

Johnson City FUMC
Discerning Pathways

Information Meeting

June 4, 2023

What is Discernment?

Dictionary: to perceive and recognize; to show understanding and good judgment.

Bible Dictionary: Discernment is given by God, through his Holy Spirit. It is received through God's word and through the insight of a renewed mind. Discerning believers seek to grow in their understanding and knowledge of God's truth.

Scriptural: Paul's letter to the Philippians 1: 9-11: "*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*"

DISCERNMENT / DISAFFILIATION PROCESS

- Local church Administrative Council votes to enter period of discernment.
- Period of discernment officially begins when District Superintendent is notified in writing.
- Discernment period must be for a period of *at least* six months (it can last longer than six months).
- Enter an intentional time of prayer about discernment.
- Assess the impact of disaffiliation upon the church, community, and Rio Texas Conference, and share a written report with the congregation and District Superintendent.
- Consider how church will deal with various specified practical concerns.
- Develop and make available to the Congregation and Superintendent a plan for either independent operation or affiliation with another denominational entity.

DISCERNMENT / DISAFFILIATION PROCESS (Cont'd)

- Develop a statement of the church's theological and missional foundations in seeking disaffiliation for reasons of conscience "related to human sexuality."
- Hold at least three listening sessions open to all members of the church, *facilitated by the Superintendent or his designee.*
- After the discernment period, the church may have a vote on whether or not to disaffiliate from the UMC. Requires at least 2/3 vote of professing members of the church who are present at the church conference vote. No absentee or proxy votes.
- If there is a vote to disaffiliate, the church must sign a disaffiliation agreement within 10 days of vote. Church must specify a proposed effective date, which must be after a vote of the Rio Texas conference to approve the disaffiliation. All fees must be paid and other requirements met before the Conference will vote on disaffiliation.
- If all requirements met, and the Conference votes to approve, disaffiliation becomes effective on the effective date specified in the disaffiliation agreement.

IMPORTANT DATES

- 3/28/2023** Administrative Council voted to enter a period of discernment.
- 4/10/2023** District Superintendent received written notice of entering period of discernment.
- 5/6/2023** Special meeting of Rio Texas Conference for churches that voted to disaffiliate and completed requirements.
- 6/8-10/2023** Regular scheduled Rio Texas Annual Conference – Corpus Christi.
- 10/10/2023** Earliest date to complete period of discernment.
- Nov-Dec 2023** Possible special Rio Texas Conference meeting for additional churches to disaffiliate.
- 12/31/2023** Deadline to disaffiliate under Book of Discipline ¶ 2553.
- 4/23-5/3/2024** United Methodist General Conference, Charlotte North Carolina
- 12/31/2024** Deadline by Rio Texas Trustees to disaffiliate pursuant to ¶ 2549 under the same terms and conditions of ¶ 2553.

UNITED METHODIST BOOK OF DISCIPLINE (2016)

¶161 Social Principles

C) Marriage—We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. **We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.**

G) Human sexuality . . . We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons need the ministry of the Church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. **The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.** We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. **We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends.** We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

¶ 304. Qualifications for Ordination—1. Those whom the Church ordains shall be conscious of God's call to ordained ministry, and their call shall be acknowledged and authenticated by the Church. . . . In order that The United Methodist Church may be assured that those persons who present themselves as candidates for ordained ministry are truly called of God, the Church expects persons seeking ordination to:

a) Have a personal faith in Christ and be committed to Christ as Savior and Lord.

...

i) Accept that Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation through faith in God through Jesus Christ; be competent in the disciplines of Scripture, theology, church history, and Church polity; possess the skills essential to the practice of ordained ministry; and lead in making disciples for Jesus Christ.

j) Be accountable to The United Methodist Church, accept its Doctrinal Standards and Discipline and authority, accept the supervision of those appointed to this ministry, and be prepared to live in the covenant of its ordained ministers.

...

3. . . . The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist

¶ 613 Responsibilities The [Annual Conference (Rio Texas) Council on Finance and Administration] shall have authority and responsibility to perform the following functions: . . .

19. To ensure that no annual conference board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The UMC "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures. This restriction shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic, nor shall it preclude funding for dialogs or educational events where the Church's official position is fairly and equally represented.

¶ 806.9 Fiscal Responsibilities [of the General Council on Finance and Administration]

. . .
9. [The General Council on Finance and Administration] shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality or violate the expressed commitment of The United Methodist Church "not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends" (¶ 161F). The council shall have the right to stop such expenditures.¹⁸ It shall not limit the Church's ministry in response to the HIV epidemic.

