

Dear Trinity UMC Family:

Conversations about disaffiliation have captured the narrative in the United Methodist Church in the past year. Many churches within the denomination will make a decision whether to stay in the UMC or disaffiliate. Many of us have heard stories from friends and family about what has happened in other churches. We know the challenges of this conversation. Our heart is for this conversation at Trinity to be prayerful, holy, and respectful. Our desire is that, even in potential disagreement, that God can be glorified in the way we learn, speak, and hear from each other.

Last summer, our church council approved the formation of a Discernment Team to help us start these conversations. This publication represents months of prayerful work and research from that team. Great effort has been made to give you helpful, fair, and balanced content. We hope you will read it carefully.

The first step in our process is to pray as a congregation for each other and for the leaders of our church. We are asking you to pray daily for Trinity United Methodist Church, for the pastors, staff, and membership.

The second step is to become informed. The following pages are a digest version of the challenges and opportunities that surround the process before us. In January, informational gatherings will also be held in the Trinity Center to hear this material presented.

The third step is to share your heart and ask questions. In February, there will be surveys and listening and learning circles (small groups) you are asked to sign up for to facilitate more discussion and for our Discernment Team to hear from you. Many have already shared with our team and leadership, and you are encouraged to continue doing so.

Once our leadership feels that all voices have been heard, including that of our God, later this spring there “may” be a congregational vote on this matter. We use the word “may” because nothing has been decided yet. We need you, our church family, to be full participants in this process. That’s why we ask you to pray and to become informed. The ultimate responsibility for this decision and for the future direction of Trinity belongs to you. We are here to help you understand the process and the issues involved.

Know that as we ask you to pray for us, we are praying for you. We steadfastly believe that, despite the anxiety this can bring and what decisions may lie ahead, Trinity’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world does not change. This is what unifies us, what unified this congregation since its formation in 1884, and what will continue to be our focus in the years ahead. Let us do this important work but not lose sight of who God calls us to be. In doing so, our best days are in front of us.

