



Below are common questions and answers concerning the upcoming General Conference of the UMC in August. This conference will deal with the *Protocol for Separation* which outlines the plans for the current denomination to split into at least two different entities. Oakdale Board's wanted to provide a central place for you to find answers and information regarding this important time in the life of our church. Responses to the congregational survey, that was sent out last year, were used to compile this FAQ list.

Please continue to be in prayer for all that is going on in our world and that God would continue to lead our Church to serve as a refuge of hope amid life's storms.

## ISSUES:

- **What are the issues facing the UMC? What are the different positions?**

The UMC has been a theologically divided denomination for many years. While this division tends to express itself over the issue of human sexuality, at its root, it is much more to do with the essentials of Christianity. The central questions tend to be as follows:

1. What is humanity, and how are we separated by sin from God?
2. Who is Jesus Christ, and what does his death and resurrection mean?
3. What is the Bible, and how should I interpret and use it in my daily life?

There are two general positions as to how to answer these questions. Those who occupy the "left" end of the spectrum tend to be called, "progressives," "liberals," or "liberationists." Those who occupy the "right" end of the spectrum tends to be called, "conservatives," "evangelicals," or "traditionalists." These positions are somewhat distinct from the current spectrum in United States politics, and there are people who might be theologically "conservative," but politically "liberal," and vice-versa.

In the debates, the out-workings of these three questions have caused the two positions to take divergent views on acceptable understandings on human sexuality. While disagreements on Jesus' divinity, or whether or not he was actually physically raised from the dead are extremely important, neither of these have a direct outcome on how we behave and practice our Christian faith. However, the first question as to the reality of sin, and the third question, about the authority of the Bible, have a direct outcome on our personal behavior, and this is especially true in sexual ethics.

Traditionalists (this term has become the most used recently in the UMC discussions) tend to take the historically "orthodox" answers to the three questions listed above. In so doing, they understand sexual behavior outside of a covenanted, heterosexual marriage to be sinful. However, that refers only to *behavior*, and not orientation. Traditionalists recognize that sexual attractions and orientations, in and of themselves, are not sin. Therefore, those who might struggle with same-sex attraction are no different than those who struggle with any kind of temptations in life. In every case, traditionalists seek the strength of Christ and the power of his



grace to stand up to sin and sinful desires.

Traditionalist central focus verses: [2 Timothy 3:16](#), [1 Corinthians 10:13](#)

Progressives take a much broader view as to how to understand the words of the Bible, and as a result, see commands regarding sexual ethics as either outdated or misunderstood. Because of this, the passages which are generally read to prohibit same-sex behavior are not applicable to the kinds of relationships and behaviors of today. Because progressives understand sexual orientations as God-given, the outcomes of these orientations (e.g. same-sex marriage, etc.) should be celebrated and encouraged. Any prohibition and separation of people who are actively engaging in same-sex sexual behavior is a violation of their God-given humanity. Therefore, progressives have continually advocated for full inclusion of LGBTQIA people into the life of the church regarding ordination, licensing and marriages. For progressives, this is a matter of justice and human rights.

Progressive central focus verses: [Galatians 5:6](#) & [22-23](#)

There is a small group in the center of the discussions which feels the denomination should not be divided over sexual ethics at all because it is not an “essential” issue. These folks tend to be called “centrists” or “moderates,” and question why a “live and let live” attitude would not be preferable to further divisions of the denomination. They argue that the three listed questions have divided the United Methodist Church for many years without causing serious difficulty, and that the unity of the denomination in Christ can transcend disagreements on non-essentials.

Centrists central focus verses: [Romans 14](#)

For more on this, see the following:

<https://revsweat.com/2020/02/12/umc-separation-primer-its-not-about-cats-or-sex/>

<https://revsweat.com/2020/03/06/umc-separation-primer-2-its-about-elephants/>

- **What is the current status of the UMC decision process?**

There was a specially called session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 2019 to attempt a resolution of the denomination’s divisions over human sexuality. At that conference, many thought that a “live and let live” type solution, called “The One Church Plan” would be brokered, allowing each Annual Conference and local congregation to decide how to move forward with regard to sexual ethics. However, that conference passed most of the “Traditional Plan,” which further enforced our denomination’s prohibitions on LGBTQ clergy and same-sex weddings.

