

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

New Questions

- **The Why Now document seems to have a negative slant toward the United Methodist Church. Is this the case?**
 - The Why Now document may have come across that way due to some of the concerns the Board has noted. However, that does not mean that there is nothing good is coming from the United Methodist Church. The Board referenced all the resolutions to give a balanced view of what was presented at the Annual Conference, though they may be interpreted differently. You can also visit our conference website, ngumc.org and view the presentation “World Changing People of God. You can also click on the link “[Important Information for Churches Considering Disaffiliation](#)” for more information. The Board encourages you to look at all you can to help you discern whether you wish for the church to disaffiliate or not.

- **How do we self-govern if we disaffiliate and are independent? Who sets this up?**
 - If we disaffiliate, there will be a period of time for which we will function as an independent church. Our independence would last until the congregation chooses another denomination. Alternatively, we can choose to stay an independent Methodist church. Given the extremely tight timeline for our decision to disaffiliate or not, there is not sufficient time to wisely discern the best fit for us. We want the future direction of our church to be a decision of an informed congregation.

For the period of time we self-govern, we plan to emulate the same local governance structure we have today. Although patterned after our current structure, there would be a great deal of work in setting this up: Contracting with the pastor, by-law preparation, etc. We will be establishing task forces to help with this process.

- **Will post-disaffiliation plans and/or self-governing information (should the vote favor disaffiliation) be shared before we vote to disaffiliate?**
 - We are following the procedure laid out by our District Superintendent and The Conference. We will share what we are able to share and when we are able to. We have learned that some District Superintendents are advising their churches not to make definite plans until after the November 18 vote. We can confirm that with our District Superintendent. Should the church vote to disaffiliate and you would like to be on a task force to look at our options, please let the Church Board or Pastor Jim know.

- **If we disaffiliate, how do you know that we will end up in a better situation than we are in now?**
 - If we disaffiliate, our church board believes that there needs to be enough time for the congregation to make an informed decision so that our path is carefully chosen.

- **If disaffiliate, is there seed money for a new local church that performs gay marriages and ordains gay clergy?**
 - Buford First will continue to welcome all people including those belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. Buford First has no plans to start a new church or give money for a new church start up.

- **Will more info be shared before the vote on Aug 27?**
 - You will have an opportunity to hear from our District Superintendent, Rev. Rodrigo Cruz in an August 6 Town hall at 6:00 pm. Additionally, the church board will continue to add to the FAQ document as we receive additional questions

- **What is the most recent estimate for the cost to disaffiliate?**

- The church is responsible for paying the past 12 months of apportionments and the next 12 months. We are also responsible for our portion of the unfunded liability of Pastors' pension as well as legal/rebranding costs which would include removing the UMC logo, new hymnals and pew Bibles, signage, cost to reincorporate, etc. Presently this is what we are anticipating but we are still firming up quotes:

- Apportionments: \$59,957.00 (amount that will be due 11/30/2023)

- Pension Liability: \$55,523.12

- Rebranding/legal: \$25,000 (estimated but will update as concrete figures come in)

- Total approximate: \$140,480.12

We presently have the amount in the General Fund to cover that cost. Should the church vote to disaffiliate, members will have the opportunity to donate whether it be to help purchase hymnals, Bibles, or simply donate so that our General Fund will be effected as little as possible.

General

- **Is The United Methodist Church splitting at this time?**

- No. The term "split" applies when there is a negotiated agreement within the denomination to divide assets and resources. No such agreement has been made in The United Methodist Church.
- The 2019 General Conference did create a limited-time agreement for churches to leave 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." Annual Conference Boards of Trustees, in alignment with that Book of Discipline paragraph, are facilitating that process.
- The intention of this was to offer a way for churches to leave the denomination who want to allow homosexual ordination or marriage. However, most of the churches who have disaffiliated have done so to not allow either of those things to happen in their churches amidst other concerns about the direction of our denomination. Please refer to the corresponding "Why Now" document for further information on the other issues driving differences of opinion inside the United Methodist Church. This is where a lot of the confusion has come from as the limited time agreement has had the opposite effect than was intended.
- At the same time, some former United Methodist leaders have created a new denomination, the Global Methodist Church. While the leaders of that denomination are encouraging traditionalist clergy and United Methodist congregations to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and join their denomination, there is no requirement that a disaffiliated church join the Global Methodist Church.
- Some churches that disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church in this season will join that new denomination, others have indicated that they will be independent churches, and some will join other pan-Methodist denominations.

