

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

General

- **Who made the decision for Mount Pisgah to begin the process of discernment regarding our future with the United Methodist Church?**
 - A majority of the Church Council voted on June 23, 2022 to begin a discernment process to explore the possibility of disaffiliation from the UMC. While this was the day the Church Council voted, the topic of discernment and disaffiliation had been discussed at several other Church Council meetings. This decision was not made lightly nor without prayer, significant discussion, and training for the Church Council members on the discernment process.
- **What is the role of the Church Council and what is the composition?**
 - As stated in Para. 252 in the UMC Book of Discipline, the Church Council, is responsible for providing for the administration of its organization and temporal life and shall be amenable to and function as the administrative agency of the charge conference. It is also responsible for envisioning, planning, implementing and annually evaluating the mission and ministry of the church. Members of the Church Council are comprised of the Chairs of all ministry areas at Mount Pisgah, including the Pastor Parish Relations Committee, Finance Committee, Board of Trustees, and Nominations Committee. It also includes the district and church Lay Leaders and delegates to the Annual Conference.
- **Why did the Church Council make this decision?**
 - The United Methodist denomination is already experiencing the disaffiliation of some churches. The disaffiliation of other churches seems inevitable. The current process for Mount Pisgah to disaffiliate expires December 31, 2023 based on changes made at the last General Conference in 2019. However, decisions need to be made by both Church Council and the professing members of Mount Pisgah prior to December 2022 in order to inform the NGC of our intentions to be included for official disaffiliation approval at the June 2023 Annual Conference should the decision be made to disaffiliate.
- **What is “disaffiliation” from the United Methodist Church (UMC)?**
 - “Disaffiliation” is a process whereby a United Methodist Church can separate from the United Methodist Church Denomination while keeping its property and assets. Since Mount Pisgah is a United Methodist Church, if we want to separate from the denomination, this process is required.
- **Has Mount Pisgah or its leadership decided to separate or disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church (UMC)?**
 - No. The decision to disaffiliate from the UMC is a congregational one and requires a vote by professing members of the congregation who are present and have taken a ballot at a specially called in-person church conference. We have decided to begin a *period of discernment*, or a *process of discernment*, with the congregation to determine our future course of action for Mount Pisgah.
- **Would anything change at Mount Pisgah because of a disaffiliation from the UMC?**
 - Everything you know and love about Mount Pisgah would continue as usual. Worship would remain the same. Our Mount Pisgah in Spanish ministry would continue to thrive and grow. Our Atlanta Indian Prayer Fellowship would continue to conduct vital discipleship. Our plans to reach out to the younger persons in our community would continue as planned. All persons would continue to be welcome to join the community of faith at Mount Pisgah. Our property and assets would be under the complete control of our local church body. We would hire our own senior pastor and all other pastors. We would no longer be able to use the “Cross and Flame” symbol. It would be necessary to drop “United Methodist” from our church name, but we could retain the name “Mount Pisgah” or “Mount Pisgah Methodist”.
- **Has Mount Pisgah ever been faced with this kind of discernment process before in considering denominational affiliation?**
 - Yes. In our 191 year history there have been several seasons of discernment that resulted in Mount Pisgah choosing to be affiliated over the years with four different Methodist denominations: the Episcopal Methodist Church (1831); the Episcopal Methodist Church South (1865); the Methodist Church (1939); and finally, the United Methodist Church (1968).