Rather than settle matters, General Conference 2019 served to further expose long-standing divisions. The debates at GC2019 were heated, mean-spirited and caustic. Several conferences in the U.S. and Western Europe vowed defiance. Bishop Karen Oliveto in the Western Jurisdiction of the United States is openly gay, and the Western Jurisdiction has continued to move toward full inclusion in defiance of the Book of Discipline. Full-page ads were taken out in U.S. newspapers to apologize for the actions of the denomination. Some African conferences have experienced loss of financial partnerships in America. Organizing and caucusing created a



struggle to define the future of the United Methodist Church, with many advocacy groups forming on both sides of the issues.

In the face of these divisions and in the shadow of an explosive schism, the late Bishop Yambasu of Sierra Leone assembled a multi-lateral group in the U.S. for the purpose of ongoing dialog. Out of that dialogue has come the [Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation](#). It, as well as multiple other separation plans are now before General Conference 2021, scheduled for August and September, though COVID has put that timeframe into question. The Protocol is an extremely important development and represents a concerted effort from all sides to work together on separate futures. The admission that separation is needed and should be amicable is groundbreaking. No one wants to go back to the negotiating table or (worse) re-open negotiations on the floor of GC2021.

The future of the United Methodist Church and any division in the denomination rests with the ability to have General Conference and to pass the *Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation*, or some other similar separation plan.

- **Will the UMC split? What would be the differences between the distinct denominations?**

In 2019, there was a large push for unity by the Bishops and leadership of the denomination. Many in the center thought that there was no possibility that the denomination would divide. Furthermore, because the denomination holds the title to all property of churches, etc., many believe that this would add weight to the necessity to keep the church together.

However, after the fissures that erupted after General Conference in 2019, most recognized the inability for the church to remain as one body. This was the conclusion of the negotiators who worked on the proposed *Protocol*. Even after the disruptions to the process caused by COVID, almost everyone associated with the denomination and its leadership continues to present the *Protocol* and division of the denomination as the best path forward. All the major caucus groups and most high-profile Bishops (including our own Bishop Easterling) are supporting the *Protocol*.

The *Protocol* calls for at least two denominations to form out of what is currently the United Methodist Church, with the opportunity for more if enough organization happens to do so. The current UMC will continue as the Post Separation United Methodist Church (psUMC). That entity will be the legal continuation of the existing UMC and will hold title to everything which does not vote to separate from it. This includes all seminaries, General Church agencies, Cokesbury, etc. In addition, the psUMC will quickly move to remove all language which prohibits the ordination of openly LGBTQ clergy and same-sex weddings. It will also likely begin the movement toward a much more progressive theological framework, and perhaps separate out the United States Annual Conferences from those around the world.

Also to be formed is a “traditionalist” denomination. This new, not yet named group will be a new Wesleyan denomination with traditional Methodist theology, polity, Discipline and sexual



ethics. The *Protocol* calls for the new denomination to receive \$25 million in cash from the existing UMC. Per the *Protocol*, any Central Conference, Annual Conference or Local Church can vote to leave the UMC and become a part of this new denomination.

The Wesleyan Covenant Association has been the major driving force in the preparation for this new denomination; however, the WCA is not itself the new denomination. The WCA considers itself a “midwife” to provide structure and support until such a time as the new denomination can be formed.

To that end, the WCA has created two things. First, they have written a proposed new *Doctrine & Discipline* for the new denomination’s General Conference to consider at its opening session. That document can be found here:

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Doctrines-and-Discipline-Version-1.pdf>

Secondly, they have created a Transitional Leadership Council to provide governance and structure to those churches who align with the new denomination until such time as a new General Conference can convene to organize the church fully. Information about the Council can be found here:

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/2020/10/01/about-the-transitional-leadership-council>

The visioning for the new denomination has already begun, and the vision cast can be found here:

<https://wesleyancovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Reimagining-the-Passion-of-a-Global-Wesleyan-Movement-Final-200312.pdf>

The *Protocol* also gives opportunity for the formation of other Methodist bodies out of this division. Each of those would receive up to \$2 million from the UMC for formation. However, as of this point, no other group has organized to the level that would enable that formation. There has been talk of an extremely progressive, “liberationist” Methodist body which might form, and perhaps a majority African American denomination, but neither has materialized at this point.

## **UMC PROCESS:**

- **What is the decision that our church will have to make?**

The Oakdale Board and Staff feel strongly that given the significance around the issues and the impact of this decision that Oakdale Church members deserve a chance to discuss and vote on whether to stay in the psUMC or to align with the new denomination. Therefore, the Oakdale Church Governance Board intends, as soon as possible after the General Conference or the Protocol passes, to ask for a special Church Conference designed to give the congregation a voice and vote in the future alignment and direction of Oakdale Church. This meeting will be called and announced as soon as information is available, and the timeline is in place.