- **Who made the decision for Buford First UMC to begin the process of discernment regarding our future with the United Methodist Church?**

- At the Church Board meeting on May 3, 2022, the Church Board decided to start a fact-finding task force to explore the growing divide within the United Methodist Church. This was followed by a period of discernment and a town hall meeting that was held on October 23, 2022. At that time, the Church Board did not think it was wise to pursue disaffiliation but informed the congregation that they would continue to monitor the situation. At the Church Board meeting on June 4, 2023, following the report from actions that occurred during the North Georgia Annual Conference (Please refer to the corresponding "Why Now" document for additional details), the Church Board by majority voted that we should move forward allowing a vote by the church on disaffiliation.

- **What has changed since the townhall meeting we had?**
 - The Church board previously recommended and confirmed a "wait and see" approach in 2022. However, the current plan and timeline for reconciliation and disaffiliation require Buford First to reach a consensus no later than September 2023. After that, our church will have fewer options available. This timeline is new and provides a shorter window compared to what the United Methodist Church had previously indicated for local churches to make important decisions about their future.
 - At the same time, the recent Annual Conference, attended by clergy and lay delegates, revealed a new, more political tone within the church and governing body, as outlined in the corresponding "Why Now" document. The Board is concerned that when the denomination makes decisions on politically contentious matters without considering all perspectives, it leads to division within the church. As the United Methodist Church takes further steps to speak on behalf of all while representing only a subset of views, it implies less tolerance and diminishes the path to reconciliation that was once central to the United Methodist Church's message.
- **What is the role of the Church Board and what is the composition?**
 - As stated in Para. 252 in the UMC Book of Discipline, the Church Board, is responsible for providing for the administration of its organization and temporal life and shall be amenable to and function as the administrative agency of the charge conference. It is also responsible for envisioning, planning, implementing and annually evaluating the mission and ministry of the church. Members of the Church Board are comprised of elected members at Charge Conference.
- **Why did the Church Board make this decision?**
 - The United Methodist denomination is already experiencing the disaffiliation of some churches. The disaffiliation of other churches seems inevitable. The current process for Buford First UMC to disaffiliate expires December 31, 2023 based on changes made at the last General Conference in 2019. In December 2022, the Board of Trustees of the North Georgia "paused" disaffiliation talk in the conference. As a result, a number of churches sued to allow votes to occur and a judge ruled in their favor. As a result, a called Annual Conference was set for November 18, 2023 to approve all churches who wish to disaffiliation. This means that churches who wish to vote need to act now.
- **What is "disaffiliation" from the United Methodist Church (UMC)?**
 - "Disaffiliation" is a process whereby a United Methodist Church can separate from the United Methodist Church Denomination while keeping its property and assets. Since Buford First UMC is a United Methodist Church, if we want to separate from the denomination, this process is required.
- **Has Buford First UMC or its leadership decided to separate or disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church (UMC)?**
 - No. The decision to disaffiliate from the UMC is a congregational one and requires a vote by professing members of the congregation who are present and have taken a ballot at a specially called in-person church conference. We have decided to begin a **period of discernment**, or a **process of discernment**, with the congregation to determine our future course of action for Buford First UMC.
- **Would anything change at Buford First UMC because of a disaffiliation from the UMC?**
 - Whether the church stays in the United Methodist Church or votes to disaffiliate, the church will change. We have already experience some of our members leaving over this issue. While we desire for everyone to be part of our church regardless of what happens, we know that is not happening and will not happen. However, everything you know and love about Buford First UMC would continue as usual. Worship would remain the same. Our intent is for the ministries to remain the same. **All persons** would continue to be welcome to join the community of faith at

Buford First.

- Some of what will change includes not paying apportionments to the United Methodist Church. This may change in the future if we join a denomination that requires apportionments. Our property and assets would be under the complete control of our local church body. In the event of disaffiliation, Buford First would seek to hire a Senior Pastor whose theology and values align with the needs of the congregation. We would no longer be able to use the “Cross and Flame” symbol. It would be necessary to drop “United Methodist” from our church name, but we could retain the name “Buford First Methodist”.
- Should the need to hire a Senior Pastor arise, the board has unanimously voted to offer this role to our current Senior Pastor, Jim Buckman. Pastor Buckman is also engaged in a process of discernment and will have more flexibility to discuss his interest and intent following a decision and indication of next steps by the church.
- **What will happen with our Preschool?**
 - Our preschool is a ministry of the church and will remain so. We have been recently certified by the United Methodist Preschool Association and will keep that certification for the next three years as of now. However, that certification is not necessary for the continuation of our Preschool. If the church votes to disaffiliate, the Preschool will research options if we desire to seek a certification, even if not required.
- **Has Buford First UMC ever been faced with this kind of discernment process before in considering denominational affiliation?**
 - Yes. In our 150 year history there have been a couple seasons of discernment that resulted in Buford First UMC choosing to be affiliated over the years with three different Methodist denominations: the Episcopal Methodist Church South (1865); the Methodist Church (1939); and finally, the United Methodist Church (1968).
- **Why is Buford First UMC evaluating the process of disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church?**
 - It is no secret that the United Methodist Denomination has been involved in an on-going and intensifying conflict. This conflict intensified after the 2019 General Conference. A theologically diverse group developed a proposal to allow amicable separation to occur known as the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.” This legislation was to be voted on at the 2020 General Conference. The 2020 General Conference was postponed several times and most recently has been postponed/cancelled until 2024. The result is a continuing escalation of the conflict within the denomination. A number of churches have already disaffiliated, and it seems inevitable that others will follow.
 - While the conflict stems from a deep theological division, much of the focus has been on performing same-sex marriages and the ordination of clergy who are professed, active homosexuals. However, the issues that divide our denomination are much deeper and more complex, and include the Authority of Scripture, the lack of regard to following the current order outlined in the Book of Discipline, and the lack of accountability among the leadership in the UMC. For more detail on the range of issues facing the United Methodist Church, please refer to the “Why Now” document.
- **Why have I not heard more about this until now?**
 - The decision to evaluate disaffiliation is a consequential one of grave importance to the church, and it is a process that has changed and evolved over the course of the 3 years since it became a possibility for UMC churches through the action of the 2019 General Conference. The Church Board has been carefully monitoring the guidance and situation in the UMC to ensure that we do not find ourselves in a position of non-compliance with our denominational governance while

