

Lyttleton Street United Methodist Church

The Way Forward
A Process of Education

Background and Considerations

Agenda

- Opening Prayer
- Statement of attitude
- United Methodist Church – Structure and Governance
- Complex Issues – More than sexuality
- Considerations
- Next Steps
- Closing Prayer

Opening Prayer

Statement Of Attitude

We will have love, order, respect, and calmness in the process. The process should never interfere with the Gospel being preached, the Holy Spirit at work, or our ministry producing fruit. This is not a question of “sides” or winners or losers. We are educating ourselves on a multifaceted issue alongside our Christian sisters and brothers. We will respect the viewpoint of others and love them despite differences of opinion. We will work to avoid polarization.

Why Are We Here Today?

In January 2023 – Discussions about separation began at LSUMC

January 30th 2023 – Church Council voted to start 30-Day Discernment Process

February 2023 – Discernment Committee appointed, met, and declared they could not continue. Church Council voted to stop Discernment Process

August 2023 – Church Council passed motion to initiate The Way Forward Information Process and appointed committee.

February 2024 – Scripture presentation by The Way Forward Information Committee

Two Different Committees

The Way Forward Information Committee Purpose:

- Explore the questions under consideration by the South Carolina Conference of the UMC with regard to the LGBTQ+ community, and other related issues.
- Understand the implications to LSUMC for remaining with the UMC or separating.
- **Discernment Committee Purpose** – Initiate and execute the discernment process as outlined by the South Carolina Conference of the UMC.

What We Are Not

This is not a formal Discernment Committee

We are not prophets

We don't have all the answers

We are not "spoon-feeders"

We are not here to make you comfortable or happy

This is not a discussion group or question and answer period

Terminology

- 1. “Traditional” and “Progressive”**
- 2. It is obvious that not every Traditionalist believes the same thing, nor do all Progressives hold a unified view.**
- 3. Language/terminology evolve.**
- 4. The LGBTQ+ acronym represents a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities.**

Terminology

L – Lesbian

G – Gay

B – Bisexual

T - Transgender: The term transgender does not have a universally accepted definition, including among researchers.

Q - Queer or Questioning

Terminology

The "+" symbol

I - Intersex

A - Asexual

P - Pansexual or Polysexual

2S - Two-Spirit

C - Cisgender

Non-Binary

United Methodist Church Genesis

1760s - The British Methodist Revival Movement led by John Wesley taken to the American colonies.

1784–Methodist Episcopal Church formed in Maryland.

1830–Methodist Protestant Church formed.

1845–Methodist Episcopal Church, South formed.

1939 – The Methodist Church was formed by the union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church.

1968 - The United Methodist Church was formed by the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Structure of the Methodist Church

Polity - The form of government of a nation, state, church, or organization. A word you will see when doing your homework.

- **No central headquarters**
- **No single executive leader**
- **Duties divided among bodies including:**
 - **General Conference**
 - **Council of Bishops**
 - **Judicial Council**

UMC General Structure

The General Conference – International

The General Conference is an international body of nearly 800 to 1,000 delegates that meets every four years. The delegates are elected by annual conferences (at annual conference sessions) to attend General Conference. They represent all annual conferences around the world. Half of the delegates are laity (non-clergy members), half are clergy.

Central Conferences within the General Conference:

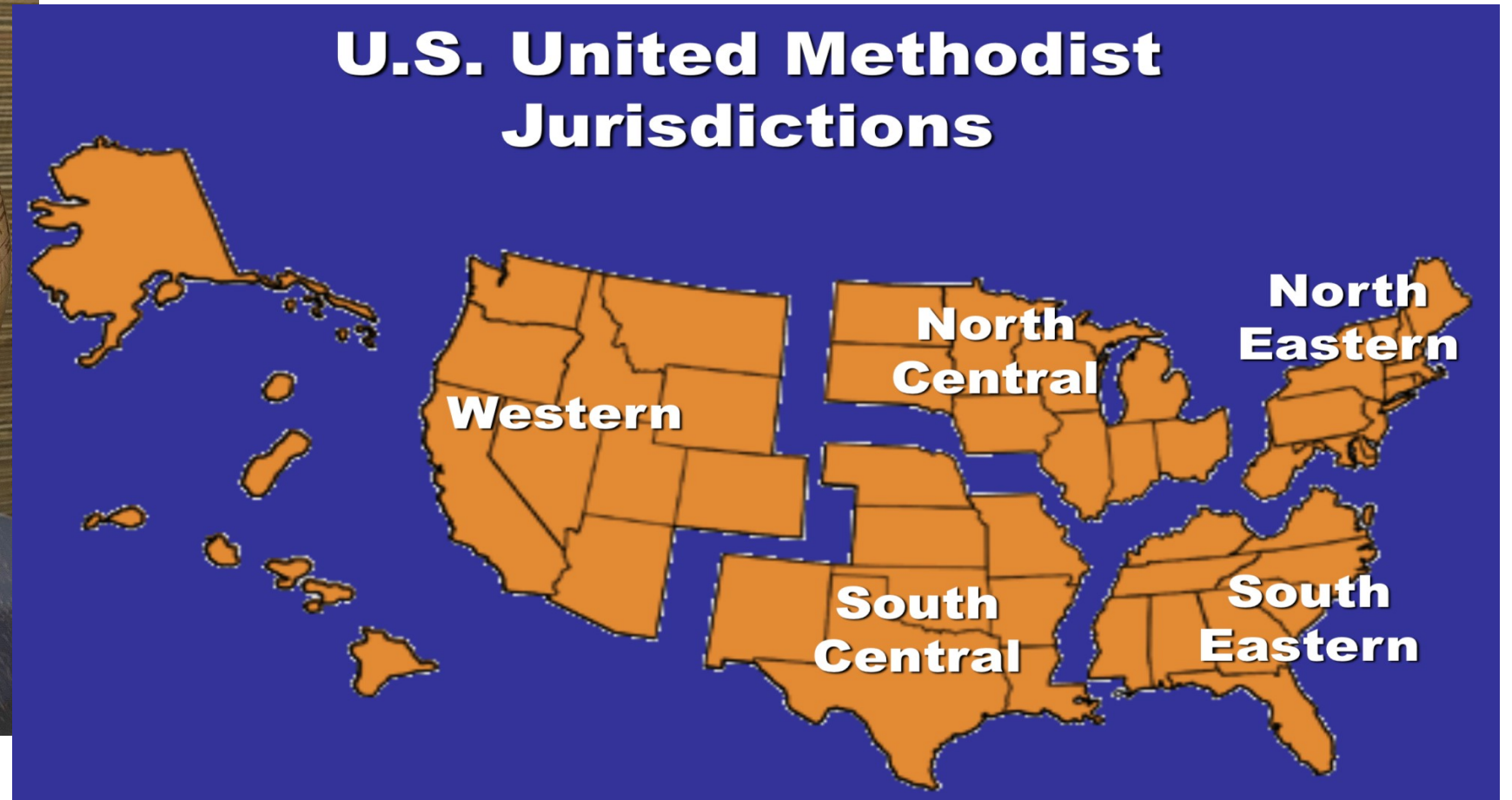
- Africa
- Central and Southern Europe
- Congo
- Germany
- Northern Europe and Eurasia
- Philippines

Jurisdictional Conference- 5 Regions of US

South Eastern Jurisdiction (SC, South Ga, North Ga etc.) 14 Conferences in Jurisdiction.

Districts of SC Conference (Hartsville, Columbia, Florence etc.).