- **How will voting work?**

The existing constitution of Oakdale Church gives the Board discretion on how the voting will take place, whether that be secret ballot, hand count or voice vote. At this moment, the Board has not finalized the details of the process or timing. Regardless of the details the vote will take place with our District Superintendent present and will follow all the rules of our constitution.

- **Will I have to be a member to vote?**

If the *Protocol* passes, all Annual Conferences and local churches have an opportunity to decide on the alignment. Even those bodies which choose not to vote will, in effect, have decided, as there will be a “default” alignment made in that case. Any Annual Conference which does not choose to vote will automatically move to the psUMC. By default, any local church within that Annual Conference will also move to the psUMC.

Alternatively, if an Annual Conference actively chooses to vote, it will require a 57% majority vote for an entire Annual Conference to leave for the new traditional denomination. If 57% is not mustered, the Annual Conference (and all churches within it) will remain in the psUMC. If the Annual Conference does vote to leave for the new traditional denomination, all local churches in it will, by default leave as well. Local churches who disagree with the alignment choice of the Annual Conference (whether with the psUMC or with the new denomination) must vote independently to align.

We believe that the Baltimore-Washington Conference will, by either vote or default, move to the psUMC. Therefore, any church within the Conference which desires to move to the new traditional denomination, will need to vote in full Church Conference to do so. The Administrative Council (or like body) within that congregation will need to approve a call for a Church Conference for the vote to be taken. They will also decide whether the church will need to muster a 2/3 majority or simple majority vote to leave. Once approved, the District Superintendent will preside over a Church Conference, and all (and only) members on the rolls of the congregation will have a vote. Our polity requires that voting be done *in person*, and the members who are present represent a suitable quorum.

The Church Conference will operate as a deliberative body, with opportunity to debate the question of alignment. After debate is concluded, each member will have the right to one vote. Voting can be done in any method the Administrative Council or the Church Conference chooses to be appropriate. It can be done by secret ballot, hand count or voice vote.

If the congregation votes to leave the UMC for the new traditional denomination, the UMC will release that congregation to move to the new denomination. All current liabilities, property, etc. will move with that congregation. However, the pastor does not necessarily move as well. Pastors must make their own individual alignment decisions.

Finally, out of the *Protocol*, there is no provision for a church to leave and become independent. Churches which wish to disaffiliate completely, will need to follow the provisions



of ¶2553 of the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church and properly negotiate their full departure with the Annual Conference. The disposition of all church property will ultimately be dependent on the terms of those negotiations and may or may not include substantial payments to the Annual Conference and the loss of the congregation's building and property.

More information on the terms of the *Protocol* can be found here:

<https://www.gracethroughseparation.com/faqs>

## **MEMBERSHIP:**

- **How can I confirm my membership?**

You can confirm your membership at Oakdale Church by signing onto the Oakdale Database on either a computer or mobile web browser at <https://oakdale.tpsdb.com/> and looking at your profile. At the top of your profile there will be a green box that will say Member if you are a member and Non-Member if you are not. Please visit [oakdale.church/techsupport](https://oakdale.church/techsupport) for technical assistance with the Oakdale Database. If you believe your membership status is not showing correctly please email Eowyn at [ebestor@oakdale.church](mailto:ebestor@oakdale.church).

- **What if I am not a member?**

If you are not a member and would like to become one, please do not consider joining just so you can participate in this vote. If you have been in fellowship with Oakdale Church and would like to formalize your membership status so that you can participate in this important vote, please contact any of the [church staff](#) and let them know. Currently during this time of COVID and where we are not meeting in person our "DigIn" curriculum is being offered through ZOOM. DigIn is the second step of the Oakdale Discipleship path where you will be given the opportunity to formally join the Oakdale family.

## **OAKDALE'S STANCE:**

- **Where does Oakdale stand on the issues? What is the church's stance on LGBTQ issues? Which way is the Board leaning?**

The staff and Board of Oakdale Church have prayerfully studied these issues, the Scriptures and read widely from a variety of sources and are united in agreeing with the Traditional/Orthodox view of the Bible and human sexuality. These are not easy decisions and there are nuances within our understandings that are not always well articulated. However, we stand with John Wesley, the current language of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church and with millions of other followers of Jesus from multiple denominational backgrounds that the Bible is God's Word in its entirety. The Bible instructs us to love all people and that is our goal. No one is excluded from the invitation to follow Jesus and each of us are examples of how God forgives sin and welcomes sinners into His Kingdom. However, Oakdale Church cannot condone behaviors that the Bible condemns. We realize that in our current cultural milieu this is a difficult stand and often misunderstood. Oakdale Church embraces all people in the Spirit of Jesus



regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation and all other tribal demarcations. Oakdale Church acknowledges that none of us live perfectly into the invitation to holy living that accompanies the Gospel, however we also cannot condone setting aside the clear teachings of Jesus because they are difficult or not acceptable to the wider culture around us.

