

Questions and Comments on Oakdale *Forward*: Responses from the Oakdale Unified Governance Board

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Updates To Be Posted in June 2022

Introduction

The Board is grateful for the more than 350 visitors to the Oakdale Forward web pages and the more than 40 questions that have been submitted. Several of you submitted comments to express your appreciation for the Board's efforts, our presentation on March 27, and the leadership that we have dedicated to following God's path for our church. We thank you for your support!

The questions that were submitted have been grouped into the following categories, which are hyperlinked below to allow you to jump to specific sections. In addition, some questions that were similar have been combined; therefore, not all questions that were submitted have been captured verbatim. Finally, additional information from the Town Hall on April 24 has been added in italics in respective sections.

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Questions and Answers

Oakdale's Core Beliefs and Differences from the UMC

QUESTION: Is Oakdale being totally transparent with the congregation on the reasons for wanting to break away from the Methodist church? Civilizations have evolved over the past two millennia. Medicine has evolved, science leads to new breakthroughs on a daily basis. Humans can fly and yet we, as a church, want to continue following antiquated scriptures that were rewritten many times in the past 2k years, and most recently by old white men reporting to King James. My feelings are that the Board must tell the congregation that we don't want to evolve as a church, in tune with the 21st century, but instead stay the course of an outdated transcript that basically states that men are men & women are to be subservive (sic) to men. That gay & lesbians are not welcome or loved by Oakdale no

matter how much we sugarcoat how much we love them. That interracial marriage or single mother/parents having children out of wedlock are pitied or frowned upon under the antiquated teachings of the Bible. Jesus loves EVERYONE, not just those that insist on following the teachings of the many outdated lessons of the Old & New Testaments. We can continue to stick our collective heads in the sands and follow the old ways and never, in my opinion, grow Oakdale into a thoroughly modern, 21st century church community or, we can accept change and evolving interpretations of the Bible and Christ's teachings and bring in new, younger and progressive families and members to Oakdale.

ANSWER: Oakdale Church strongly believes that God loves all people and that all people are in need of God's forgiveness offered through faith in Christ's death on the Cross. Oakdale Church agrees with the Book of Discipline of the UMC regarding the practice of homosexuality, which states that "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." This same view is held by the vast majority of faithful Christians of all denominations all over the world. Oakdale Church has and always will welcome same-sex-attracted individuals and couples into the church with the same love and grace offered to all others. Jesus embraced all people but not all behaviors. The Spirit of God receives us as we are and enables us to grow into the character of Christ as we submit our lives to Jesus in obedient faith. Regarding reaching younger generations of people, The Pew Research Center states that 62% of United Methodist Church membership is over 50 years old and only 9% are between 18-29. While the United Methodist Church has been losing members and worshippers for decades, some of the fastest growing churches in the country, with large numbers of young people, are churches that are innovative in methodology, yet remain orthodox in theology.

Oakdale's Board does desire to be transparent, and there are several reasons for the Board's recommendation at this time. First, it is universally recognized that the UMC has become a house divided and we have been instructed by our Bishop that these conversations are to occur. As the Board's members have gone through our own journey of investigation into the issues that have brought the UMC to the point of schism, we researched, prayed, and had a great deal of conversation. The Board made the recommendation to the congregation because primarily we believe we are following where God is leading us. We didn't set out to be here, but this is where God has led us. Oakdale Church, however, does hold the view of the Bible that has been consistent in the UMC since the days of John Wesley who stated that he was "a man of one book." Article IV of the Confession of Faith referring to the Bible states: "We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation."

QUESTION: If transitioned to non-denominational, will Oakdale Church be welcoming to same sex couples, families, and people of LGBTQ affiliation?

ANSWER: Our culture has now embraced homosexual practice and marriage fully. Most churches continue to live and teach a sexual ethic that flows out of the biblical understanding that marriage is between one man and one woman and that sex outside of marriage is not God's design. What we have been witnessing over the last couple of decades has been this significant cultural shift. Similar shifts have taken place in culture. The church has not always responded well to these shifts in culture and ethics and we don't want to presume that Oakdale Church has been perfect or ever will be. Everyone is

welcome and invited into the Oakdale Church family. Our goal is to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal to us the places where our lives are not aligned with God's will and empower us to experience transformation and alignment with Jesus' teaching. Oakdale Church will continue what we have always practiced, a loving approach to all people (grace) as we teach God's Word (truth) so that each person can embrace and experience the abundant life and freedom Jesus offers to all. Homosexual practice is no more sinful than heterosex outside of marriage. Members of the LGBTQIA community will be embraced as Oakdale Church embraces all people.

QUESTION: What will be the stand of the pastors and church of the non-denominational option regarding gay pastors and pastors marrying gay couples? What is the stand of the other two options?