Cost of Disaffiliation

- The full previous 12 months apportionments plus the next 12 months apportionments (our apportionments are currently about \$38,300 per year).
- The full unfunded pension liability as calculated by the Rio Texas Conference.
- As of March 2023, the calculation for our church was \$45,980 apportionments + \$60,045 unfunded pension liability = \$106,025 total.
- The amount will vary with passage of time. It can be affected by how much of the apportionments have already been paid, and fluctuations of the unfunded pension liability due to changes in market conditions. The amount can increase or decrease, but realistically it should range from \$100,000 to \$150,000.

Church Property – The “Trust Clause”

The United Methodist Church requires that legal documents (deeds) for local church property contain certain language called the “trust clause.” Essentially, the Trust Clause states that the local church owns the property “in trust” for the benefit of the United Methodist denomination. The reason for the Trust Clause is to ensure that United Methodist local church property will continue to be used for United Methodist Church purposes. In other words, our church owns its property, but it is subject to a trust clause requiring it to be used for United Methodist Church purposes. For a fuller explanation see Understanding the UMC Trust Clause – Basic Church Administration (church-admin.org).

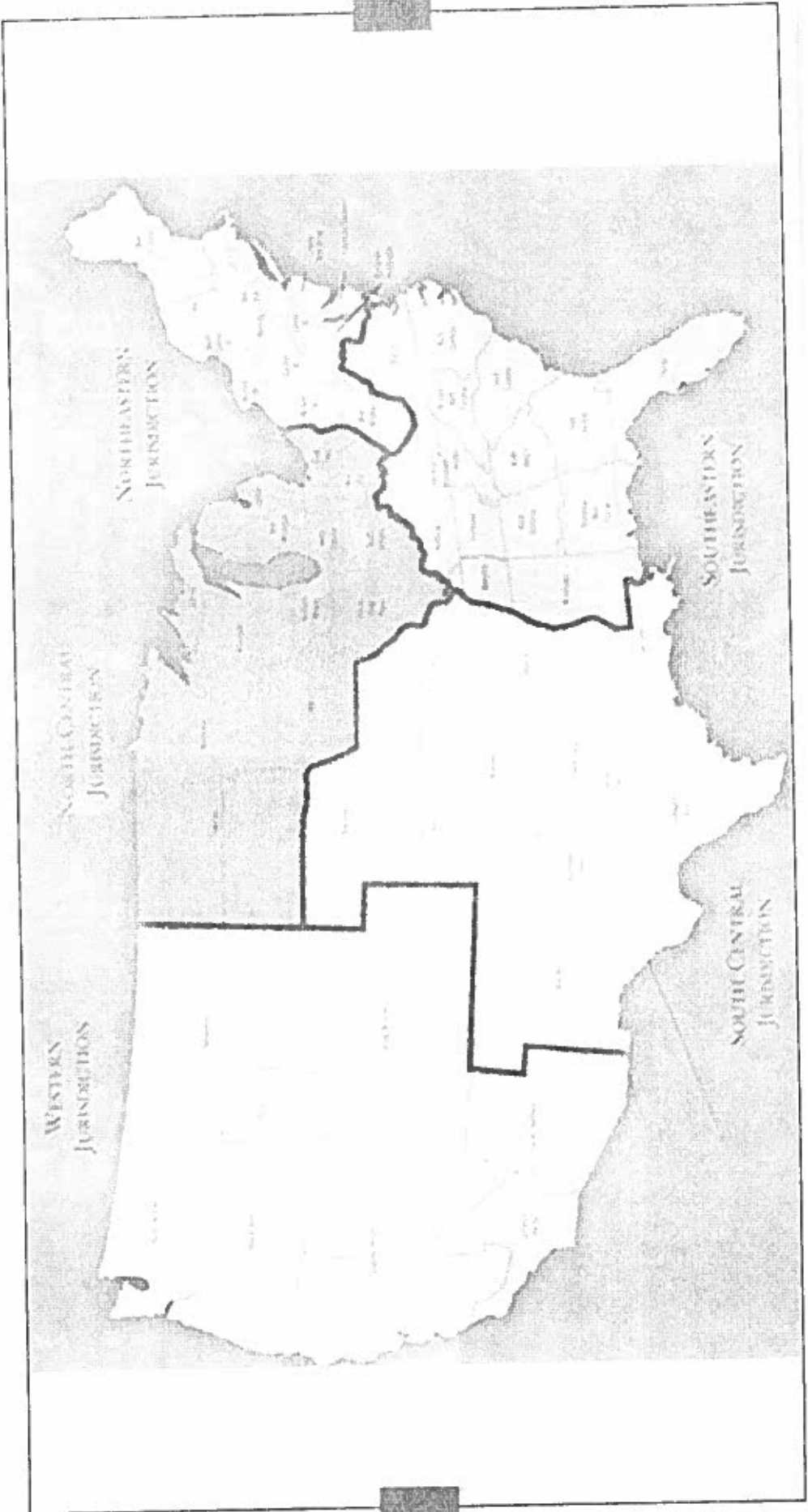
If a church votes to disaffiliate from the UMC and complies with the other requirements, and if the Rio Texas Conference approves the disaffiliation, the Conference will release the church property from the trust clause. If the church decides not to disaffiliate, the church property will continue to be used for United Methodist Church purposes.