We are praying for you,



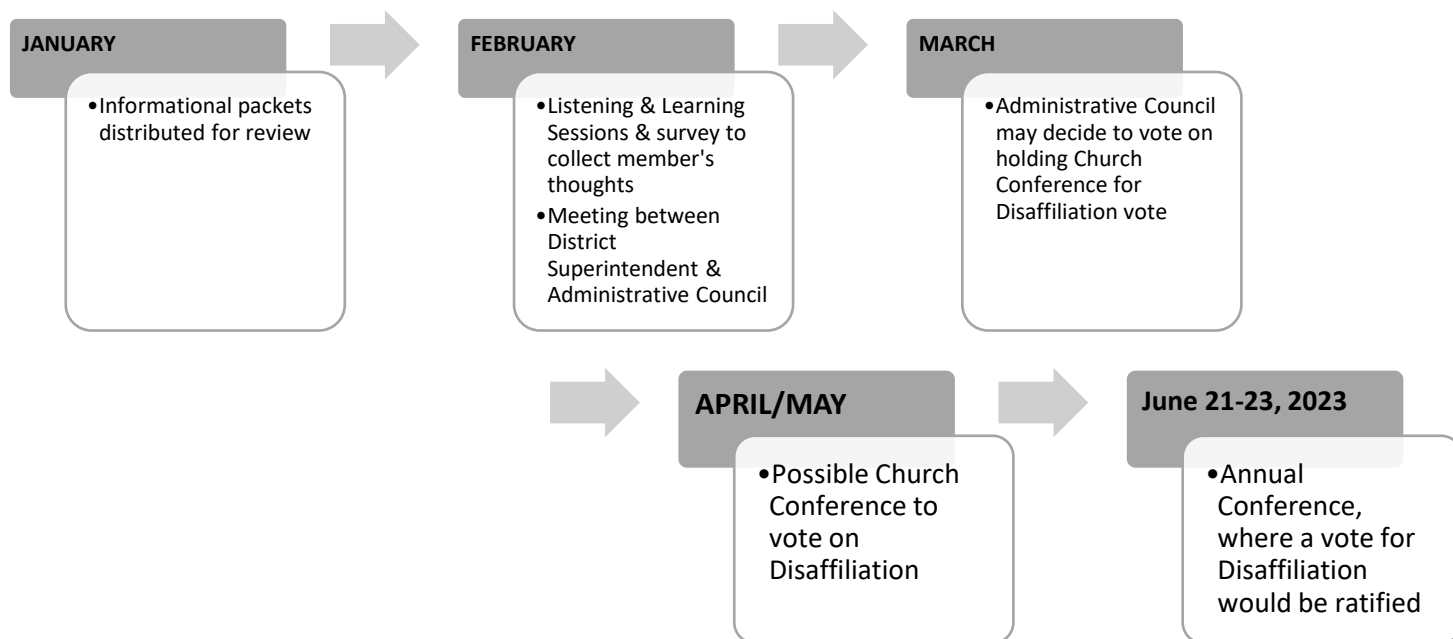
Doug de Graffenried
Senior Pastor



Josh Mandrell
Church Council Chair

Process and Timeline for Trinity's Disaffiliation Discernment

The below process/timeline has been developed to assist Trinity United Methodist Church (Trinity), as a church body, to discern our future with the United Methodist Church (UMC). Also included are options of what might happen if we continue down the path towards disaffiliation.



1. Informational Packet distribution (January)

Please read all the information contained in this packet so you can better understand the process, timeline and issues in order to make an informed decision.

2. Guided Prayer (January-March)

In addition to working to understand the issue and technicalities involved, church members are also asked to walk through our season of discernment together through prayer using the included prayer calendar as a guide.

3. Informational Packet Review Meetings (January)

The below meetings will offer members an opportunity to talk through the Informational Packet with members of the Discernment Team and sign up for smaller group Listening & Learning Sessions. While you are welcome to both Informational Packet meetings, a member only needs to attend one as the same information will be presented at each meeting.

- Sunday, January 15, 2:00pm in The Trinity Center (childcare available)
- Wednesday, January 18, 6:00pm in The Trinity Center (childcare available)

4. Listening & Learning Sessions with consultant Dr. Craig Gilliam: (February)

The below guided sessions with consultant Dr. Craig Gilliam will be held for groups of up to 12 members each for the purpose of gathering the thoughts of the church body. Members are asked to attend only one session. The same material will be covered at each session. Following the sessions, Dr. Gilliam will provide his findings to the Discernment Team and Administrative Council for the purpose of assisting in discerning if Trinity should hold a Church Conference for the purpose of voting on our affiliation with the UMC. Dr. Gilliam's findings will be made available to the entire church body for review. Each session will be held in the Confirmation Room and will last approximately 1-1/2 hours.

- Th, Feb 16 - 8:30am
- Th, Feb 16 - Noon
- Th, Feb 16 - 4pm
- Th, Feb 16 - 6pm
- Fri, Feb 17 - 8:30am
- Fri, Feb 17 - Noon
- Fri, Feb 17 - 4pm
- Fri, Feb 17 - 6pm
- Sat, Feb 18 - 9am
- Sat, Feb 18 - 11am
- Sun, Feb 19 - 2pm

5. Survey: (February)

For those members unable to attend a Listening & Learning Session or those who have more to share following their session, a survey will be provided so that your perspective and questions can be taken into consideration. Survey results will be included with Dr. Gilliam's findings (mentioned above in #4).

6. Discernment Team recommendation and Administrative Council decision (March)

Based on all that will be captured from the Listening & Learning sessions and survey, the Discernment Team will make a recommendation to Administrative Council whether to hold a Church Conference for the purpose of voting on disaffiliation at the March 28th council meeting.