ANSWER: Oakdale Church pastors do not condone gay marriage in the Church, will not perform gay marriages, nor allow them to be held on Oakdale Church property. While the official position of the UMC prohibits these ceremonies as well, there are Bishops and Pastors and Churches that are living in defiance of these guidelines. The schism in the UMC has come to this place because what started as theological disagreements has resulted in disobedience and covenant-breaking. It seems clear that the UMC leadership in the United States is determined not to live into the UMC discipline and so will continue to live in disobedience to the Book of Discipline until such time that they can alter it. The Global Methodist Church will uphold the current UMC doctrinal stand, as will Oakdale Church.

Additional info from the April 24 Town Hall: *A audience commenter raised the perspective that the church has used doctrine in the past to justify slavery, and now we are using it again with human sexuality. Love is love. Additional perspective was provided by another audience commenter that the UMC has not been transparent about how it advances its own agenda on this issue (with current BWC leadership supporting full inclusion of the practice of homosexuality), which can impact ministers on a global level and even become life-threatening.*

Oakdale's Church Doctrine

QUESTION: How would the doctrine of a non-denominational church be established?

ANSWER: Non-denominational churches usually choose to regard the Bible as their authority rather than the customs of a particular church denomination. Oakdale Church believes that the Bible should be the authority that dictates our teachings, worship, and all aspects of the church. Oakdale's Core Beliefs, which would not change if the Congregation votes to leave the UMC, can be found at <https://oakdale.church/new-here-about-us/what-we-believe/>.

Attractional vs. Disciple-making Focus

QUESTION: Following the Board's presentation, I wonder why the Board members see an attractional church as mutually exclusive from a disciple making church? Why can't a church be both?

ANSWER: The Oakdale Board does not in fact see an attractional church as mutually exclusive from a disciple-making church; however, the attractional model alone does not facilitate discipling people where they already are in their lives and in their communities. We certainly support having a church home where members can worship together and support one another, but the church must also be able to invest significant effort in sending out God's people in faithfulness to The Great Commission, stating

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19) As we move to tip the balance (yet maintain some balance) more toward a model of sending out disciple-makers, the emphasis on the attractional model, and the related constraints of denominational expectations, become less or even non-compatible.

Finances and Property

QUESTION: What happens with the facilities if Oakdale leaves the Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC). Technically they are owned by the BWC, correct? Can Oakdale keep its property if it leaves the UMC? How will the current mortgage loan for the property be considered?

ANSWER: Although donations from Oakdale congregants purchased the church's property and pay for its upkeep, according to church law set out in the Book of Discipline, "[a]ll properties of United Methodist local churches . . . are held, in trust, for the benefit of the entire denomination, and ownership and usage of church property is subject to the Discipline." See Book of Discipline (2016), ¶ 2501. As a practical matter, this means that, ordinarily, churches seeking to leave the denomination can't take their property with them. Also relevant to this analysis, Maryland law includes provisions specifically dedicated to the United Methodist Church and its Trust Clause.

At the 2019 General Conference, a new section 2553, "Disaffiliation of a Local Church Over Issues Related to Human Sexuality," was added to the Book of Discipline, establishing a process for disaffiliation. Although section 2553 imposed departure costs of 24 months of apportionments and unfunded pension obligations, it also specified that "a disaffiliating local church **shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property.**"

Unfortunately, Annual Conferences may add requirements to section 2553. The Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC), has **added** a requirement to section 2553 requiring that local churches **pay 50 percent of the assessed value of their property.** The Maryland Taxes and Assessment website has Oakdale's property assessment at \$7,273,100; 50% of the assessed value would be \$3,636,550.

Ultimately, the final cost of departure, should the congregation choose that path, will likely be resolved through negotiation, and would likely involve some percentage of the assessed value of the church's property, outstanding loans, 1-2 years of apportionments, and unfunded pension liabilities.

Additional information about the trust clause and section 2553 can be found at the UMC and BWC websites, <https://www.umc.org/en> and <https://www.bwcumc.org/>, respectively.

QUESTION: What will be the fiscal oversight if we become a non-denominational church? What is to stop bad behavior with funds?

ANSWER: Presently, the Methodist denomination provides very little oversight of local church finances. At Oakdale, we have several levels of oversight that exceed the denomination's review. First, the Board has a Finance Work Group that reviews the monthly financial reports prepared by the church staff. The Finance Work Group reports their assessment at each monthly board meeting. Additionally, the Board has an external and independent Certified Public Accountant that performs an assessment of the church's annual financial reports. The Board takes its fiscal oversight role seriously and exceeds the denominational requirements.

QUESTION: Would the Conference legally challenge our decision on fiscal grounds since we pay a significant apportionment to them? Who would defend our position?