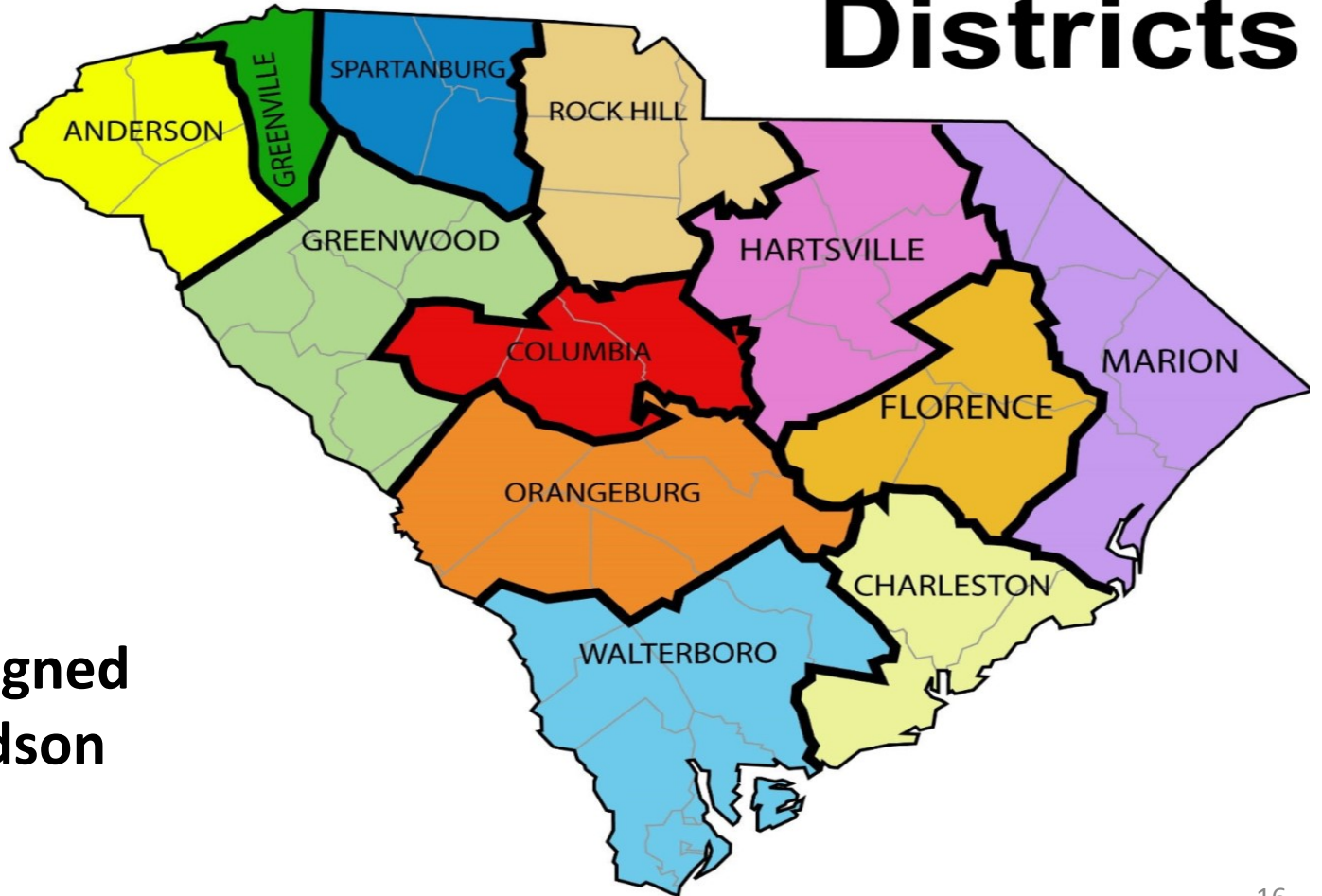
**The General Conference - International
Jurisdictional Conference** - 5 Regions of US, meet to vote on Bishops
and boards. Meets every 4 years



Jurisdictional Conference - 5 Regions of US, meet to vote on Bishops and boards.
Meets every 4 years



UMC SC Districts



**South Carolina Conference led
by Bishop Jonathan Holston**

**Hartsville District led by an assigned
superintendent, Rev. Telley Gadson**

Conferences of the UMC

General Conference (Worldwide):

- International meeting
- Occurs every four years.
- Nearly 1,000 delegates from around the world
- 50% clergy, 50% laity who are elected by Annual Conferences
- The General Conference is the church-wide assembly that deals with global matters and church law.

Annual Conference (South Carolina)

- Regional organizational unit of The United Methodist Church
- Meets yearly
- United States has 54 such conferences, which can cover entire states or parts of states.
- 50% clergy, 50% laity
- Votes on constitutional amendments, the election of delegates to the General Conference, and character and relations of its clergy.

