



MATTHEWS UNITED METHODIST

## **Our Path Forward: The Future of The United Methodist Church**

**From: Jon Pollack, Carol Hatcher, Chuck Wilson**

**May 25, 2022**

Several months ago, it was announced that the General Conference (GC – the governing body of our denomination) of The United Methodist Church (UMC) had been postponed until 2024. This means that due to the pandemic, the meeting of GC has been postponed 3 times between 2020 and its new projected date of 2024.

This was obviously frustrating news. However, this postponement is necessary due to the global nature of The UMC and the reality that vaccinations are still limited in many areas of the world, especially on the continent of Africa where many faithful United Methodists live. While a virtual gathering might seem to be an alternative, the reality is that reliable internet can be hard to find for folks in the developing world. The security of voting on the crucial matters before the next GC could also be challenging. The option of a 2023 GC was considered, but it was decided that it would not be good stewardship to hold a special session of GC in 2023 and then incur the same costs for the regularly scheduled Conference for 2024. The committee on GC, made up of lay and clergy (not bishops) from across the denomination, made this decision.

Not long after the announced postponement of GC to 2024, The Global Methodist Church, which is a group of traditionalist United Methodists who have been planning for separation from The UMC for some time now, announced that they will launch this new denomination on May 1 of 2022 rather than waiting and launching after the GC 2024. This decision is understandable as everyone is frustrated with the delays in being able to move forward at this point. However, no one planned for a global pandemic, and it's no one's fault for these delays. It just is.

In the wake of these announcements, there has been a great deal of misinformation about all of this and the future of The UMC moving forward. So, we wanted to share some information with you and clear up any misinformation.

First, we want to affirm the reality that even with the possible removal of The UMC *Book of Discipline's* current restrictive language around the ordination of LGBTQ+ persons and the constraints on clergy in performing same-sex weddings, this in no way changes our doctrinal standards which are found in the *Book of Discipline* and cannot be changed at GC. That means that the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith, the General Rules of the church, and more continue as the foundation of our faith. This includes our understanding of the authority of scripture and our commitment to the Lordship of Christ. We mention these two points specifically because numerous public statements have been made that the continuing UMC will not be held to these fundamental commitments. It has been said that those choosing to leave are partly doing so because the authority of scripture is at stake.

This is simply not the case. What is being debated is the interpretation of certain scripture passages and how they have meaning for us today around issues of human sexuality. Differences in the interpretation of scripture is nothing new to the church. Obviously, The UMC has interpreted scriptures related to the role of women in the church, differently from other churches, for many years. However, those differences do not lead us to question the commitment to scriptural authority of those we disagree with. We simply agree to disagree. Those disagreements on scriptural interpretation also do not lead us to question the commitment of others to the Lordship of Christ. Those choosing to leave the church over these differences of scriptural interpretation to level such attacks against those who choose to remain are disingenuous and without merit.

As we know from previous discussions, The UMC has made room for various understandings in interpreting these scriptures and The UMC of the future will continue to do so. The potential removal of the restrictive language that could lead to more full inclusion for LGBTQ+ persons in the life of the church does not mean that we are all going to agree on this. It does mean that MUMC and its pastors have the freedom to offer more inclusive ministry in individual contexts.

Obviously, no final decisions can be made until the meeting of GC in 2024.

In the meantime, for those churches who feel that any such potential change will violate their conscience and values, there is a pathway for disaffiliation that was outlined in the special called 2019 GC. Our Western North Carolina Annual Conference is working with both pastors and churches who have gone through a careful, open discernment process, the steps for which are outlined by the Conference, and is following the GC guidelines for disaffiliation which includes:

- Payment of unpaid apportionments for 12 months immediately prior to disaffiliation,
- Payment of an additional 12 months of apportionments,
- Payment of an amount equal to the Local Church's pro-rata share of the Annual Conference's unfunded pension obligations which is determined by a formula by the Western North Carolina Annual Conference,
- Payment of any unpaid pension, salary, or ministry protection costs,
- Payment of all legal costs related to disaffiliation.

We share that to affirm that the language we have heard used in some circles around "fighting" with the Annual Conference is again not based in reality. There is already a fair, established process for churches that choose to disaffiliate.

We're sure there are currently churches seeking disaffiliation. While you may read other numbers floating around social media, we have learned that there are churches on some lists that are supposedly disaffiliating and had no idea they were on such a list!

As your church leaders, we have every intention of continuing to serve and lead MUMC in the continuing UMC here in the Western North Carolina Conference. We believe in our mission to love God, love each other, and love our neighbors in extraordinary ways. We also believe in the mission of the worldwide UMC, which continues to practice the theology of the open table - where everyone is welcome to find a place and where the grace of Christ is the cornerstone of mission and ministry in Christ's name. Even in this hard season of painful division, The UMC continues to make disciples of Jesus Christ every day. The UMC continues to teach and preach the gospel. The UMC continues to tend to the needs of the sick and the suffering. The UMC continues to serve and care for our neighbors in need and to promote justice in the world. We will respect and bless those who choose to leave, trusting that God uses many forms of church to bless the world even as we continue to seek to bless the world from our own United Methodist theological tradition here in Matthews, NC.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this more, we will do our very best to be available to answer your questions.

**Faithfully yours,**

**Jon Pollack, Servant Leader for the Administrative Council**

**Carol Hatcher, Lay Leader**

**Dr. Charles (Chuck) W. Wilson II, Pastor**

**P.S. On Sunday, June 5, in The Commons, at 9:30 am and 10:45 am, Rev. Amy Coles, Special Assistant to Bishop Ken Carter will be with us.**