

First Church, Myrtle Beach

Discerning Our Future With The United Methodist Church

Frequently Asked Questions:

Please use in conjunction with our Discernment Guidebook:

https://www.fumcmb.org/uploads/9/1/2/7/91270820/discernment_guide_final.pdf

GENERAL

Q: Why is our church considering separation from the United Methodist denomination?

A: Due to the ongoing division taking place in the denomination of the United Methodist Church, congregations across the U.S. are choosing their own pathways for future affiliation based on their core values and theological beliefs. Over 7600 US UM churches have disaffiliated, including 113 from SC. The history is long and complicated, but ultimately, upholding the traditional witness of the Holy Scripture as authoritative in all matters of faith and practice is the central reason why our church is considering leaving the United Methodist Church.

Q: Why is this happening now?

A: Bishop Holston and the Trustees of the SC Annual Conference, have provided the opportunity for each congregation to consider its future affiliation by March 1 of each year. They have provided specific terms and deadlines in for SC United Methodist Churches who want to disaffiliate.

Q: What will change if our church leaves the United Methodist Church?

A: Our church will continue to advance its mission to Follow Jesus, And Share Him With Others— regardless of denominational affiliation. Our pastors, Church Council, lay leadership, and committed members are working to ensure the ministry and mission of our church continue and grow without interruption or redirection. If we disaffiliate, our intent is to continue operating as we have been.

Q: What is required to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church?

A: The SC Annual Conference requires a multi-step process for each church seeking to separate from the UMC. These terms are contained in the Agreement to Separate, developed by the Bishop and Trustees of the SC Annual Conference.

- The church council votes to pursue separation and then sends a written request to the district superintendent to schedule a church conference.
- The local church prayerfully enters a minimum 30 day process of prayer and discernment. (Our discernment process started officially on September 17, 2023.)

- The following financial obligations must be met:
 - 10% of the appraised value of all church property
 - 10% of liquid assets
 - Unpaid apportionment giving for the prior year and up to the date of the annual conference of the year of closure, plus an additional 12 months of apportionment giving.
 - Any unpaid salary and benefits due to clergy appointed to the church.
 - A proportional share of any unfunded pension obligations.

(The estimated total of these costs is listed below under Financial And Legal Impacts)
- At a church conference meeting, the support of two-thirds of professing church members present and voting is required for a church to separate from the UMC.
 - This vote must take place by March 1. (Our vote is scheduled for January 21, 2024 at 3:30pm)
 - A simple majority vote by delegates of the SC United Annual Conference (June 9-12, 2024) is the final step before a congregation can leave the United Methodist denomination with its property and assets.

Q: When will the disaffiliation be official?

A: Upon a simple majority vote by the delegates of the SC Annual Conference (June 9-12, 2024), the disaffiliation will become official on June 30, 2024.

Q: Will our church affiliate with another denomination?

A: If our congregation votes to disaffiliate from the UMC, we would officially close as a United Methodist Church and immediately become an independent church. We would have the option to remain independent or join with another denomination. It is our decision to make, and there is no required deadline for us to make our decision. Our pastors and leaders desire to continue operating as we are with our same Wesleyan theological and missional emphases. It's too early to determine a specific affiliation pathway for our future. Among the options for possible future affiliation are 1) The Global Methodist Church, 2) the Free Methodist Church or 3) another Methodist affiliation, or 4) remain as an independent church. The pastors, Lay Advisory Committee and Church Council will be studying the best path forward. Before joining another denomination, our pastors and leaders will provide plenty of opportunities for education and discussion.

Q: How will this affect my church membership?

A: Your vows of membership are honored regardless of denominational affiliation. Your membership is recorded in our local church database, and that status will not change as a result of any separation or affiliation activity. If our church disaffiliates, and you wish to remain United Methodist, you will have the opportunity to join another United Methodist Church at any time.

Q: Will we change our church name?

A: In order to maintain as much consistency as possible with our history as a church, our recommendation is to call ourselves First Methodist Church of Myrtle Beach.

Q: Can I cast an absentee vote if I am not available the day of the vote?

A: Per the Agreement to Separate from the SC Annual Conference, each member has to be present and signed in in order to vote.

PASTORS & STAFF**Q: Where do our pastors stand on this issue? Do they support leaving the denomination?**

A: Our pastors join our congregation in the current period of discernment. They support taking a vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church. They have indicated that if we disaffiliate, they will remain as our pastors.

Q: Do our church council members support leaving the United Methodist Church?

A: Yes, our church council voted unanimously in favor of recommending to our congregation that we disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church.

Non-clergy staff will not be impacted. None have indicated that they will leave if we disaffiliate.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPACTS**Q: What is the financial impact if our church disaffiliates from the UMC?**

A: The financial obligations of the Agreement to Separate are as follows: 1) 10% of the appraised property value of all church property, 2) 10 % liquid assets, 3) any unpaid apportionments along with 12 months of additional apportionments, and 4) a proportional amount of unfunded pension liability. We have been given a total number of about **\$1,087,538**. An anonymous donor has agreed to fund the disaffiliation costs up to \$1,000,000. We have cash reserves to cover the balance of the cost. .

Q: Will our church retain ownership of our buildings and property if we disaffiliate?

A: Yes. By meeting the terms of the Agreement to Separate and obtain a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote at our church conference on January 21, 2024, we will be able to leave the United Methodist Church with full ownership of our property, buildings, and other assets.

Q: What is the trust clause and how does that affect our church?

A: The trust clause in the United Methodist Book of Discipline states that United Methodist Local Churches aren't the legal owners of their buildings or property or financial assets. We and the

other local United Methodist churches hold our property and assets in trust to the United Methodist denomination. If a local church in South Carolina decides to leave the denomination, the local church has to adhere to The Agreement to Separate, produced by the Bishop and Trustees of the SC Annual Conference, in order to leave with its property and financial assets.

Q: What is the legal risk of leaving the denomination?

A: 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.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

Q: Is the division in the UMC about accepting LGBTQIA+ people in the church? This is what is in the headlines.

A: News media coverage often highlights UMC clergy and/or congregations that either advocate for or stand against the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons as clergy and as couples married in the church. At First Church, discernment and affiliation decisions are focused on the matters of scriptural authority and orthodox Christian beliefs about the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our church relies on the Scriptures and what orthodox Christians have always believed about God to guide all matters of life, including sexual ethics.

Q: What is our stance on LGBTQIA+ clergy and marriage?

A: We believe that all people are created in the image of God and are therefore of sacred worth. We believe that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, so all are in need of God's forgiveness. We believe that the Bible calls all to repent of their sins. We believe that the Bible clearly prohibits the practice of homosexuality, therefore we believe that we should not marry homosexual couples or celebrate the ordination of practicing homosexual ministers.

Our church has always followed the authority of scripture regarding marriage and sexual practices outside of marriage. (Gen. 2:24, Matt. 19:4-5), (Rom. 1:26-27, Lev. 18:22)

Q: Are LGBTQIA+ persons welcome at our church?

A: Absolutely. First Church views all people as individuals of sacred worth. We will welcome all people and minister to all people. We will extend grace, and respect to all who call First Church their home. We believe in the practice of holding to Biblical truth while at the same time extending grace, respect, and compassion to all people.