Local Governance of LSUMC

- Role of Pastors – Pastors play critical leadership role
- Church Council – Local Church Leadership and Governing body
- Committees report to Church Council and do work of Church
- Connection with UMC
 - Connectional Ministries – Youth Ministries (basketball tournaments, Salkehatchie, Revolution), Local and Global Mission Outreach,
 - Pastor selection – between SPRC and UMC
 - Resources for Guidance through Congregational Issues (SPRC and UMC)
 - Legal Policies and Implications
 - Financial Responsibilities (property, assets, and liabilities) – Trust Clause

Three Key Books of the United Methodist Church

- The Bible (Do you ever read it?)
- The Book of Discipline (BOD) (You have never read it!)
 - Doctrine and Theological Framework
 - Updated by the General Conference and published every 4 years
- The Book of Resolutions (You did not know it exists.)
 - Social policies and resolutions

What is included in the Book of Discipline?

- Government and Organization
- Social Principles
- Administrative and Judicial Processes
- Rituals and Worship
- Historical and Ecumenical Statements
- Rules and Guidelines for Church Life

The Book of Resolutions

Contains the text of all current and official social policies and other resolutions adopted by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church.

- Resolutions and policy statements.
- Covers The Natural World, The Political Community, The Nurturing Community, The World Community, The Social Community, The Economic Community, Other Resolutions.
- Not legally binding.
- To be used responsibly for reference, encouragement, study, and support.

History of Methodism and Social Issues

1784 – The “Christmas Conference” at which all the faithful members of the Methodist Church were enjoined to emancipate any slaves they held.

1908 – Adopts “The 1908 Social Creed” In 1908, the Methodist Church took a stand for the rights of workers with a Social Creed that called for an end to child labor, a fair wage, and safety standards.

1960 – Develops the Board of Christian Social Concerns These are statements of church teachings that cover a wide range of issues

1968 – Addressing segregation within the church. General Conference abolishes the Central Jurisdiction Prior to this all African-American churches were included in their own Jurisdiction.

1972 – General Conference adopts “The Social Creed of the United Methodist Church” A broadening and reaffirmation of the Social Creed of 1908.

1990 – Support for the Americans With Disabilities Act

2019 - End Discrimination against women and girls.

The Book of Discipline and Homosexuality

- 1972 BOD - “.... we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured, though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- 1988 BOD - “Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching, we affirm that God’s grace is available to all.”

The Book of Discipline and Homosexuality Today - 2019 BOD Addendum

- P161.G Human Sexuality—“We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. ... sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”
- P2711.3 Additional Mandatory Penalties for Violation of Marriage Rules
 - a. First (1st) offense – One (1) year’s suspension without pay.
 - b. Second (2nd) offense – Not less than termination of conference membership and revocation of credentials of licensing, ordination, or consecration.
- P415.6 Bishops are prohibited from ordaining self-avowed, practicing, homosexual Bishops, Elders, Deacons

Concern for the Future

- Progressives continue to push the gray areas and break boundaries of the Book of Discipline which is very concerning to Traditionalists.
- Rules also call for confidentiality of charges.
 - We cannot see what is being done about rules that are broken.
 - It is frustrating to those who cannot see inside the system.
 - The church needs greater transparency.

Book of Discipline Today

- The Book of Discipline only deals with homosexual relationships in the context of the Clergy and Marriage within the church.
- While the LGBTQ+ community includes homosexuality, the Book of Discipline does not address the other sexual preferences indicated in the LGBTQ+ designation.
- Questions about many in leadership positions having beliefs consistent with the Book of Discipline and enforcement of the rules.
- Objections to vocal leadership publicly lobbying for change of the BOD to include homosexual clergy and marriage, and LGBTQ+.

Changing Public Perception and Changing Legal Rulings

It is obvious that public and legal perception of homosexuality has changed and is continually changing. Some feel the church needs to change with the times, and others say that public perception should not influence church doctrine.

How are we to relate our faith to the changing temporal world we live in?