- **If Administrative Council votes FOR holding a Church Conference**, a meeting for church members to vote on disaffiliation would likely be held in late April.
 - **If Church Conference (i.e., all the members of the congregation) votes with two-thirds majority FOR Disaffiliation,**
 - Completed withdrawal agreements and payment would be required no later than May 31st to make Annual Conference agenda.
 - Decision would be ratified at Annual Conference June 21-23, 2023.

- Following Annual Conference ratification, the effective date of Trinity's disaffiliation would be June 30, 2023.
 - Work will continue after disaffiliation to determine Trinity's future as either an independent Wesleyan church or as an affiliate of another Wesleyan denomination.
- **If Church Conference results in a vote AGAINST disaffiliation**, Trinity would remain with the United Methodist Church.
- **If Administrative Council votes AGAINST holding a Church Conference**, Trinity would remain with the United Methodist Church.

The following three pages contain points regarding why Trinity might consider staying with the UMC or leaving. These points are not meant to be a comprehensive list.

Reasons to STAY AFFILIATED with the UMC

1. Historic Connections

- The UMC is an established denomination with a defined reputation worldwide for proclaiming God's love and doing social good through its local church and denominational ministries like UMCOR.
- Trinity has been a Methodist church from our founding. Trinity has been a member of the UMC since the denomination's formation in 1968. Through the UMC, Trinity has long established partnerships with local and global ministries that span decades of investment and impact.
- UMC's structure of pastoral itineracy and appointments allows Trinity to benefit over time from a variety of pastoral skills and experience and the circulation of ideas. Unlike many smaller churches, a church of Trinity's size would have a guaranteed pipeline of pastors.

2. "Big Tent" Biblical Theology

- The UMC denomination has become known for being a "big tent," where Christians can hold a variety of viewpoints, from "traditional" to "progressive," while remaining united in Christ. John Wesley, himself, was known to open the church to ideas, people, and spaces that others often would not.
- The denominational debate over sexuality has existed since the denomination's founding in 1968. While it is widely believed the UMC is on a course to change policies to allow for the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons and the officiation of same-sex weddings in local congregations, it is not a "done deal." Such changes would require approval at a quadrennial General Conference (the next will be in June 2024). Should this occur, it is possible that local churches would still have some agency to decide what happens in their churches.
- Should the Book of Discipline be changed to allow for LGBTQ+ clergy and the officiation of same-sex weddings, speculation is that Annual Conferences and local congregations would still be free to set their own rules regarding these issues in keeping with the "big tent" culture.
- At this time, the perceived lessening of conflict achieved by joining another denomination may be speculative. For example, the Global Methodist Church's Book of Discipline is still in draft form and its governance and policies are still being established.

3. Inclusive Culture

- The UMC is committed to being a welcoming culture for all regardless of where they fall on the theological spectrum, from “traditional” to “progressive.”
- The UMC can reach a broad diversity of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and lifestyles with its “Big Tent” approach to ministry and theology.

4. Financial

- Staying in the UMC would cost nothing additional other than the ordinary annual apportionments we currently pay (around 10% of our General Fund income). Although, with churches currently choosing to disaffiliate, a financial adjustment for remaining churches is possible.
- Staying affiliated avoids the cost of disaffiliation, estimated to be a payment of approximately \$540,000 to the Louisiana Conference (current-plus-two-years’ apportionments and clergy pensions) and legal and rebranding costs.
- Staying affiliated avoids incurring locally some additional costs of pastor benefits (for example, UMC pastors participate in a specific insurance network to bring costs down; retirement). Furthermore, pastor salaries for independent churches reportedly tend to be higher due to the competitive market for pastors.

