

UMAction

Briefing



United Methodist Exits Accelerate

As the United Methodist Church increasingly liberalizes on a range of issues, the mass exodus of conservatives and moderates is accelerating. As of this writing, over 3,000 U.S. congregations have been approved by their annual conferences for exit from the UMC under Paragraph 2553, the temporary exit provision adopted by the 2019 General Conference. This number could reach 5,000 by year's end.

Exiting churches include one quarter of the UMC's top-100 U.S. largest congregations, as well as the largest congregations in the California-Nevada, Central Texas, Illinois-Great Rivers, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, North Georgia, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Western Pennsylvania Conferences as measured by membership and/or worship attendance.

Neither church is conservative but both see no purpose in staying with a fast-declining denomination.

Overseas, the Bulgaria Conference and the Slovakia district have left the UMC. Meanwhile the Estonia Annual Conference along with all of the four annual conferences in Russia and Central Asia have begun leaving the UMC. The Estonia Conference voted by 96 percent for disaffiliation because of the UMC's "movement away from traditional positions regarding, among other issues, the authority of the Bible and its interpretation

for example on matters related to human sexuality." It observed how "a large number of UMC clergy, including bishops, have decided to ignore the *Book of Discipline* on these matters," so that now "the UMC can no longer be viewed as maintaining a traditional position."

United Methodist congregations of Filipino workers in the Middle East have left the UMC for Global Methodism. There have been some departures from the UMC in Africa and the Philippines, with many more expected to come later

Among large exiting congregations are St. Luke's UMC in Oklahoma City and White's Chapel UMC in suburban Dallas, the largest United Methodist church in central Texas. Neither church is conservative but both see no purpose in staying with a fast-declining denomination.

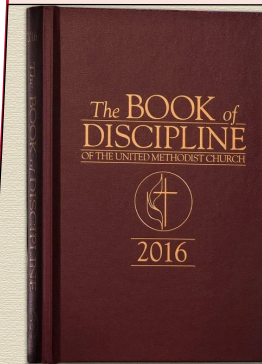
Paragraph 2553 allows churches to quit the congregation with their property with a two-thirds congregational vote. This provision expires with the final 2023 session of each congregation's annual conference, with

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Spring 2023

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"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 ..."

Text from the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* permitting the disaffiliation of churches (image: United Methodist News Service)

UMAction Scores Against Disobedience Movement



The United Methodist Church's top court has ruled that bishops cannot shield from accountability clergy who violate United Methodist standards by holding complaints in abeyance. (Photo: Wikipedia.org)

therefore limit or restrict the rights or obligations of bishops, district superintendents, counsels for the church, committees on investigation, trial courts, boards of ordained ministry, or district committees on ministry to fully comply with and uphold” the UMC *Discipline’s* standards on homosexuality. By logical implication, other jurisdictions and annual conferences passing similar LGBTQ-affirming resolutions do not “limit or restrict the rights or obligations” of any UMC official to “fully comply with and uphold” these standards.

As a delegate to the North Central Jurisdiction, UMAction Director **John Lomperis** submitted a formal challenge and legal arguments to the “Queer Delegates’ Resolution to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC,” which was overwhelmingly adopted by all five U.S. jurisdictions in November. UMAction Steering Committee member **Dixie Brewster** made a similar legal challenge in her South Central Jurisdiction.

The key issue was that this resolution “affirm[ed]” the practice of many bishops in the last couple of years to effectively allow clergy to have same-sex partners and officiate at gay weddings by declaring that, as bishops, they will indefinitely “hold in abeyance” all formal complaints against ministers who commit such violations of official UMC standards.

In its recent Decision #1483, the UMC Judicial Council issued a ruling, now authoritatively binding throughout the denomination, that, per *Discipline* Paragraph 362.1.g, holding complaints “in abeyance” cannot be done or even “contemplated,” except in situations “of ongoing or imminent civil or criminal proceedings.”

This comes shortly after this denominational supreme court issued Decision #1469, which affirmed a ruling that the 2021 North Central Jurisdiction’s adopted resolution promoting liberalizing of church standards related to homosexuality “does not,

That ruling also resulted from a legal challenge and arguments submitted by Lomperis.

No one should delusionally exaggerate these rulings’ impact. It is too late for them to fundamentally change the big-picture reality of widespread disobedience.

But in some specific places and cases, they may make a difference.

Outside of the Western Jurisdiction, when liberal U.S. bishops let their clergy get away with violating the *Discipline’s* sexuality standards, in most cases these bishops generally seek ways to technically avoid personally disobeying the explicit letter of the law, even while violating its spirit.

After the 2019 General Conference adopted the Traditional Plan, saying that they would “hold complaints in abeyance” became bishops’ loophole of choice. Now we have taken that away from them.

We hope that liberal leaders will be motivated to allow United Methodism’s split to proceed unhindered. ✚

FOR REFLECTION: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20.

ACTION: If you are willing to challenge unfaithful clergy by filing a complaint through the UMC’s accountability processes, which any individual may do, email JLOMPERIS@TheIRD.org with “FILING COMPLAINTS” as the subject line, and we can offer coaching.