The Role of Scripture in Finding our Way in the UMC

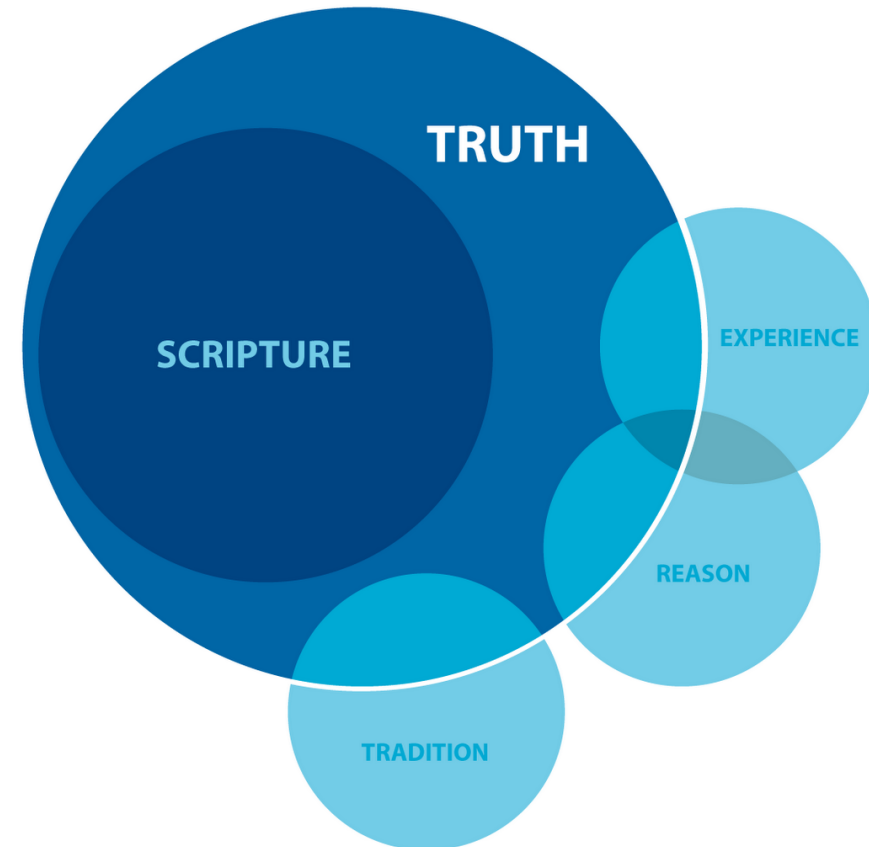
Scripture: The first and primary authority; it contains the *only* measure whereby all other truth can be tested.

Tradition: Don't undervalue the witness of development and growth of the faith through the past centuries and in many nations and cultures.

Experience: Apart from scripture, experience is the strongest proof of Christianity for each person. For example, "One thing I know: I was blind and now I see."

Reason: Without reason we cannot understand the essential truth of Scripture as long as we are assisted, of course, by the Holy Spirit.

A NEW LOOK AT THE WESLEYIAN QUADRILATERAL



"Try all things by the written Word, and let all bow down before it. You are in danger every hour if you depart ever so little from Scripture."

John Wesley, 1758

What Happens Next?

- The Way Forward Committee will finish its presentations. **At that point their job is done.**
- A motion to enter Discernment can only be made by a Church Council member.
- If Church Council votes does not approve the motion, no further action will be taken (**simple majority**). Motion can continue to be introduced at a future meeting.
- If Church Council approves the motion, LSUMC will enter the Discernment process (**simple majority**). Church Council will appoint a Discernment Committee.
- At the end of the Discernment process, the congregation will vote whether to separate or not. (**2/3 majority**). Members can only vote in person and on the date and time the vote is scheduled by the District Superintendent.
- If the congregation votes not to separate, no further action will take place.
- If the congregation votes to separate, a series of actions will be initiated.

SC UMC Separation Process Summary

Probably similar to last year, but deadlines may change.

- We cannot separate this year (2024)
- December 1, 2024 – First documents must be submitted to SCUMC Conference.
- Feb 28, 2025 - The latest date the congregation can vote for separation.
- June 25, 2025 - If Church has voted to separate, the last items on checklist must be completed. There are approximately 24 deadline dates in the checklist.