Rio Texas Lawsuit

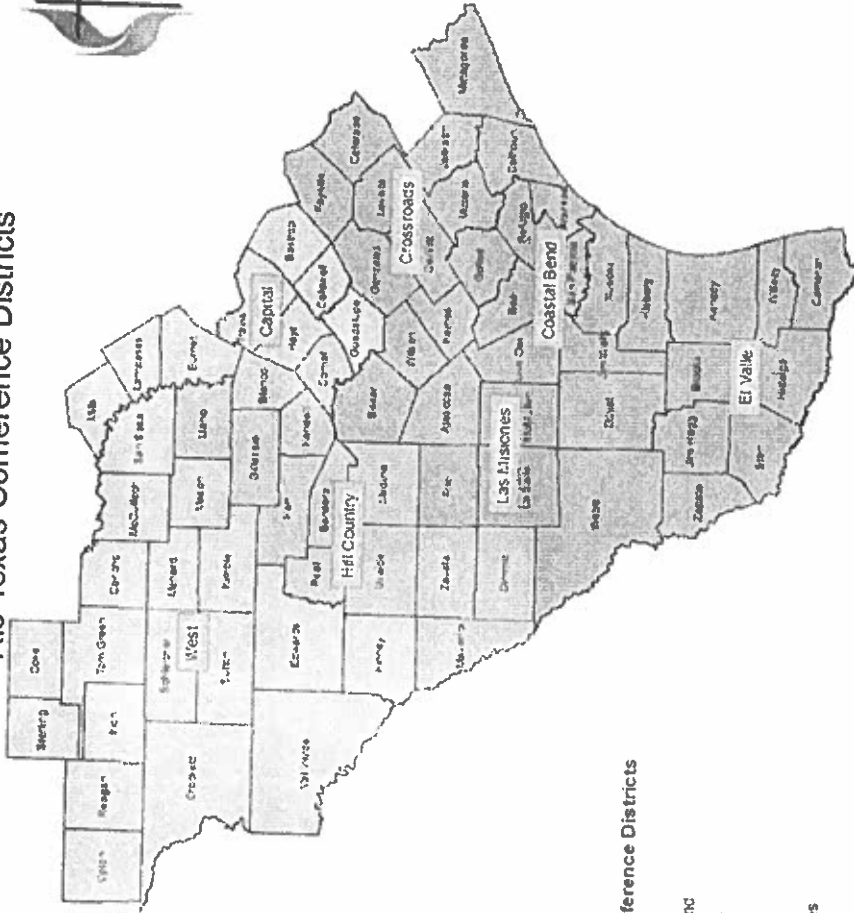
On May 16, 2023, the Rio Texas Conference filed a lawsuit in San Antonio against about 40 churches concerning disaffiliation, because these churches had refused to comply with the disaffiliation process specified by the Book of Discipline and the Rio Texas Conference. These churches had previously jointly hired an attorney to challenge the process. Specifically, on April 26, 2023, the churches' attorney sent a letter to the Rio Texas Conference stating that these churches "have no intention to pay any 'unfunded' pension amount" and that they were "open to paying" only a portion of the apportionments.

Due to the refusal of these churches to comply with the disaffiliation process or meet their financial obligations, the Trustees of the Rio Texas Conference filed the lawsuit for a declaratory judgment of the parties' rights and obligations, and for breach of contract. The Trustees have fiduciary duties towards all churches in the conference, and one purpose of the lawsuit is to protect churches remaining with the United Methodist Church from having to make up for these departing churches refusing to pay their financial obligations.

After the filing of the lawsuit became public knowledge, several churches contacted the Rio Texas Conference and acknowledged that they would comply with the approved disaffiliation process.



Rio Texas Conference Districts



Rio Texas Conference Districts

- Capital
- Coastal Bend
- Crossroads
- El Valle
- Hill Country
- Las Misiones
- West

Bishops

The Bishop for our Rio Texas Conference is elected by the South Central Jurisdiction (see map). Bishops are appointed for life tenure, except that they must retire after age 68, or they may be involuntarily retired early by a 2/3 vote. The Jurisdiction meets every 4 years; it last met in Houston in 2022.