faithfully moving forward with Buford First's stated mission of "Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." The action by the Church Board to request that Buford First UMC begin the process of discernment regarding disaffiliation took on a sense of urgency due to a deadline to submit the request or to lose the opportunity to do so.

- **What happens next in the process of discernment regarding disaffiliation?**
 - We are following a process in accordance to Paragraph 2553 of the UMC Book of Discipline (<https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Paragraph+2553+-+2016+Book+of+Discipline+Errata.pdf>) as implemented by the North Georgia Annual Conference. We ask that every member begin to pray during this process. Our Church Board will continue to provide information and is available for any questions. Our District Superintendent will be meeting with the Church Board and will be present for a Town Hall to entertain any questions. We will then have a vote in early September.
 - Please send questions to churchboard@bufordfirstumc.org

- **What happens following the Church Conference?**
 - If two-thirds of those present and voting professing members approve of disaffiliation, the Church Board of Buford First UMC will enter into an "agreement" with the Conference Board of Trustees of the North Georgia conference of the UMC.
 - This agreement will spell out the details and legalities of moving forward. The agreement will involve a financial cost to leave the denomination. The cost includes Buford First UMC's share of the North Georgia Conference's unfunded pension liability for clergy, currently retired and active. Per the terms of the disaffiliation legislation passed by the 2019 General Conference it also includes two years of the apportionments we pay annually to the North Georgia Conference. These payments honor a system which Buford First UMC has been a part of for a long time. Buford First UMC currently has funds available to cover these costs without compromising any of our current activities and priorities.
 - Following this process, Buford First will become an independent church, not connected to a denomination, with the possible option of joining another denomination at a later date. This is a second decision to be made and cannot be made until a decision to disaffiliate has been voted and approved by the Annual Conference.

Human Sexuality – Paragraph 2553

<https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Paragraph+2553+-+2016+Book+of+Discipline+Errata.pdf>

- **Book of Discipline ¶ 2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality—**
 - 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.
 - While this issue is not the only focus for churches undergoing this period of discernment, it is the most highly publicized. It is important to note that while the current language in the Book of Discipline makes these prohibitions, the North Georgia Conference and United Methodist Church is not enforcing its own rules. Based on resolutions passed at Annual Conference, many believe the language in the Book of Discipline will change to further enable self-avowed LGBTQIA+ persons to be ordained, and to enable individual churches and clergy to make decisions regarding the facilitation of same-sex marriages.

- It is critically important to note that while this issue is important, it is not the only issue facing the United Methodist Church, or Buford First.
- **What is our stance on same sex marriage and ordination of self-avowed and practicing homosexuals?**
 - *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* has been the same on this matter since 1972, and yet it is disregarded by progressive clergy and congregations across the denomination with no accountability or enforcement.
 - Paragraph 304.3 of The Discipline says, “The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”
 - While Buford First UMC firmly believes in the authority of scripture and seeks to follow the Book of Discipline as in adherence to the authority of Scripture regarding marriage (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-5) and sexual practices outside of marriage (Romans 1:26-27, Leviticus 18:22), there is cause for concern based on expected changes to the Book of Discipline and the degree of freedom our church may enjoy in the future.
- **Does Buford First UMC welcome homosexual persons at our church?**
 - Absolutely! Buford First UMC views all people as individuals of sacred worth. Therefore, everyone is invited to participate in worship as lay congregants or in ministry programs as lay participants. We extend welcome, grace and respect to all who call Buford First UMC their church home.