Formal Discernment Process

- The formal Discernment Process must last at least 30 days, but can last as long as the Church chooses, as long as it fits into the deadlines.
- The formal Discernment Process can contain whatever activities the Church chooses, but must end in a vote on whether or not to separate, unless the process is stopped by Church Council, as happened previously.
- The SC UMC suggests certain activities during Discernment that include prayer, additional presentations, small group meetings that include Bible study, devotions, discussions and communion.

Factors That Influence A Church's Decision

- Theological Alignment
- Biblical Interpretation
- Connectional Structure
- Historical and emotional ties
- Financial and Legal Considerations
- Church Leadership and Clergy
- Mission and Outreach
- Diversity and Inclusion

Final Thoughts

Deciding to leave a denomination is a major step

Unanswered Questions

General Conference Speculation

Personal Decisions About What To Do:

- DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH
- Be patient with the process
- Wait and see what happens at General Conference and Annual Conference.
- Get involved in the process
- Determine what you believe personally, and decide how your beliefs align with official UMC doctrine and actions.
- Determine if there is a gap, and if so, how large is that gap and how important it is.

Closing Prayer

References

Checklist for Closure and Separation in 2025 similar to 2024

Prior to Vote Prior to the church voting to separate, the church must provide the congregation with a self-prepared estimate of the separation fee or, if available, the fee as calculated by the Annual Conference Trustees and communicated by the Conference Treasurer. The estimate provided to the congregation should show a possible range of the fee so that the congregation is not surprised if the actual fee is not exactly what is presented for purposes of the vote.

12/01/2024 If a church is planning to separate at the 2025 Annual Conference, it must provide the following documents to Annual Conference Trustees in care of the conference treasurer: Full appraisal report, mortgages, other debts, deeds, contact list with contact info, associated institutions, insurance summary, required insurance coverages, insurance claims, miscellaneous forms.

01/01/2025 Letter to district superintendent requesting separation agreement and verification of Church Council Review. (Requested by pastor on behalf of Church Council.)

01/01/2025 Letter to district superintendent requesting a Church Conference for vote to occur no later than March 1.

03/01/2025 Church votes on separation no later than March 1st (actually Feb 28th)

03/01/2025 Church's attorney to draft a general warranty deed to transfer the real property to the new church entity. Church's attorney provides proof of creation of new entity and its legal name.

Checklist for Closure and Separation in 2025 similar to 2024

03/10/2025 If church vote result is to separate, notification to Annual Conference. Church to stop apportionment payments.

04/30/2025 Annual Conference Trustees provide to church, by email, payment amounts required for separation to include 10% of assets, unpaid apportionments for prior year, unpaid apportionments through date of closure, additional 12 months of apportionments, balance due on direct bill to include amounts owed on debt forgiveness plan, and Church's share of unfunded pension obligation

04/30/2025 Conference treasurer provides instructions for payment of separation fee to escrow account.

04/30/2025 Digital copy of membership rolls/records, funerals, baptisms, weddings (for Conference Archivist), Council meeting minutes (for Conference Archivist), historical and current property records, such as deeds (for Conference Archivist)

05/31/2025 Church provides signed copy of separation agreement.

05/31/2025 Church fully funds escrow account no later than May 31.

06/14/2025 Church's attorney provides proof that Church has begun the process to dissolve its legal entity.

Checklist for Closure and Separation in 2025 similar to 2024

06/14/2025 Church's attorney to prepare any bill of sale that is required.

06/14/2025 Church provides proof all liabilities have been paid in full or transferred to new entity. Church provides digital copy of members wishing to remain United Methodist who have not already transferred their membership to another United Methodist Church. Church to get tax exempt status for new entity with IRS.

06/20/2025 Annual Conference Trustees sign separation agreements and quit claim deeds.

06/25/2025 Church to remove UMC and Cross and Flame from all signs, accounts, social media, etc. (may use hymn books and bibles and keep awards).

06/25/2025 Annual Conference sends to church's attorney the certificate signed by conference secretary certifying that a resolution was presented to the members of the South Carolina Conference to ratify the separation agreement and the vote of the members on that resolution.