¶ 403: "Bishops are elected from the elders and set apart for a ministry of servant leadership, general oversight and supervision. As followers of Jesus Christ, bishops are authorized to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine and discipline of the Church."

¶ 54: After consultation with the district superintendents, the bishop appoints ministers to the charges within their conference.

¶ 53: The bishop presides over sessions of the annual conference.

Bishops cannot change the Articles of Religion, Doctrinal Standards, or the Book of Discipline.

Robert Schnase has served as bishop of the Rio Texas Annual Conference since September 2016. after serving 12 years as bishop of the Missouri Annual Conference. Prior to his election as bishop in 2004, Schnase served for 15 years as senior pastor of First United Methodist Church, McAllen, Texas.

United Methodist Church – Human Sexuality Issues*

- 1972 – UMC added to the Book of Discipline: “homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth, though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian doctrine.”
- UMC also officially prohibits the blessing of same-sex marriages by its clergy or in its churches.
- UMC officially prohibits “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from being ordained or appointed as ministers.
- Over the years since 1972, some ministers have been defrocked for coming out as openly gay or otherwise disciplined for officiating same-sex marriages. Others have avoided discipline.
- The 2008 General Conference again decided to retain the current provisions related to homosexuality.
- In 2015, the Connectional Table, an agency of the UMC, proposed a localized option that would permit ministers to officiate same-sex weddings and permit conferences to ordain openly gay clergy. However, this was rejected by 3/4 of the delegates at the 2016 General Conference.
- After 2016, several conferences voted in favor of non-discrimination clauses, which effectively allowed openly gay clergy. Some conferences passed resolutions expressly upholding the UMC positions on homosexuality. None of these conferences are in the South Central Jurisdiction.*

United Methodist Church – Human Sexuality Issues (Cont'd)

- Some other jurisdictions and conferences have since ordained some openly gay clergy.
- In 2016, the Western Jurisdiction elected an openly lesbian bishop. In 2017, the UMC Judicial Council ruled that a married lesbian bishop and those who consecrated her violated UMC church law on marriage and homosexuality. However, the Judicial Council also ruled that it did not have jurisdiction or authority to overturn her election or to remove her from the assignment. In 2022, the Western Jurisdiction elected a second openly gay bishop.
- In 2018, the Council of Bishops proposed allowing individual pastors and conferences to decide whether to ordain openly gay clergy or allow same-sex weddings. However, this proposal required approval by the General Conference. Another plan, called the Traditional Plan, called for upholding the Book of Discipline policies on homosexuality and would allow for stricter enforcement of church law.
- In February 2019, a special called session of the General Conference was held to consider these proposals. The Traditional Plan was adopted by a vote of 438-384 (53%-47%).
- The 2019 General Conference also adopted a disaffiliation plan that provides guidelines for congregations that wish to leave the UMC “for reasons of conscience” regarding issues of human sexuality. This disaffiliation plan is now ¶ 2553 of the Book of Discipline.

Other Thoughts

- The UMC is NOT altering its doctrine to deny the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, salvation through Christ alone, or any other doctrinal standards. These are bedrock beliefs of the UMC and are protected by the UMC Constitution. There are no petitions to make such changes at the General Conference. Moreover, to make such changes would require a 3/4 vote of the General Conference, followed by a 3/4 vote of all annual conferences of the UMC. See ¶ 17, 18, 59, 104. It's simply not happening.
- Even if the current provisions concerning human sexuality are repealed, PASTORS AND CHURCHES WOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO CONDUCT OR HOST SAME SEX WEDDINGS. There are no such proposals for the General Conference. Individual churches and pastors decide which weddings to perform or host.
- It is theoretically possible, but extremely unlikely, that our church would be assigned an openly gay pastor. If a church indicates this would be a serious problem, the conference bishop would most likely not assign our church such a pastor. The conference is not in the business of disrupting its churches.

Finally!!

Questions?

Links: [Rob Renfroe – Issues with UMC and support for Global Methodist Church: 1. The United Methodist Church is Divided and Dividing – YouTube.](#)
[Adam Hamilton – Response to Rob Renfroe and support for UMC - Adam Hamilton Responds to Rob Renfroe: Why UMC? – YouTube.](#)

Remember, we are in an intentional time of prayer. Please keep the UMC, our church, and the discernment committee in your prayers.

Prayer of Discernment: *Dear Lord, we pray that our love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help us determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ we may be pure and blameless, having produced a harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God, Amen.*