Reasons to DISAFFILIATE from the UMC

1. New Opportunities

- Trinity would have the opportunity to become an independent Wesleyan congregation or join another Wesleyan denomination more closely aligned with the church we discern God calling us to be.
- Should Trinity disaffiliate and remain independent, Trinity would be free to determine our own governance and policies based on our local culture, mission and vision. Using the current version of the UMC Book of Discipline as a “guide” would mean Trinity would continue to minister and operate the same. Very little change would occur in services and missions.
- Should Trinity disaffiliate and remain independent, Trinity could interview and hire pastors locally allowing us to employ pastors more closely aligned with our local culture, mission, and vision. With several churches disaffiliating and pastors leaving the UMC, along with the number of pastors retiring and there being no new itinerant pastors who will be ordained at the 2023 LA Annual Conference, the pool of available UMC pastors may be of concern.

- Should Trinity disaffiliate, we would be free to seek a denominational affiliation and mission partners aligned with an understanding of, and commitment to, a “traditional” view of scripture and Christian practice.
- Trinity could have fresh connectional opportunities with local and global ministries that could stimulate new growth.

2. Traditional Viewpoints

- Since the denomination’s founding, the UMC Book of Discipline has included language prohibiting the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons and the officiation of same-sex weddings; however, several Bishops and Annual Conferences in the United States have publicly stated that they will not enforce those prohibitions.
- It is believed by many that the UMC is on a course to eventually change its current policies to allow for the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons and the officiation of same-sex weddings in local congregations.

3. Compassionate Culture

- Trinity would be free to maintain a welcoming culture committed to traditional Christian beliefs and practices without the added confusion caused by questions about when and how and why the UMC is considering changes to the beliefs and practices currently in the Book of Discipline.
- Trinity would be free to move on from the long-standing denominational debate over human sexuality to focus on mission and ministry.

4. Financial

- Under current rules, if Trinity votes to disaffiliate by May 2023, the UMC will release all of our land, facilities, endowments and other assets from the “trust clause” (a statement included in legal documents declaring that the property and assets of a local church are held “in trust” for the benefit of the entire denomination), allowing Trinity to control our future direction while retaining all of our local assets.
- Should Trinity disaffiliate and remain independent, we would not have the requirement to pay apportionments and could instead decide locally how our financial resources might be used for God’s work.

Frequently Asked Questions about Discernment and Disaffiliation

1. What is Disaffiliation?

A vote for Disaffiliation means we desire to leave the United Methodist Church (UMC). A vote against Disaffiliation means we desire to stay in the UMC.

2. Why is Trinity United Methodist Church (Trinity) considering Disaffiliation?

There are numerous reasons our church might consider Disaffiliation, including:

1. The possibility that the UMC will change language in the Book of Discipline to allow practicing homosexuals to become pastors and for churches and pastors to officiate same-sex weddings.
2. The fact that some Bishops and Annual Conferences in the United States (though not the Louisiana Annual Conference nor Bishop Harvey) have publicly stated that they will not enforce the current prohibitions in the Book of Discipline regarding homosexuality. Additionally, in 2016 an openly gay female pastor was elected bishop for the UMC's Western Jurisdiction and her successor, a married gay man, was elected in November 2022.

3. Do we have to vote on Disaffiliation?

No. However, with several large churches across the US having disaffiliated, the membership, structure and finances of the denomination will likely see changes. As "traditional" churches leave, the remaining UMC decision-making bodies could become more "progressive" in makeup.

4. What is the current UMC official stance on homosexuality?

The United Methodist Church affirms that sexuality is "God's good gift to all persons" and that "all people are of sacred worth and are equally valuable in the sight of God." Since 1972, the UMC Book of Discipline has affirmed that "the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching." The UMC has also maintained long-standing restrictions regarding practicing homosexual clergy and same-sex weddings. Pastors may not be "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals" and may not conduct ceremonies that celebrate same-sex weddings or unions. Such ceremonies also may not be held on church property.

