

Cokesbury FAQ

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Listening & Conversation Team Members

Mr. Dusty Fisher – Administrative Council Chairperson
Mrs. Jane Nelson – Chair of Staff-Parish Relations
Mrs. Cathy Sowell – Church Lay Leader
Mr. Roger Silverthorne – Chairperson of Finance
Mr. Ralph Lockhart – Chairperson of Trustees
Mr. Jim Van Sickle – Lay Delegate to Annual Conference
Mrs. Frances Wilkinson – Chairperson of Missions
Mr. Everett Lucas – Member at Large
Mr. Sandy Sowell – Lay Delegate to Annual Conference

Upcoming Conversation & Coffee in the Atrium

Wednesday, May 10, 6PM & Thursday, May 11, 11AM

Saturday, May 20, 10AM

Wednesday, May 24, 6PM & Thursday, May 25, 11AM

1. What is discernment?

The United Methodist Church defines a specific process for how churches can explore disaffiliation.

Discernment is the initial step.

For our church, discernment means seeking God's will for Cokesbury Church towards the best way forward for our church family to continue its historical mission of bringing Christ to people and people to Christ:

- To remain in the United Methodist Church denomination,
- or to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church denomination

2. What is the basic issue?

Since the General Conference in 1972, the United Methodist denomination has been involved in an ongoing and growing conflict. This conflict intensified after the 2019 Special Called General Conference. Because of this growing division, a theologically diverse group of United Methodist leaders developed a legislative proposal to allow an amicable separation from the denomination. This legislation was to be voted on at the 2020 General Conference, which was postponed several times, and most recently has been postponed until 2024. The result is a continuing escalation of conflict within the denomination.

The 2019 Special Called General Conference adopted paragraph ¶2553 of the *Book of Discipline* which states: “Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the *Book of Discipline* related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues.”

3. Why are we doing this (now)?

The 2019 Special Called General Conference provided a process for local churches to disaffiliate, known as ¶2553. This process allows for a church to retain its properties and assets while allowing the membership to be removed from the UMC. This process has a sunset date of December 31, 2023.

The process to disaffiliate requires that a request be submitted to the District Superintendent and to be approved by the Annual Conference. Prior to submitting such a request, a local United Methodist church must have gone through a period of discernment with the congregation to determine if that is the correct course of action for that congregation. We want to be sure we have ample time for Godly discernment, discussion and prayer within our congregation.

4. What will we be if we aren't UMC?

This congregation would have the option of joining another Methodist denomination or to pursue a future as an independent church.

5. In the event that Cokesbury Church would choose to leave the United Methodist Church, what, if anything, would change at Cokesbury?

While it is impossible to know the full impact that leaving the UMC would have on our congregation, we can speculate based on the anatomy of our church today. Worship would remain much the same (but with no United Methodist hymnals and other UMC-specific articles, etc.). All persons would continue to be welcome to join the community of faith at the “new” church. Once the disaffiliation process has been completed, our property and assets would be under the complete control of our local church body and not the Alabama West Florida Annual Conference. We would no longer be able to use the “Cross and Flame” symbol. It would be necessary to drop “United” from our church name. The “new church” will be completely disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church denomination and all of its connections.

6. Is Cokesbury Church still welcoming those in the LGBTQ+ community?

Yes. Cokesbury Church views all people as individuals of sacred worth. Therefore, everyone is invited to participate in worship as lay congregants or in ministry programs as lay participants. We extend welcome, grace and respect to all who call Cokesbury their church home.

7. What will it cost?

The dollar amount required to be paid is provided by the Alabama West Florida Conference. The current amount is ~\$432K. There would also be some additional expenses to make name changes to legal documents (e.g., Articles of Incorporation, ByLaws, deed, etc.)

Additional breakdown that follows is provided for information:

As of January 2023, below information taken from AWF Conference Dashboard for CUMC:

Total Minimum CUMC Disaffiliation liability to AWFC:.....\$432,034.49

Pension Liability:\$135,410.41

plus Post Retirement Medical:.....\$146,394.08

plus Two Years of Apportionment: . \$150,230.00

--Our current AWFC apportionment is \$75,115 annually or \$6,259.58 per month.

--This year, we have been paying half of the apportionment or \$3,129.79 monthly (we are projected to have paid \$37,557.50 at the end of 2023).

--If we borrow \$400,000 for 10 years at 5.75%, we estimate that the payments would be \$4,390.77 each month.

8. What will we keep (property)?

With a properly executed Disaffiliation Process and Agreement, Cokesbury would have the right to retain all of its real and personal, tangible and intangible property.

9. What covenants do the leaders make?

From the UMC Book of Worship pp. 688-689

- It is your task to proclaim by word and deed the gospel of Jesus Christ, to lead persons to faith in Jesus Christ, and to conform your life in accordance with the gospel.
Remember that you are called to serve rather than to be served, to proclaim the faith of the Church and no other, to look after the concerns of Christ above all.
- So that we may know that you believe yourselves to be called by God
- and that you profess the Christian faith, we ask you:

- Do you trust that you are called by God to the life and work of representative ministry in the Church?
- Do you believe in the Triune God and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?
- Are you persuaded that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain all things necessary for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and are the unique and authoritative standard for the church's faith and life?
- Will you be faithful in prayer, in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures, and with the help of the Holy Spirit continually rekindle the gift of God that is in you?

Book of Worship p. 695

- In covenant with other elders, will you be loyal to the United Methodist Church, accepting its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline, defending it against all doctrines contrary to God's Holy Word, and accepting the authority of those who are appointed to supervise your ministry?

10. How do we pray about this?

The following prayer has been provided by some thoughtful and devoted Cokesbury Church members:

Prayer Seeking Guidance

Father God, we thank you for this day. Father, you are the same today as you were yesterday and as you will be tomorrow. Since the beginning of mankind, you sought to have a relationship with your creation. Father, today we pray for discernment. Open our eyes, our ears and our hearts as we come to search your will. We pray that the Holy Spirit that indwells within us will give us a peace beyond understanding to know precisely when something is your will, and when something is not. Lord, we pray for one another and we pray for grace filled conversation. Help us to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit to feel your presence and help us make the right decisions for ourselves and your church, Cokesbury. We want to be obedient to your call in our lives and we know that we can trust your guiding hand. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.