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Seminary Professor Denies Salvation via Cross

During Holy Week, a prominent professor at the UMC's Iliff School of Theology in Denver attacked traditional doctrine about salvation. In, "What if Crucifixion Is Not Salvific?," Dr. **Miguel A. De La Torre**, Professor of Social Ethics and Latinx Studies, declared, "Jesus' death neither pays a ransom nor is a substitution for us." Instead, this trainer of new United Methodist clergy insisted, its "only signification is the unjust death of a just person at the hands of religious and political leaders," in "an act of solidarity" with other victims of oppression.

He claimed that the traditional orthodox doctrine of Jesus Christ dying as a substitute for the sins of humanity "at best, is wrong and, at worse, damning to the disenfranchised." De La Torre preposterously suggested this traditional Christian theology may be to blame for "crusades, religious wars, pogroms, inquisitions, witch trials, colonialism, the genocide of 'pagans,' the enslavement of 'infidels' and the Holocaust," and even called Christianity "the cause for most of the world's bloodletting."

He specifically decried the lyrics of a popular hymn repeating that there is "power in the blood" of Jesus.



Ecce Homo ("Behold the Man"), painted by Antonio Ciseri over 20 years (1870 to 1891), is an enormous (12.5 x 9.6 feet) painting depicting the dramatic moment when Pontius Pilate pleads with the angry mob to look at Jesus, the man who had done no wrong. But the crowd kept demanding the death of the only innocent human being who ever lived, and the sinless Jesus offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all human kind. Or maybe that's not what happened on the first Good Friday, according to a professor at the UMC's Iliff School of Theology.

Congregations staying United Methodist will fund, through their apportionments, this seminary teaching against basic beliefs about salvation through the cross of Christ shared by Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and all major Protestant traditions. ✝

FOR REFLECTION: Galatians 6:14.

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voting and paperwork due much earlier. These sessions usually occur in May or June, so it is already too late for many churches.

Many bishops have called special annual conference sessions in late 2023 to ratify one final round of congregational disaffiliations. So far, these conferences are: Alabama-West Florida, Dakotas, Florida, Illinois-Great Rivers, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee-Western Kentucky, Upper

New York, Virginia, and Western North Carolina. Some of these require congregations to submit an initial expression of potential interest as early as June. ✝

ACTION: If your bishop has already scheduled a special annual conference in late 2023, thank them. If your bishop has not, respectfully urge them to do so in order to allow both conservative and liberal Methodists to move into their preferred futures. Contact information for all bishops can be found at www.umc.org/directory

United Methodist Bishops Punish Exiting Churches

While Paragraph 2553 gives congregations an explicit “right” to disaffiliate from the denomination and keep their properties, many liberal United Methodist leaders have made it needlessly difficult. The Mountain Sky and Greater New Jersey Annual Conferences, under the leadership of lesbian activist “bishop” **Karen Oliveto** and Bishop **John Schol**, have said disaffiliating congregations could be charged additional ransom fees on a case-by-case basis, on top of other required payments, *after* they vote to disaffiliate. So their congregations must “fly blind” when they vote to disaffiliate, not knowing how much it will cost. In New Jersey, this mystery fee is piled on top of what the conference already demands disaffiliating congregations pay:

- Unfunded retiree health care liabilities
- A share of Boy Scout settlement costs
- The amount of recent grants “given” by the conference
- 18 months’ compensation plus the costs of two moves for any of their pastors who do not disaffiliate
- An “administrative fee” of up to \$3,500
- A stipend for two “guides” appointed by the conference’s liberal leadership to “lead the disaffiliation discernment process,” amounting to \$500 per guide per session

These are all in addition to the apportionment, unfunded-pension-liability, and legal payments *Discipline* Paragraph 2553 already requires of disaffiliating congregations.

The Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences (under Bishop **Latrell Easterling**) and California Pacific Conference (until recently under Bishop **Grant Hagiya**)

force disaffiliating congregations to pay 50 percent of the value of their property.

In late December, Bishop **Sue Hauptert-Johnson** abruptly canceled all further disaffiliations in North Georgia. She disingenuously called this a “pause,” but made clear it will last until 2024, when Paragraph 2553 will have expired. Newly elected Bishop **Robin Dease**, who took over that conference in January, refused to lift this blockade, provoking litigation from 186 congregations.

Shortly before Holy Week, new Bishop **Connie Shelton** ambushed the historic Fifth Avenue UMC in Wilmington, North Carolina, which was interested in pursuing disaffiliation, by abruptly closing the church and seizing its property. This congregation was small but self-sustaining and larger than many other conference churches. UMC *Discipline* Paragraph 2594.3.b broadly allows bishops and their officials to suddenly seize and close any congregation in this way. So as long as your congregation remains United Methodist, this risk hangs over it.

Annual conferences rejected the disaffiliations of three Arkansas congregations and one Virginia congregation, despite congregational votes. Two of the Arkansas congregations are now litigating, while most of the third congregation has quit their building (and its significant debt) to worship elsewhere. For the Virginia congregation, only ten of its people remained with the building, while over 100 others organized a new congregation elsewhere, whose worship attendance is more than they had enjoyed as United Methodists.