For more information, see "What is the Church's position on homosexuality?" at

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-what-is-the-churchs-position-on-homosexuality>

5. What are the proposed changes to the UMC stance on homosexuality?

Many proposals have been introduced since the denomination's first General Conference in 1972 and at every quadrennial conference since. Most recently, proposals have involved removing the "incompatibility statement," allowing ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy and permitting pastors and churches to officiate LGBTQ+ weddings.

6. If the rules haven't changed yet and Louisiana is currently enforcing the rules we have, why is Trinity considering Disaffiliation now?

Proceedings of every General Conference since 1972 have become more and more contentious due to opposing views on the subject of human sexuality, and related clergy and bishop disobedience has become more widespread.

Many on both sides of the issues believe that this conflict cannot be resolved, even with the UMC's hopes for fostering a "big tent" denomination. In 2019, Bishop Harvey of the Louisiana Annual Conference cosigned the "Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation" which "propose[d] restructuring the United Methodist Church by separation as the best means to resolve our differences allowing each part of the Church to remain true to its theological understanding, while recognizing the dignity, equality, integrity, and respect of every person."

In 2019, ¶2553 was introduced into the Book of Discipline as a path for churches to disaffiliate and be released from the "trust clause" (a statement included in legal documents declaring that the property and assets of a local church are held "in trust" for the benefit of the entire denomination), allowing departing churches to retain ownership of their land, facilities, endowments and other assets. This provision sunsets on December 31, 2023, but requires ratification at the preceding Annual Conference in June 2023.

In 2021, the Louisiana Annual Conference passed our version of the 2553 plan.

You may read the text of ¶2553 from the Discipline at the following webpage:

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-2553-disaffiliation-over-human-sexuality>

The Louisiana 2553 Process can be found in the 2021 Journal on pages 254-262:

<https://louisiana-email.brtapp.com/files/2021conferencejournalb.pdf>

Note that one change was made from the proposal in this report, as the 45% property assessment was removed. You can see this change in the minutes of the Annual Conference session printed on pages 71-72.

7. Are other churches in the Louisiana Conference considering Disaffiliation?

As of November 2022, 58 of the Louisiana Conference's 500+ churches have voted to disaffiliate, and those votes have been ratified by the Conference. Though we cannot provide an exact count or list of churches, it is our understanding that additional congregations are discerning the disaffiliation prior to Annual Conference in 2023 and the sun-setting of the ¶2553 provision in December 2023.

8. What is the financial cost of Disaffiliation?

If Trinity votes to disaffiliate in May, that same month Trinity will owe approximately \$475,000* to the Louisiana Annual Conference.

This figure was determined by using the process outlined by ¶2553, with additions from the Conference Board of Trustees. Under Louisiana rules, churches disaffiliating under ¶2553 in Louisiana must pay:

1. The remainder of our 2023 apportionments, plus an additional two years of apportionments.
2. Trinity's share of the unfunded pension liability as determined by Wespath (the UMC pension agency) and allocated by the formula developed by the Conference Board of Trustees.
3. Trinity does not owe any past due amounts owed in pastoral pension or health benefits, nor have we taken any loans from the Conference that would require repayment.

Trinity would also need to pay for the legal fees associated with disaffiliation and establishing a new entity, as well as costs associated with rebranding the church and installing new signage.

It is possible that employment costs may increase should Trinity disaffiliate and elect to become an independent church. Specific changes require further study.

*updated on 1.26.23 based on number from District office

9. Should Trinity vote for disaffiliation, how would we pay for it?

Current thinking is that existing church reserves (i.e., the “cushion” from our 2022 operating budget) would be utilized to cover disaffiliation expenses; however, guidance from the Finance Committee would be sought regarding raising funds from the church body specifically for disaffiliation so that cash reserves wouldn’t be completely depleted, particularly not knowing how a vote for disaffiliation might impact annual pledges.

10. If we hold a Church Conference, who can vote?

Any professing member of Trinity at the time a Church Conference is called by the District Superintendent who attends the Church Conference in person is eligible to vote. Per UMC rules, those who are unable to be present cannot submit a proxy vote, nor can anyone vote electronically.