- **What role will the congregation play in the decision process?**

The Final decision for Oakdale Church will be made by the members of Oakdale Church. The Board will request a Church Conference from the Bishop and then convene the meeting for the vote, but the final decision belongs to the membership of Oakdale Church.

- **What role does the WCA play in our decision making?**

The WCA plays no role in our decision making other than the WCA has played a vital role alongside other caucuses and our institutional leadership in providing information and resources for research and understanding. The WCA has done a great deal of leg work in getting things ready for a new denomination, however the WCA is not the new denomination. The WCA has played the role of midwife in the process of this difficult time of division and consultation. Our Senior Pastor, Kevin Baker was the founding president of the local chapter of the WCA here in the Baltimore Washington Conference and continues on the Board currently. Oakdale Church's Board decided to formally join the WCA organization a year or so ago in order to support their efforts of constructive formation of a new denomination and alternative to the decades of division and mission confusion that has resulted. It is our understanding that the WCA will no longer be needed after the birth of the new denomination.

#### **IMPACT ON CHURCH:**

- **How will our choice affect property rights? Will the “new” be supported by the financials of the old?**

Currently all property and assets of Oakdale Church belong to the UMC and are governed by Oakdale Church. The deeds to Oakdale Church all have a “trust clause” which gives the UMC ownership and control. The new denomination is choosing NOT to have a trust clause believing that it is better to have a “community of the committed” rather than a “community of the constrained”. If Oakdale Church decides to move to the new denomination all of her property and assets along with indebtedness will become the property of Oakdale Church. Because of unfunded pension liabilities (indebtedness for pension promises already made) there will be a “lien” on the property (not liquid assets) until those unfunded liabilities are retired. These unfunded liabilities will be paid monthly as they are now until they are exhausted. Wespath the current financial institution responsible for pastoral pensions, healthcare and investments will serve both the psUMC and the new denomination.

- **Will the divide change how we operate? How does the Oakdale leadership see Oakdale changing-services, worship, education, social, etc.?**



The goal of Oakdale Church's Board has always been to protect the mission and ministry of Oakdale Church regardless of the outcome of this divisive season. It is our hope that aside from the technicalities of voting, trust clause and denominational alignment that the ministry of Oakdale Church will go forward unchanged. In other words, it is our goal that the community will barely notice that Oakdale Church has changed at all.

- **How will our choice affect individual membership status? Will the church exclude membership based on sexual status or personal beliefs?**

If Oakdale Church decides to align with the new denomination individual memberships will naturally transfer without any effort needed from individual members. If Oakdale Church chooses to stay with the psUMC then no membership action is necessary. Oakdale Church has never excluded anyone from membership based on sexual status and will not do so in the future. Membership in Oakdale Church is offered to all who are seeking to live in obedience to the teachings of Jesus, desire to align with the mission and beliefs of our community and are baptized as followers of Jesus. That will continue as well.

- **What will happen to the church when the division takes place? Where will the other portion of the church go?**

No one will be asked to leave Oakdale Church even those who were not in the majority. It is hard to believe that the membership of Oakdale Church will be 100% in any decision much less this one. Therefore, the Board and staff worked diligently to get the denominational leadership to lead forward in a way that would make these kinds of decision unnecessary. It is painful to think that regardless of how small the percentage that part of the Oakdale Church family will feel alienated from their Church home. It is the hope of the Oakdale Church Board and staff that everyone will remain a part of the Oakdale Church family regardless of their vote. However, the Board is not interested in continuing this conflict once the vote has been taken. In other words, everyone is welcome and wanted but we will not continue to litigate this division after the vote. The Board does realize that these are serious matters and people feel very strongly on both sides and so some may choose not to stay after the vote is taken. The Board and the staff of Oakdale Church will do everything they can to help people transition to a faith community that is more aligned with their heart and beliefs.

#### **COMMUNICATION:**

- **How can we ask questions? Can we receive additional communication on what is happening? How will the information be presented?**

You are always invited to ask questions of the staff and Board through email, phone calls or personal appointments. This FAQ reflects the Board's commitment to open communication and a desire to keep you informed. Throughout this year the Board has planned several town hall style gatherings and will send out information as often as new information becomes av