- **Why is Mount Pisgah evaluating the process of disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church?**
 - It is no secret that the United Methodist Denomination has been involved in an on-going and intensifying conflict. This conflict intensified after the 2019 General Conference. A theologically diverse group developed a proposal to allow amicable separation to occur known as the “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation.” This legislation was to be voted on at the 2020 General Conference. The 2020 General Conference was postponed several times and most recently has been postponed/cancelled until 2024. The result is a continuing escalation of the conflict within the denomination. A number of churches have already disaffiliated, and it seems inevitable that others will follow.
 - While the conflict stems from a deep theological division, much of the focus has been on performing same-sex marriages and the ordination of clergy who are professed, active homosexuals. However, the issues that divide our denomination are much deeper and more complex, and include the Authority of Scripture, the lack of regard to following the current order outlined in the Book of Discipline, and the lack of accountability among the leadership in the UMC.
- **Why have I not heard more about this until now?**
 - The decision to evaluate disaffiliation is a consequential one of grave importance to the church, and it is a process that has changed and evolved over the course of the 3 years since it became a possibility for UMC churches through the action of the 2019 General Conference. The Mount Pisgah Executive Committee has been carefully monitoring the guidance and situation in the UMC to ensure that we do not find ourselves in a position of non-compliance with our denominational governance while faithfully moving forward with Mount Pisgah’s stated mission of “Making disciples of Jesus Christ, here, there, and everywhere.” With a recommendation from the Executive Committee, the action by the Church Council to request that Mount Pisgah begin the process of discernment regarding disaffiliation took on a sense of urgency due to a deadline to submit the request or to lose the opportunity to do so.
- **Why are we acting now?**
 - As stated at the June 2-4, 2022 North Georgia Annual Conference Session, the process to disaffiliate requires that a request to disaffiliate be submitted to the District Superintendent between January 1, 2023 and February 28, 2023 for disaffiliation to be approved by the Annual Conference in June 2023. 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 and prayer within our congregation.
- **What happens next in the process of discernment regarding disaffiliation?**
 - On June 23, 2022, the Church Council voted to officially begin the process of discernment regarding disaffiliation. We are following a process in accordance to Paragraph 2553 of the UMC Book of Discipline (<https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Paragraph+2553+-+2016+Book+of+Discipline+Errata.pdf>) as implemented by the North Georgia Annual Conference. If the Church Council discerns this Fall (2022) that having such a vote is the will of the congregation, we will have a congregational vote regarding disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church during a called Church Conference for all professing members of Mount Pisgah in either March or April 2023.
- **What happens following the Church Conference?**
 - If the Church Council decides to hold a Church Conference to vote on disaffiliation and if two-thirds of those present and voting professing members approve of disaffiliation, the Mount Pisgah Trustees will enter into an “agreement” with the Conference Board of Trustees of the North Georgia conference of the UMC.
 - This agreement will spell out the details and legalities of moving forward. The agreement will involve a financial cost to leave the denomination. The cost includes Mount Pisgah’s share of the North Georgia Conference’s unfunded pension liability for clergy, currently retired and active. Per the terms of the disaffiliation legislation passed by the 2019 General Conference it also includes two years of the apportionments we pay annually to the North Georgia Conference. These payments honor a system which Mount Pisgah has been a part of for a long time. As part of the RISE initiative, Mount Pisgah has funds available to cover these costs without compromising any of our current activities.

- Following this process, Mount Pisgah will become an independent church, not connected to a denomination, with the possible option of joining another denomination at a later date. This is a second decision to be made and cannot be made until a decision to disaffiliate has been voted and approved by the Annual Conference.

Human Sexuality – Paragraph 2553

<https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Paragraph+2553+-+2016+Book+of+Discipline+Errata.pdf>

- **Book of Discipline ¶ 2553. Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality—**
 1. *Basis--* 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 which follow.
- **What is our stance on same sex marriage and ordination of self-avowed and practicing homosexuals?**
 - *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* has been the same on this matter since 1972, and yet it is disregarded by progressive clergy and congregations across the denomination with no accountability or enforcement.
 - Paragraph 304.3 of *The Discipline* says, “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 Church.”
 - Mount Pisgah firmly believes in the authority of scripture and will continue to follow the *Book of Discipline* in adherence to the authority of Scripture regarding marriage (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-5) and sexual practices outside of marriage (Romans 1:26-27, Leviticus 18:22).
- **Does Mount Pisgah welcome homosexual persons at our church?**
 - Absolutely! Mount Pisgah 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 Mount Pisgah their church home.

Voting

Who can vote? Who is a Professing Member?

