



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Charlotte Episcopal Area
WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE

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Dear Clergy and Laity of the WNC Conference

With sadness, The Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church is informing you that the Conference has been sued by [38 churches demanding immediate separation](#) from the United Methodist Church. We are deeply grieved by this, as we seek to be a church united in love and in mission. We cannot comment on particulars in the lawsuit. Nonetheless, we are familiar with the issues at hand. Here are some broad, important thoughts to keep in mind:

The Western North Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church is committed to providing a “gracious exit” for those churches that wish to depart, pursuant to the process adopted at the 2019 General Conference, which is set out in *The Book of Discipline*, paragraph 2553. The Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church, the denomination’s highest judicial body or “court,” has ruled that paragraph 2553 is the only path for churches seeking disaffiliation from the UMC. Despite our efforts to engage these churches in this process, they have refused to follow the *The Book of Discipline*, choosing to file this lawsuit instead.

Since 2019, forty-one churches of all sizes and means in our Conference have followed the *Discipline* and used paragraph 2553 to disaffiliate, living into their connectional obligations. At the time of this statement, sixteen additional churches have voted to enter the disaffiliation process (since the June 2022 session of Annual Conference) and more have expressed interest.

The UMC is a hierarchical and connectional denomination. As a hierarchical church, our governance and obligations originate from our General, Jurisdictional, and Annual Conferences. We are also connectional. Connectionalism is one of the core theological doctrines of John Wesley that weaves the entire denomination together at every level, from the shared system for appointing bishops and clergy, to shared theology, to connected ministries, to holding property in trust, to connectional conferencing and legislative decision-making. What these churches seek is vastly different from our open and transparent process which occurs in church conferences and at our annual conference session. It is an attempt to undermine the core of the connectional commitments all churches and conferences in The UMC have to one another. And, it is outside the bounds of established church law, doctrine and theology.

We ask that, despite their haste, any groups seeking to break away uphold the obligations of and responsibilities of churches seeking “disaffiliation” which were established by the General Conference in 2019, and that they not cause pain, damage or disparage other United Methodist churches, other members in their churches, other pastors, or the Conference. We remain committed to upholding the core tenants of our *Book of Discipline* and rulings of our Judicial Council.

Again, much of this is about fairness and responsibilities churches have to each other. For instance, an abrupt separation creates significant issues that could damage benefits and pensions for retired pastors and their spouses who devoted their lives to service. Another example is the withholding of apportionment funds churches give to support our camps, as well as campus ministries, to natural disaster response projects, to food and homeless ministries, and to vital missions abroad. Without the committed funding from the United Methodist churches in the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, these ministries will no longer be able to flourish.

From the perspective of the Western North Carolina Conference, our doctrinal standards have not changed and will not change, even as we continue on a journey to be a church that serves all people.

In all this, our overarching goal is to move through this process in a spirit where we can support, bless and love each other. A tenet of our faith is that we embrace a Church built through loving relationships rather than uniformity in thought and action. As John Wesley is quoted, "though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?"

Thank you for your faith in Jesus Christ and our connection as United Methodists.

The Peace of the Lord,

+Bishop Ken Carter
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The United Methodist Church