Voting

- **Who can vote? Who is a Professing Member?**
 - Only “professing members” of Buford First UMC can vote. Professing members are those who have officially joined Buford First UMC and includes students who have gone through Confirmation and taken the vows of membership. The final decision to disaffiliate from the UMC or remain UMC is determined by a 2/3 vote of all professing members attending the in-person Called Church Conference who have taken a ballot. Any ballot taken and returned without a clearly defined vote will be considered a “No” vote to disaffiliate, which translates that this ballot is considered as a vote to remain in the UMC.
- **If I’m a member, do I have to be present in-person to vote?**
 - Yes.
- **If I’m not a member, can I vote? How do I find out if I’m a member?**
 - No. Send inquiries to office@bufordfirstumc.org.
- **Can I get more information before the vote?**
 - Yes, Buford First UMC will be holding town hall meetings and discussions prior to the Church Conference to vote.
 - There will be three meetings in which our members will come together to learn and discern:
 - Meeting 1 – July 16 at 12:15 PM – Town Hall meeting, hosted by the board with Q & A
 - Meeting 2 – To Be Scheduled based on Rodrigo Cruz’s availability – Town Hall meeting, hosted by the board and with the participation of our District Superintendent, Rodrigo Cruz

- Meeting 3 – To Be Scheduled following Meeting 2 – Final meeting. This meeting will be our members' opportunity to vote for or against disaffiliation.
- **What happens if Buford First UMC doesn't disaffiliate?**
 - If Buford First UMC votes not to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church, it will remain a part of the denomination. The church will continue to be governed by the UMC's Book of Discipline, and it will be eligible to receive financial support from the UMC. All property and assets will remain in Trust with the North Georgia Conference.
 - The church may still face some challenges, however. For example, whether a church votes to disaffiliate or not, it may experience some internal divisions.

Pastors and Staff

- **Where do our pastors stand on this issue?**
 - Pastor Jim joins with the congregation in the current period of discernment; he is in careful consideration and study of the options.
- **How will the church staff be impacted?**
 - We do not know at this time how giving will be impacted, and adverse effects could easily have an impact on our staff. However, the Board continues to support our staff and we hope to continue the mission that we have been called to do, with the staff that we presently have.
- **If Buford First UMC disaffiliates from the UMC, how will it be appointed a pastor?**
 - There are 72 churches in North Georgia that have disaffiliated from the UMC in the North Georgia Annual Conference. It is anticipated that there will be dozens to hundreds more additional churches that will disaffiliate at the called Annual Conference in November. These churches are putting together pools of potential pastoral candidates. Whether Buford First UMC chooses to affiliate with one of the new denominations or remain an independent Methodist church, Buford First will select its own senior pastor from that pool of candidates.

Finance, Property, and Legal

- **How will Buford First UMC remain financially viable, both now and in the future?**
 - Buford First UMC will remain financially viable through God's continued grace and your continued generosity. The financial obligations associated with disaffiliation in the North Georgia Conference require (1) payment in full of two years apportionments and (2) payment in full of the unfunded pension liability (this figure is calculated quarterly). These costs are manageable and are funded through the current general fund.
 - Buford First does not receive any funding from the North Georgia Conference and will continue to pay apportionments to the North Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church until such time as it formally disaffiliates, should such a determination be made. If Buford First disaffiliates, apportionments would no longer be paid.
- **What does it mean to hold property "in trust"?**
 - The trust clause is an historic, universal claim made by the UMC and written into the church's articles of incorporation in an effort to retain ownership rights of local church properties. Holding property in trust for The United Methodist Church means the "holder" (Buford First) is required to use the property exclusively for the purposes of and to benefit The United Methodist Church. It also means that if, at any point, it becomes clear the holder can no longer or chooses no longer to

function as part of The United Methodist Church, it forfeits all rights to continue to hold the property, and the property itself and all other assets transfer to the denomination (the North Georgia Conference Board of Trustees).

- Simply, the North Georgia Conference actually owns all property and assets currently being used by Buford First. Buford First does not own its own property nor assets. Should Buford First vote to disaffiliate from the UMC, we will be released from the trust clause and will own all property and assets.

- **What is the legal risk of leaving the denomination?**

- There is no risk or liability associated with disaffiliation by following the prescribed steps for completing the process. The risk of litigation increases in cases where churches take steps to disaffiliate outside the prescribed process. Buford First is following the steps outlined by the Board of Trustees of the North Georgia Conference.

- **What can I do to support Buford First's future?**

- The first thing to do is to pray. Pray for Buford First, other churches that choose to disaffiliate and those that will remain in the UMC. Additionally, be informed and be prepared to vote at the appropriate time.
- Finally, continue to support Buford First with your presence and your gifts.