed class before the members-only vote.

DOES THIS REQUIRE LEGAL ACTION?

Not at all. There is no legal action being taken by Thrive or the Michigan Conference and no animosity exists between us. Pastor Tom is friends with these leaders and the conference has been gracious in its response to Thrive. This is being handled amicably among Christian brothers and sisters.

WHAT ARE THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS?

If we stay in the UMC we are likely to lose key donors, core leadership and staff. Such a loss of revenue and personnel would put the future of Thrive Church at great risk.

The financial cost of disaffiliation is set by the Michigan Conference Trustees. They are:

1. We owe two year's apportionments (the dues every congregation pays for the ministries and administrative needs of the denomination)
2. We owe the equivalent of an additional two years of apportionments for our property.
3. We must pay upfront our share of the unfunded liability on the UM pension plan (a plan the denomination has for retired clergy).

The total of these three items is approximately \$421,000. Following a positive vote on March 19, we would hold a capital campaign towards this fee. A low interest loan from the Michigan Area Loan Fund would be taken for any remaining balance.

The good news under this provision is that we get to keep our buildings—valued at \$3½ million. In the United Methodist Church buildings are owned by the denomination in what is known as the “trust

clause.” Under this special provision, Paragraph 2553, churches may leave with their buildings. This provision expires at the end of 2023 and is the reason so many churches are disaffiliating now.

HOW ARE OUR LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE WELL-BEING OF THRIVE CHURCH?

Our leadership structure remains the same—a single board model responsible for finance, administration, staff-parish relations and trustees. Meetings are held the fourth Tuesday nights of each month and they are open to anyone to attend. We will continue using our established practices of yearly audits, staff reviews and supervision. It is anticipated that upon entry into the Global Methodist Church, we would alter our practices to match the standards set by the new denomination.

NEWS REPORTS ABOUT THE UMC FOCUS ON LGBTQ. WHERE DOES THRIVE STAND?

The media can be counted on to highlight the controversial and the most polarizing aspects of the debate within Methodism. While the debate within the UMC has focused on issues of human sexuality, the rift goes much deeper. It has to do with our understanding of Scripture and its authority in our lives. These differing opinions have led to differing positions on matters related to human sexuality.

Over the years, we have been straightforward about our positions while maintaining a posture that is grace-filled. We have not been an issue driven church, nor do we intend to become one. We want our posture to be grace-filled, loving, and welcoming of all persons, no matter where they come from or what they’ve done. This is the gospel. We also desire our positions to be grounded in scripture and the truth of God’s word. Otherwise, we are simply being driven by cultural trends. We believe the scriptures clearly and consistently teach that sex is reserved for marriage and that marriage was designed by God for one man and one woman for life. We invite all into a life of discipleship where we are transformed into the image of Christ. Growing in grace involves submitting all our life, from our money to our time, and yes, even our sexual behavior, to the Lordship of Jesus.

For more information, see the recent message on being a Biblically inclusive church at:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/mQ4ZASKAIQU?feature=share>

WHAT IF I HOLD VIEWS DIFFERENT FROM OUR LEADERSHIP?

Thrive Church has long welcomed people with differing opinions within our church community and we’ll continue to welcome people with views that differ from our pastoral staff and leadership teams.

WHAT CAN I, AS A MEMBER OF THRIVE, BE DOING?

We would ask that you pray and get informed about disaffiliation. Please pray a) For the unity of our church, b) for the people of our church, especially newer believers, that this is not unsettling to their faith and c) that this is not a distraction from us making disciples of Jesus.

The vote on disaffiliation is set for Sunday, March 19, at 4 pm in the worship center. Per the rules of the UM Discipline, only full members are allowed to vote and must be present to vote.

WHAT IS OUR FUTURE?

While these are challenging days for the United Methodist Church and our congregation, we believe God has his hand on Thrive Church now, like he has for the past 150 years! Necessary endings often bring new beginnings. God is moving now in a powerful way. The best is yet to come!