

## Questions and Answers derived from Bishop Héctor's meeting with UNY clergy re: disaffiliation:

- 1.) **Question: The church that I'm serving for voted to disaffiliate. Because the State will likely not recognize the disaffiliation for up to six months, does the church continue to pay the health benefits through the Upper New York Annual Conference and will I still be appointed here and paying down the bills?**

**Bishop's Answer:** The short answer is yes. The disaffiliation is not final until all steps are completed, and the State of New York approves the property transfer. And yes, you will still be appointed as a United Methodist clergy to your current congregation until the disaffiliation is finalized.

- 2.) **Question: Do I lose my ordination if I disaffiliate?**

**Bishop's Answer:** You can ask for your ordination to be transferred to another denomination if it is a denomination that is in full communion or recognized by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church.

If someone decides to withdraw from The United Methodist Church, they will have to surrender at least their certificate of membership as a full member of The United Methodist Church. As far as surrendering their ordination, in the end, it's up to the other body whether they will accept them or not.

- 3.) **Question: Is there still room in The United Methodist Church for someone who is moderate or leans to the right? And if we are moderate, leaning to the right, will we be forced to abandon our convictions?**

**Bishop's Answer:** I will answer this question on two levels. First, for here, in Upper New York and then I'm going to reflect on your question about what it means to be a United Methodist.

From my personal perspective as your bishop, my answer to your question is, yes! As I have been saying since Day 1 when I got here is that my vision of unity includes us honoring our differences and creating holy spaces for disagreements, in that we do that in a healthy way. I will never appoint a pastor to a church where there is not a theological match on sensitive matters like this one. I would never ask you to be in ministry in a congregation that doesn't align with your beliefs and values when it comes to human sexuality – that would do harm to you, to the congregation, the community, and to the witness of the church. As your bishop, I will never ask you to do anything that goes against your beliefs and values.

I'm not asking people to turn left or right. I'm inviting people to move forward together, understanding that if we keep our faith in Christ at the center of our experience as United Methodists, there will always be ways to work through our differences. That's my commitment to you and every clergy in The United Methodist Church.

Now in terms of our denomination... We never know what will happen in the future, or what the General Conference might decide. What I can say to you today is that currently, there is no legislation to be considered by General Conference, for that matter, that would force conservative clergy to do things that go outside of their values when it comes to human sexuality. I know there's some folks that are saying that that's the case. That's not true.

What we're seeing today in the form of the heated debates and divisions, in my humble opinion, is not a movement of the center of The Church. It's a movement of the extremes of The Church. I still believe that at the center is most of the people who call themselves United Methodists.

- 4.) **Question: If a church is in the process of disaffiliation and ends up being voted on at the October Special Session, it will be unlikely for the State of New York to have an opportunity to decide on the disaffiliation until next year. Will the church by default then miss the 2023 deadline?**

**Bishop's Answer:** My understanding is that our Board of Trustees are aware of how this process is playing out, and for churches that are ratified at the October Special Session, their intentions will be honored by the Board of Trustees. We are sensing and hearing from the State of New York that things might start to speed up because they were not ready for this at the beginning. It seems that they're getting better at looking at these requests. But if the case was that it extends beyond December, my understanding is that our Board of Trustees will honor them.

- 5.) **Question: Theoretically, if a church disaffiliates in January 2024 and the pastor is not yet sure whether to disaffiliate, do they immediately get a cross-denominational appointment or do they wait until the July 1 appointment season and if so, will they receive compensation in the meantime?**

**Bishop's Answer:** If this were a scenario, you would be compensated until the end of your appointment. We feel that's fair and the right thing to do because we covenant for a one-year appointment.

We can always talk about an appointment to another denomination if one appointment is available for you, and again, we'll follow the processes for full communion, or for the denominations that The United Methodist Church recognizes.

- 6.) **Question: Whether a church decides to disaffiliate or not, what is a pastor to do if they need longer to discern whether they are going to stay or go? What is their process?**

**Bishop's Answer:** The steps are outlined in our *Book of Discipline*, in paragraph 360. For clergy who want to withdraw their membership from The United Methodist Church, basically, they need to let the church, the episcopal office, and the Conference Secretary know their intent and then surrender their Certificate of Membership. I am available, as are district superintendents, to converse one-on-one with clergy that are still discerning.

- 7.) **Question: What is the effect on the clergy's Retiree Health insurance if they disaffiliate?**

**Bishop's Answer:** My understanding is that any benefits that is provided by the general denomination that has been accrued over the years of service are available to retired clergy. If there is any Upper New York specific benefit being provided as a retired clergy in full connection with the denomination, those would not continue.

**8.) Question: Will a church be penalized if they go through the discernment process and can't decide?**

**Bishop's Answer:** Definitely, no. Also let me emphasize that nobody is being asked or forced into the disaffiliation process. I am not forcing anyone. District Superintendents are not forcing anyone. Nobody is being asked or forced into a decision on this matter. Whoever is saying that – is lying. The discernment process is available for congregations that want to explore disaffiliation.

If a congregation that completes the disaffiliation discernment process decides to remain in The United Methodist Church, they will work with their District Superintendent to clarify the issues and how to better move forward in our ministry together.

**9.) Question: When it comes time for a church conference to vote on disaffiliation, constituent members are not voting members, correct?**

**Bishop's Answer:** According to Paragraph 2553 in the *Book of Discipline*, only professing members are eligible to vote at the church conference.