11. What is the voting threshold for Disaffiliation?

At least two-thirds of the professing members who attend the Church Conference must vote to disaffiliate for the measure to pass. While we want as many members as possible to come and vote, there is no minimum number required to reach a quorum. Whoever is present at the meeting constitutes a quorum.

12. What would happen if Trinity votes to Disaffiliate?

If a vote for disaffiliation passes, our Trustees will begin the legal process of transferring all assets into the name of the new church entity we will create. We will also begin exploring our next steps as a church, including whether we affiliate with another denomination or become an independent Wesleyan church. If we disaffiliate, Trinity will continue to serve people in the Ruston area, just as we have always done.

13. What would happen if Trinity votes to stay in the UMC?

If we remain in the UMC, Trinity will continue to serve people in the Ruston area, just as we have always done.

14. What would happen to members who disagree with the results of the vote?

Our hope is that everyone will continue to be a member of Trinity, regardless of the results of a vote. It is understandable, however, that some people will choose to join another church that more closely aligns with their personal views and beliefs.

15. What would happen to our current pastors and staff after a vote?

As Clergy, Pastor Doug will have to have to make his own personal decision whether to remain with the UMC or step away. Pastor Michael, while employed by Trinity at the local

level, is currently in the UMC ordination process and will also have to make a decision regarding his personal affiliation with the UMC.

Our Deacons (Pastors Becky and Mickey) and staff are hired at the local level and, should they wish to remain employed with Trinity, will see no impact to their role. It is possible, though, that there could be an impact to their standing with the Conference.

It is possible that employment costs may increase should Trinity disaffiliate and elect to become an independent church. Specific changes require further study.

16. What are our denominational options if we were to vote to disaffiliate from the UMC?

Most of the churches in Louisiana who are disaffiliating are considering 4 options:

- Independent
- Global Methodist Church (<http://globalmethodist.org>)
- Free Methodist Church, USA (<http://fmcusa.org>)
- Evangelical Methodist Church (<http://emchurch.org>)

17. Will we have to change our name if we disaffiliate?

Yes, but only somewhat. We will no longer be “United” Methodist and must remove all references to the UMC from our signage and church building. However, we can still retain “Trinity” and “Methodist” in our church name.

18. Where can I learn more information?

There are numerous sources of information about the current situation in the United Methodist Church. Please note that not everything you can read on the Internet is helpful or even truthful. While no site is perfect, we recommend investigating the following websites:

- Louisiana Conference – <http://la-umc.org>
- UM News – <http://umnews.org>
- Good News Magazine – <http://goodnewsmag.org>
- Wesleyan Covenant Association – <http://wesleyancovenant.org>

19. Who makes up the Discernment Team and how were they selected?

Discernment Team members, listed below, were appointed by Administrative Council Chairperson Josh Mandrell following extensive prayer, counsel with Pastor Doug and other church leaders, and conversation with each team member. Selection criteria required that individuals be active members of Trinity with a clear heart for serving the Church.

Intentionally, the team is comprised of individuals having a range of views on the matter of disaffiliation for the purpose of ensuring an unbiased, thoughtful approach to the issue.

The group met nearly weekly from mid-August through November to study the issue, understand ¶12553, develop Trinity's discernment process and prepare this informational packet. The team will continue to serve throughout Trinity's discernment process.

- Dawn DeForest: 318-548-6667, dawndeforest@me.com
- Gary Green: 318-245-7189, gsusanbaby@aol.com
- Jay Guillot: 318-243-1955, jguillot@hga-llc.com
- Windham Lee: 334-216-0511, Windham-lee@westrock.com
- Tommy Rogers: 318-884-5197, tommy-rogers@outlook.com
- LeAnn Waldroup: 706-897-6828, leann.russell@gmail.com
- Sarah Warren: 318-245-6105, the3warrens@hotmail.com