

## WHY NOW

Last year, the Church Board decided not to proceed with a vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church at that time. This decision was made after prayer and conversations with many members of the congregation. The Board recognizes that our church is diverse in many ways, but it is a place where we love and support one another while seeking spiritual growth together. The United Methodist Church has historically been a church that strives to love God and neighbor. The United Methodist Church has also had the history of being present when disasters occur, establishing retirement homes for people who would not have a place to go during their senior years, and helping the church to be socially conscience without engaging in extreme political positions. However, the Board has observed recent changes in the United Methodist Church and our Annual Conference that have moved towards a more politically influenced agenda. These changes have the potential to alienate many within our denomination and the people we are trying to reach with the message of Jesus Christ.

Below are some of the recent resolutions and actions that the Board would like to share. Some are items in which the United Methodist Church have acted upon as viewing each other as people of sacred worth. Others are things that could be considered politically contentious. We share these with you to give you a larger picture of what is happening in our denomination.

- 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.
- The Council of Bishops' letter following the Roe v. Wade Statement represents a shift from the more neutral position on abortion stated in our Book of Discipline.
  - <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/umc-bishops-bemoan-us-supreme-court-decision-on-abortion-16542550>
  - [Book of Discipline Statement on Abortion](#)
- The Affirmation of the Queer Delegates' Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in The UMC calls for the affirmation of ALL LGBTQIA+ people. (Note: "Queer" is the self-preferred label, taken from the resolution, that refers to the broader community of persons with the LGBTQIA+ acronym) While we believe in the worth of every individual and the importance of acceptance, this resolution conflicts with our traditional,

orthodox theology in certain instances. For example, while we acknowledge the existence of individuals struggling with gender identity, we maintain the belief that "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created them; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). It is spiritually and psychologically harmful to affirm as truth the popular notion that our gender may differ from our biological sex because we may feel uncomfortable in our bodies at times, as advocated by some transgender groups. We also cannot affirm the beliefs of individuals when new groups are continuously being added to this classification.

- [Affirmation of the Queer Delegates' Call to Center Justice and Empowerment](#)

- The addition of Standing Rule C from the Reparations Task Force requires intercultural training for conference boards, teams, council, and ex-officio members, without specifying the content of the training. This raises concerns about the General Conference's shift towards a more progressive agenda, as indicated by their websites:
  - <https://www.r2hub.org/manifesto>
  - <https://www.r2hub.org/library/what-is-critical-race-theory>
  - <https://www.r2hub.org/library/pronouns-matter>
  
- Recent developments such as the passage of Resolution 703 and the independent actions of certain churches within the North Georgia Conference seeking alignment with an activist-based agenda on gun violence prevention further contribute to our concerns.
  - [Gun Violence Resolution](#)
  
- Recent developments on the topic of reparations: The United Methodist Church has officially supported reparations for descendants of slavery since 2008. The Church has been instrumental in helping churches acknowledge the hurt that has been caused by our past. In 2019, the church's General Conference passed a resolution calling on Congress to pass H.R. 40, the bill that would authorize a study on reparations. However, the issue of reparations has become increasingly divisive in recent years. In 2022, the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church was asked if it served the best interest for the proceeds of a black church that was closing to be sent to the Conference Board of Trustees or to be used to help underserved areas. Out of this a Reparation Task Force was formed to help guide not only this situation but consider other areas to bring about justice. Links below help to describe the good that the Church is doing, and also raises some of the concerns that some members of the Board feel could be divisive.

- <https://www.ngumc.org/newsdetail/2023-north-georgia-conference-wrap-up-and-report-17451965>
  - <https://www.ngumc.org/reparations>
  - <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/support-reparations-for-african-americans-3066>
  - <https://www.amren.com/news/2023/06/georgia-methodists-approve-reparations-plan-to-support-black-congregations/>
- Resolution 701, discussed at the June 2023 Annual Conference, requests that all clergy and lay persons involved who intend to disaffiliate step down from leadership roles within the local church, district, conference, and general bodies as a matter of "integrity."
    - [Integrity Resolution](#)
  - Immigration reform: The church has called for comprehensive immigration reform that would provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.
    - <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-united-methodist-position-on-immigration-reform>
    - <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-welcoming-the-migrant-to-the-us>
  - Environmental justice: The church has been a vocal advocate for environmental justice, and has worked to address the disproportionate impact of pollution on low-income communities and communities of color.
    - <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/climate-change-and-the-church-s-response-1035>
    - <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/environmental-racism-in-the-us-1025>

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.

Regardless of individual opinions on the specific positions or initiatives under consideration by the United Methodist Church, it is necessary to have a conversation about whether the United Methodist Church adequately represents the diverse opinions within Buford First and respects our church's autonomy in serving our community and making disciples.

The Church Board's hope is that we need to see where we can best position ourselves to be a gathering place for those with different perspectives, while continuing to worship and serve together while making disciples of Jesus Christ.