

## PROS OF STAYING WITH THE UMC

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The Pew Research Center estimates that nearly one-third of people raised in the Christian faith currently leave the religion before turning 30 years old, and an additional seven percent do so after that age. If those rates continue, Pew projects that 46% of Americans would identify as Christian by 2070 and those with no religious affiliation would stand at about 41%<sup>i</sup>.

Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church is on the move. We have had 102 new members join the church since January 2021. We have a warm and loving congregation which seeks to grow in faith and Christian fellowship as we pursue our lifetime journey for God's will. Wesley Memorial has been part of three Methodist denominations up to this point in its history. The Wesley Memorial United Church was formed right after the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1844. We joined in 1856. We then became part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South until 1939; the Methodist Church until 1968; and then, the United Methodist Church from that time until the present. For over a half century, the UMC has built a recognizable reputation in the United States and globally, a reputation that is trusted and respected. Worldwide, people recognize the United Methodist Cross and Flame, a symbol of Christian love and witness. We have a long history of supporting small churches, inner city churches, rural churches, and many other forms of church, as well as facilitating local ministry in small and rural churches. The United Methodist Church also has a long history of funding connectional ministries across the globe that have made and disciplined believers. We expect to continue as we share the resources God had entrusted to us. The UMC espouses a broad tent perspective as it relates to clergy and local church beliefs so that pastors and churches can preach and teach views that fall from one end of the theological spectrum to the other, from very conservative to very progressive.

Our founder, John Wesley, coined the phrase "agree to disagree". Those who choose to remain in the United Methodist Church state that they value our diversity of thought and life, and seek to negotiate the changes necessary to contextualize ministry in today's world<sup>ii</sup>.

Our Church now faces the decision as to whether to remain with the United Methodist Church, or to disaffiliate from the Conference and join the GMC, become independent, or pursue affiliation with another entity.

Many of us have grown up in the United Methodist Church. Our children have been born and educated here, and were married here. We have held funerals for parents and other relatives and friends who have passed. There is a strong tradition of faith and family that resides in the United Methodist Church. Wesley Memorial has deep roots in the United Methodist Church, and

accordingly, strong traditions and scriptural beliefs that join us and those who went before us in this church. We are a financially sound church.

In 2019, a group of bishops and other United Methodist leaders reached an agreement that would maintain the UMC but allow traditional congregations to separate into a new denomination. This was published as the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.” (See Discernment Team paper on “Why do Traditionalists feel they need to leave the UMC instead of Progressives”). In that context, the Global Methodist Church was founded in May of 2022 and many Methodist Churches have disaffiliated from the UMC and are joining the GMC. Additionally, now more than one-quarter of those who proposed the Protocol say they can, in good faith, no longer support this proposal. The General Conference for the UMC has been delayed until 2024, and, thus, uncertainty continues<sup>iii</sup>.

The Global Methodist Church is newly formed and began operations on May 1, 2022. They are a 501c(3) registered non-profit and have a book of discipline. They have hundreds of clergy and churches that have already affiliated and more still in the process of joining the GMC. As with many startup churches, there are many unknowns about how the church may actually function and thrive as time passes<sup>iv</sup>.

The purpose of this paper is simply to identify certain issues that would encourage us to stay with the UMC. A paper on this subject prepared by STAYUMC, which arose from a church in Alabama discusses many of these issues and can be found at

<https://www.stayumc.com/concerns/>. A brief summary of some of the points are as follows:

1. There are many uncertainties about the GMC and the ultimate cost of withdrawal from the UMC.
2. If Wesley Memorial remains in the United Methodist Church, we will only have to pay our usual yearly apportionments. Those apportionments, as set by the Western North Carolina Conference, would be one hundred eighty-two thousand six hundred and fifty dollars (\$182,650) for the year 2022, and then for the next year, 2023, the apportionment would have to be made in the amount of one hundred sixty-nine thousand three hundred thirty-three dollars (\$169,333). They would be payable in each of the years incurred if remaining United Methodist. If we disaffiliate, we pay the cost for 2022 and 2023 as a lump sum. If we remain with the UMC, we eventually pay unfunded pensions, but again, it's on a year-to-year basis, and not a lump sum payment. Additionally, we would pay any unfunded pension liability, if we were to leave, as a withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its *pro rata* share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. Those funds presently are not yet known<sup>v</sup>.

3. The Cross and Flame will stay with the UMC and thus no signage, name tags, or permanent materials will have to be updated if we remain with the United Methodist Church.
4. Our church properties will remain under trust ownership of the United Methodist Church as they have been historically.
5. While we realize that many traditional Methodist Churches may disaffiliate and that may lessen the power of the more traditional voices in the General Conference regarding the 2019 “Traditional Plan” and matters regarding the governance structure, we can continue our fight for traditional methodism, values, scriptural interpretations, and an improved system of governance. The Progressives have been clear that they will continue to push for changes in the Book of Discipline to revise rules that are applicable to the LBGTQ+ communities.

<sup>i</sup> The Wall Street Journal, Wednesday, September 14, 2022, Vol. CCLXXX No. 63 at page A2.

<sup>ii</sup> “Why I am not leaving the United Methodist Church”. Rev. Steve West, February 17, 2020. <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/why-im-not-leaving-the-united-methodist-church#gsc.tab=0>.

<sup>iii</sup> “Protocols Day has passed, some negotiators say.” June 8, 2022. <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/protocols-day-has-passed-some-negotiators-say>.

<sup>iv</sup> “What are the big concerns? What those withdrawing from the UMC to form a new Methodist Denomination may not be telling you.” <https://www.stayumc.com/concerns/>

<sup>v</sup> See Discernment Team paper on “What is the Financial Cost of Disaffiliation”.