



## The Risk of Waiting

Several events have occurred recently that make it imperative for traditional local churches to consider disaffiliating from the UMC now.

General Conference 2022 has been postponed until 2024.

The Global Methodist Church has officially launched.

The Judicial Council's Decision 1444 declared that Annual Conferences as a whole are unable to disaffiliate.

Churches are wondering: Do we need disaffiliation now? Or should we continue in a 'wait and see' posture until 2024? What are the risks of waiting?

Here are some factors to consider.

- **Withdrawn Support for the Protocol** - Many UMC leaders who participated in crafting the Protocol have publicly withdrawn support for the Protocol within the last 2 months, including multiple bishops and some of the most influential centrist leaders. With the Protocol on life support, the opening for truly amicable separation has likely closed and whatever "deal" comes out of 2024 is likely to be much less generous than what is available to us now.
- **Disaffiliation Paragraphs Threatened** - Paragraph 2553 closes at the end of 2023. The Council of Bishops has asked the Judicial Council for a declaratory decision on the appropriateness of utilizing 2548.2. By making this request the bishops have made clear their position that they wish to make the path of departure more restrictive. It is entirely possible that there will be no pathway for disaffiliation at the end of 2023. Furthermore, we are led by bishops who have expressed no motivation to open a new pathway in 2024.
- **Bishop Jones' Gracious Pathway vs Other Bishops' Punitive Pathways** - Bishop Jones and the Texas Annual Conference have worked to extract minimal penalties from disaffiliating churches. Many Bishops are not allowing congregations to file for disaffiliation at all, others are not allowing disaffiliation until 2023, and yet others are charging congregations an asset tax of 25%-50% in order to disaffiliate. Many Bishops have also taken punitive action against traditional churches and pastors. Some bishops have removed pastors from their churches because they aligned with the Wesleyan

Covenant Association. Other bishops and leaders bishops are now questioning whether members of the WCA can continue holding credentials in the UMC. The bishop we receive to replace Bishop Jones when he retires either this September or in January will be more liberal and less friendly toward traditionalists and those churches wanting to leave.

- **Clergy Risk** – With a more liberal bishop and with many, if not most, traditionalists leaving The Texas Annual Conference, the future of the TAC will become similar to that of the UMC – more and more progressive. Bishops in the future will not risk entrusting strong churches to clergy who might move a congregation out of the denomination. Current appointments and future opportunities will look different for traditionalist clergy who are not in full alignment with the progressive path forward.
- **Disaffiliation Together Offers Strength and Leverage** - A growing number of churches have requested their unfunded pension liability number from the conference. If a large number of churches go through this process at the same time, we will be able to support each other with best practices. In addition, these churches will have more strength as they approach the negotiating table concerning financial matters with the conference.
- **Seismic shift in votes to Annual Conference** - A congregation can only leave after a vote of approval from Annual Conference. A fall Annual Conference is being called for this purpose. But after the traditionalist churches, clergy and lay delegates from these churches leave later this fall, the TAC will become overwhelmingly progressive. A local church that decides to wait until Annual Conference 2023 or 2024 might discover that Annual Conference delegates are no longer willing to allow local churches to disaffiliate.
- **Input in GMC Formation** - By completing the disaffiliation process this year we will have representation at the convening conference of the GMC and be able to help in faithfully shaping the emerging denomination.
- **Flipping the question** – Every church can and must choose for itself. Not discussing the question of disaffiliation or not having a vote is a decision. Refusing to act now is deciding to put your church in what is likely to be a more difficult and more vulnerable position later.