06/25/2025 Annual Conference Trustees sends to church's attorney the signed separation agreement, Quitclaim Deed, and any other related documents. Church entity to keep insurance coverage active until all steps are complete. UMC church must have insurance in place until at least 07/01/2024 or date UMC church is dissolved, whichever is later.

Changing Legal and Public Perception of Homosexuality

- **Early 20th Century Stigmatization:** Homosexuality considered a mental disorder. Same-sex relationships hidden, discrimination, persecution, and social isolation.
- **1924:** The Society for Human Rights in Chicago first recognized gay rights organization in the United States, although it was short-lived.
- **1950s and 1960s - LGBTQ Rights Movement Begins:**
- **1958:** First ruling by U.S. Supreme Court in favor homosexual rights. A gay magazine deemed obscene by the Post Office, *One, Inc. v. Olesen*
- **1969:** The Stonewall Riots sparked the modern LGBT rights movement in the United States
- **1970s - Declassification of homosexuality as a Mental Disorder** by American Psychiatric Association
- **1980s - AIDS Epidemic**
- **1990s - "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA):**
- **2003:** *Lawrence v. Texas* overturned *Bowers v. Hardwick*, making same-sex sexual activity legal in every U.S. state and territory.
- **2009:** Matthew Shepard/James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, expanded hate crime law to include gender, sexual orientation...
- **2010:** The Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act was signed into law, allowing gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to openly serve in the U.S. military.
- **2013:** In *United States v. Windsor*, allowed legally married same-sex couples to be recognized under federal law.
- **2015:** *Obergefell v. Hodges* further extended rights to perform and recognize same-sex marriages equal to opposite-sex marriages.
- **Increasing Acceptance and Representation:** Public opinion polls show increasing acceptance of LGBTQ individuals rights.
- **Ongoing conflicts:** LGBTQ individuals continue to push for health care access, housing, employment and inclusion.

The public perception and acceptance of homosexuality in the US has undergone significant changes.

1. **Early 20th Century - Stigmatization:** Homosexuality was often considered a mental disorder. Same-sex relationships were largely hidden, and those who were openly gay or lesbian often faced discrimination, persecution, and social isolation.
2. **1950s and 1960s - LGBTQ Rights Movement Begins:**
3. **1969:** The Stonewall Riots, while not a legal decision, sparked the modern LGBT rights movement in the United States.
4. **1970s - Declassification as a Mental Disorder:**
5. **1980s - AIDS Epidemic:**
6. **1990s - "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA):**
7. **Increasing Acceptance and Representation:** Public opinion polls have consistently shown increasing acceptance of LGBTQ individuals and support for their rights, including marriage equality.
8. **Ongoing conflicts:** LGBTQ individuals continue to push for healthcare access, housing, and employment, as well as greater inclusion.

Changing US Legal View of Homosexuality

- **1924:** The Society for Human Rights in Chicago becomes the first recognized gay rights organization in the United States, although it was short-lived.
- **1958:** In *One, Inc. v. Olesen*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a gay magazine deemed obscene by the Post Office, marking the first time the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of homosexual rights.
- **1986:** In *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the Supreme Court upheld Georgia's sodomy law, criminalizing oral and anal sex in private between consenting adults when conducted by same-sex couples.
- **1996:** In *Romer v. Evans*, the Supreme Court struck down a Colorado state constitutional amendment that prevented protected status based upon homosexuality or bisexuality, stating it was motivated by animosity towards homosexuals.
- **2003:** *Lawrence v. Texas* overturned *Bowers v. Hardwick*, making same-sex sexual activity legal in every U.S. state and territory.
- **2009:** The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expanded existing United States federal hate crime law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability, was signed into law.
- **2010:** The Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act was signed into law, allowing gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to openly serve in the U.S. military.
- **2013:** In *United States v. Windsor*, the Supreme Court struck down Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), allowing legally married same-sex couples to be recognized under federal law.
- **2015:** *Obergefell v. Hodges* was a landmark decision by the Supreme Court where the right to marry was extended to same-sex couples nationwide, requiring all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and all territories to perform and recognize the marriages of same-sex couples on the same terms and conditions as the marriages of opposite-sex couples.
- **2020:** In *Bostock v. Clayton County*, the Supreme Court ruled that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is necessarily a form of sex discrimination and thus prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Definitions