- Only “professing members” of Mount Pisgah can vote. Professing members are those who have officially joined Mount Pisgah and includes students who have gone through Confirmation and taken the vows of membership. The final decision to disaffiliate from the UMC or remain UMC is determined by a 2/3 vote of all professing members attending the in-person Called Church Conference who have taken a ballot. Any ballot taken and returned without a clearly defined vote will be considered a “No” vote to disaffiliate, which translates that this ballot is considered as a vote to remain in the UMC.

If I’m a member, do I have to be present in-person to vote?

Yes.

If I’m not a member, can I vote? How do I find out if I’m a member?

No. Send inquiries to tpadmin@mountpisgah.org.

Can I get more information before the vote?

Yes, Mount Pisgah will be holding “church family” style meetings and discussions in the Fall. When these are scheduled, they will be advertised in the church bulletin, during worship announcements, via e-mail, and on the website. Please plan to attend to have your questions answered.

What happens if Mount Pisgah doesn’t disaffiliate?

If Mount Pisgah doesn’t disaffiliate, it will remain a United Methodist Church, including all property and assets remaining in trust with the North Georgia Conference.

Pastors and Staff

Where do our pastors stand on this issue?

Appointed UMC clergy will use their own discernment process to determine their own decision. The Mount Pisgah clergy team joins with the congregation in the current period of discernment; they are in careful consideration and study of the options.

How will the church staff be impacted?

Employment for non-clergy staff will not be impacted.

If Mount Pisgah disaffiliates from the UMC, how will it be appointed a pastor?

There are 70 churches in North Georgia that disaffiliated from the UMC at this year's North Georgia Annual Conference session. It is anticipated that there will be additional churches that will follow since the postponement of General Conference until 2024. These churches are putting together pools of potential pastoral candidates. If Mount Pisgah chooses to affiliate with one of the new denominations, they will also have candidates available. Additionally, in either case, Mount Pisgah will select its own senior pastor as well as the other pastors.

Finance, Property, and Legal

How will Mount Pisgah remain financially viable, both now and in the future?

Mount Pisgah will remain financially viable through God's continued grace and your continued generosity. The financial obligations associated with disaffiliation in the North Georgia Conference require (1) payment in full of two years apportionments (current apportionment payments are \$310K annually), and 2) payment in full of the unfunded pension liability (this figure is calculated quarterly). These costs are easily manageable and are funded through the current operating budget and reserves from the RISE initiative. Mount Pisgah does not receive any funding from the North Georgia Conference and will continue to pay apportionments to the North Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church until such time as it formally disaffiliates, should such a determination be made. If Mount Pisgah disaffiliates, apportionments would no longer be paid.

What does it mean to hold property "in trust"?

The trust clause is an historic, universal claim made by the UMC and written into the church's articles of incorporation in an effort to retain ownership rights of local church properties. Holding property in trust for The United Methodist Church means the "holder" (Mount Pisgah) is required to use the property exclusively for the purposes of and to benefit The United Methodist Church. It also means that if, at any point, it becomes clear the holder can no longer or chooses no longer to function as part of The United Methodist Church, it forfeits all rights to continue to hold the property, and the property itself and all other assets transfer to the denomination (the North Georgia Conference Board of Trustees).

Simply, the North Georgia Conference actually owns all property and assets currently being used by Mount Pisgah. Mount Pisgah does not own its own property nor assets. Should Mount Pisgah vote to disaffiliate from the UMC, we will be released from the trust clause and will own all property and assets.

Could the Conference close Mount Pisgah?

Yes, this is a possibility. Several churches smaller in size than Mount Pisgah have already been closed. When a church is closed the assets of the local church automatically transfer to the Annual Conference Board of Trustees.

What is the legal risk of leaving the denomination?

There is no risk or liability associated with disaffiliation by following the prescribed steps for completing the process. The risk of litigation increases in cases where churches take steps to disaffiliate outside the prescribed process. Mount Pisgah is following the steps outlined by the Board of Trustees of the North Georgia Conference.

What can I do to support Mount Pisgah's future?

The first thing to do is to pray. Pray for Mount Pisgah, other churches that choose to disaffiliate and those that will remain in the UMC. Additionally, be informed and be prepared to vote at the appropriate time. Finally, continue to support Mount Pisgah with your presence and your gifts.