Much of this nastiness could have been avoided if liberal leaders had kept their word offered to conservatives in their negotiated agreements for “amicable separation.” ❄️



Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson presides at the February online special session of the Virginia Annual Conference. Under the leadership of bishops like her, this season of separation has brought far more pain, anxiety, and disruption to congregations than was needed. (Photo: YouTube screen capture)

GOOD NEWS: Global Methodist Church Gains Momentum

One year after its May 1, 2022, launch, the Global Methodist Church—the denomination formed by theologically orthodox United Methodists—has accepted some 2,000 congregations, with dozens more coming in every week.

So far, most are in the United States. One of the many barriers facing non-American congregations that wish to join the GMC is a controversial ruling by UMC Council of Bishops President **Thomas Bickerton** of New York. Based on legally debatable technicalities, his ruling claims that only U.S. congregations are allowed to use Paragraph 2553, the main church-law provision for congregational disaffiliation. Orthodox United Methodists overseas are mostly waiting until the 2024 General Conference.

The GMC already has a global presence. All UMC congregations in Bulgaria and Slovakia have become Global Methodist. So have several congregations in the Philippines as well as United Methodist congregations among Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in several Middle Eastern nations.

In Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo Provisional Annual Conference of the GMC has already planted 46 new congregations.

In the U.S., provisional annual conferences have begun holding inaugural sessions. In attending these sessions of the Mid-Texas and Eastern Texas Conferences (the latter of which includes Arkansas and Louisiana), *UMAction* observed what United Methodist annual conference sessions always should have been. There were no controversial resolutions, infighting, or display tables promoting unbiblical agendas. Approving budgets and reports took minimal time, while the main “business” was inspiring teaching, encouraging fellowship, and helpful workshops equipping congregational ministry. Members expressed their common commitment to basic, historic Christian doctrine. The Mid-Texas Conference session included a concurrent youth retreat, in which many teenagers made decisions for Christ!



Dr. Krystl Gauld, a *UMAction* Steering Committee member, speaks at the “Beyond These Walls” missions conference. (Photo: John Lomperis)

GMC leaders have also made clear their commitments to prioritizing making disciples of Jesus Christ (including through new church plants), accountability, transparency, more collaborative pastoral appointments, rediscovering the treasures of our Methodist heritage, a streamlined ordination process, avoiding any sort of trust clause, and a less costly denominational bureaucracy. Pastor **Ryan Barnett**, lead pastor of First

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GOOD NEWS: GMC Gains Momentum

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Methodist Waco and the Mid-Texas Conference's executive officer, summarized the GMC's attitude towards its congregations: "We're not interested in your property or your money—we're interested in the people in your community who need to know Jesus!"

Bishops **Scott Jones** and **Mark Webb** recently transferred from the UMC into Global Methodism. GMC leaders have stressed their commitment to redefining the role of bishops as a teaching office, in contrast to the UMC's model of "royal" bishops.

In contrast to the UMC, Global Methodism sets limits to prevent any congregation from paying more than 6.5 percent of its income in annual-conference plus denomination-wide funding obligations, which is already much lower than most United Methodist congregations' apportionments. What Global Methodist congregations are actually charged is even lower.

UMAction recently interviewed leaders of two Mid-Texas and three Eastern Texas congregations about the differences between their 2022 United Methodist apportionments and their current, interim 2023 Global Methodist denominational funding obligations. These reductions ranged from 46 to 81 percent!

The GMC seeks to continue what is best and useful from its United Methodist heritage, while discarding bad habits, especially the acceptance of continual decline. Global Methodist leaders are clear that their denomination has a core of biblical doctrine, which they expect to be taught in their congregations.

Recent GMC annual conference sessions included compassionate acknowledgment of "wounds and scars" many Global Methodists carry from their journeys out of the UMC.

However, the GMC is moving forward in mission rather than looking backward.

The denomination was lead sponsor of the April 27–29 "Beyond These Walls" missions conference at the Woodlands Methodist Church in Woodlands, Texas. In refreshing contrast to many United Methodist conventions, this gathering of hundreds of enthusiastic church leaders from around the world notably lacked liberal agendas and self-congratulations, instead focusing on the world's needs and acknowledging our own inadequacies apart from God.

As Global Methodism rapidly grows in America and across the world, it is dedicated to the vision of "a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb," worshiping, loving, and serving God (Revelation 7:9). ✝

ACTION: Encourage others to join the Global Methodist Church. Check out: www.globalmethodist.org

UMAction Briefing

A newsletter for United Methodists seeking a biblically faithful and evangelistically fruitful future for our congregations

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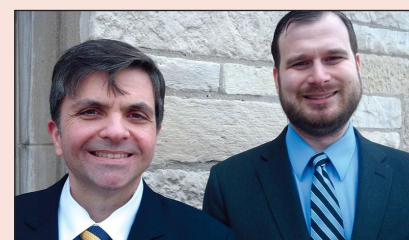
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