1. We have chosen to use the terms “traditional” and “progressive” to represent contrasting views because that is what we find in the official UMC dialog (publications and UMC social media), and in everyday discussions. **It is obvious that not every traditionalist believes the same thing, nor do all progressives hold a unified view.** While same-sex preference (homosexual) is the focus of the current debate within the church, we also use the term LGBTQ+ because both are used in discussions and communications.
2. Language/terminology evolve. Different people/communities use different terms to be more inclusive or specific to their needs. Meanings/definitions can vary over time and across cultures.
3. The **LGBTQ+** acronym represents a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities. Each letter in the acronym stands for a different group within the LGBTQ+ community. While the current debate within the UMC focuses only on same-sex relationships, the term LGBTQ+ is used in church communications and dialogs.

Terminology

L – Lesbian - This term refers to women who are romantically or sexually attracted to other women.

G - Gay: Often used to describe men who are romantically or sexually attracted to other men. However, it can also be used more broadly to encompass same-sex attraction in general.

B - Bisexual: Used to describe individuals who are attracted to both their own gender and other genders. Bisexuality acknowledges that attraction isn't limited to just one gender.

T - Transgender: Represents individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. The term transgender does not have a universally accepted definition, including among researchers.

Q - Queer or Questioning: Can stand for either "Queer," an umbrella term, or "Questioning," individuals who are uncertain or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity

The "+" symbol is often added to include the diverse array of identities and orientations that may not fit neatly into the other categories, some of which are:

I - Intersex: Born with physical or genetic characteristics that don't fit typical definitions of male or female. They may have a combination of male and female biological attributes.

A - Asexual: A lack of sexual attraction or interest in sexual activity. Asexual individuals may still experience romantic attraction and form romantic relationships.

P - Pansexual or Polysexual: Individuals who are attracted to people regardless of their gender identity or expression. Polysexuality may have a focus on attraction to multiple, but not necessarily all, genders.

2S - Two-Spirit: Term is of Indigenous North American origin. May used to describe individuals who embody both masculine and feminine qualities, often with spiritual significance.

C - Cisgender: Those whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth, or Heterosexual.

Non-Binary: An individual who does not fit into the traditional binary categories of male and female. Our annual report to the SCUMC now includes a category for non-binary.

Final Thoughts

Deciding to leave a denomination is a major step that requires thorough consideration, prayerful discernment, and open communication. It's critical to engage with the entire church community, seek professional advice, and consider the long-term implications for the church's mission and ministry.

Personal Decisions About What To Do:

1. DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH
2. Be patient with the process
3. Wait and see what happens at General Conference and Annual Conference.
4. Get involved in the process
5. Determine what you believe personally, and decide how your beliefs align with official UMC doctrine and actions.
6. Determine if there is a gap, and if so, how large is that gap and how important it is.

Looking Back

LSUMC – Two attempts to address the issue

Discernment Team	Learning Team
<p>Formal Application by LSUMC Church Council to announce intention to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate from UMC (Para. 2549) • Must lead to congregational vote • 2/3 majority of participating members to separate 	<p>Internal Team only (appointed by LSUMC Church Council) to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same-sex marriage and clergy selection (scripture) • Consequences and Impact of separation (if LSUMC Church Council decides that path) • Assumes no changes in 2024 General Council
<p>Must lead to congregational vote by deadline to be considered for final approval by the following Annual Conference.</p>	<p>LSUMC Church Council must decide and approve formal application to Separate from UMC.</p>
<p>30-day deadline to complete research, communications and vote.</p>	<p>No deadline. Para. 2549 can be applied every year (Bishop Holsten agreement)</p>
<p>Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to leave UMC with Property for a percentage of total valuation • Can join other Methodist denominations, other denominations, or become independent church. 	<p>Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to learn, discuss, and pray about issues without deadline • Less polarizing environment.