ANSWER: Based on its actions in litigating against churches that attempt to leave the denomination with their property, e.g., Sunnyside Church in Frederick, Maryland, and its decision to add a departure charge of 50 percent of the assessed value of the property to the section 2553 disaffiliation provision, it is likely that the Annual Conference would oppose any efforts for Oakdale to leave with its property. Beyond that, any prediction of what the conference might do is speculation.

QUESTION: Does Oakdale have endowment funds and if so, how much are they and would they stay with a non-denominational Oakdale since they were given to a United Methodist Church.

ANSWER: Yes, Oakdale has a single endowment in which the dividends and income of an investment are to be used **“only for church maintenance.”** In December 2021, the value of the endowment and accumulated investment income was approximately \$104,000. Although we would need a legal opinion to be sure, it seems that an asset donated for such a limited purpose would remain forever tied to Oakdale property.

QUESTION: Has the GMC set any suggested annual dues that this newly formed organization would need its affiliated members to pay?

ANSWER: In the GMC’s guidance at <https://globalmethodist.org/what-we-believe/> (paragraph 349), it is stated that not more than 1.5% of the local church operating income will be required for the general church, with another 5% to the annual conference. However, the percentage is likely to be higher at first, with the commitment to reach 5% within 5 years.

QUESTION: What will the insurance, benefits and other staff benefits cost if we are no longer part of the United Methodist Group policies and retirement plans?

ANSWER: Oakdale has limited participation in overarching UMC insurance policies or retirement plans for anyone other than UMC-appointed pastors. For pastoral retirement, the amounts required have not yet been determined.

Other Denominations

QUESTION: What about the Free Methodists? Why don't we just join with them? Or how about Southern Baptist? I grew up in a nondenominational church which split twice as I was growing up. I have witnessed numerous nondenominational congregations crash and burn due to scandal, financial mismanagement and difficulty recruiting staff. They often seem to thrive for a decade or two but not much longer. Being part of a bigger ship can slow you down but can be a safety feature on rough seas.

ANSWER: While there are many denominations that likely have similarities with Oakdale's values, the denominational church model that worked for many of us is no longer working in today's world. Despite many Americans being spiritually curious, they are less and less interested in the denominational model, and we see the results as church membership keeps dropping. The reasons behind this are complex but include negative perceptions of the indoctrination and assimilation associated with the stereotypical church experience. As the Board considered and analyzed all these avenues, we realized that simply changing denominations won't solve the core issue, and that a strategic level change is needed to

achieve our goals. The Board felt that the non-denominational model is the only model that provides the fundamental change needed for us to be as successful in the next two hundred years, as we were in the last.

Additionally, being non-denominational doesn't mean that Oakdale is alone. In fact, nondenominational churches represent the second-largest church grouping in the nation. The Board believes there is potential for many like-minded churches to collaborate and support one another as we embark on the future. Finally, Oakdale's Board takes their oversight role seriously, and often involves independent parties to ensure due diligence when it comes to issues such as church finances.

QUESTION: What happened to the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA)? Why are we no longer aligned?

ANSWER: The WCA was and is a group of churches and individuals who together recognized that many UMC leaders were choosing to no longer abide by the UMC's own principles, and in the desire of the WCA members to be faithful to those principles, founded on Scripture, were looking to join together in some way to forge a new way forward. Oakdale was very involved with the WCA for several years, and saw that it was an organization founded and led by wonderful, God-loving people. However, the WCA was never itself intended to become a new denomination. Instead, many of those affiliated with the WCA have helped to develop and/or will be joining the Global Methodist Church. The Board's recommendation to choose the non-denominational path does not mean that we do not still share some alignment with the Global Methodist Church, but that we feel that God is leading us away from the legalities and ties that come with being part of a denomination.

QUESTION: Of the churches that have already formally decided to leave the UMC, what percentage have gone non-denomination vs. joining the new GMC?

ANSWER: It is not possible to answer this question at this time, since the GMC launched too recently (May 1, 2022). However, it may be helpful to share that, according to the United Methodist News, "a review of U.S. annual conference reports and publicly available journals found that annual conferences — church regional bodies — approved about 100 disaffiliations in 2021," in addition to 32 churches in 2020. Further, it was recently announced that, in Florida alone, a group of 107 churches are seeking to disaffiliate from the UMC.

QUESTION: With regard to the UMC Book of Discipline as written, will the GMC follow that or adopt a new Book of Discipline? If the vote is to become a non-denominational church, will we establish our own theological guidelines and "disciplines"?

ANSWER: The GMC currently has a transitional Book of Discipline ([82948-englishtransitionalbookofdoctrinesanddiscipline .pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#)), modeled after that of the UMC, that will move to a permanent status after the denomination's official launch. If Oakdale decides to become a non-denominational church, we will need to develop governing documents. These documents will align with Oakdale's current theological stance and governance structure. As demonstrated by the UMC no longer operating in adherence to the Book of Discipline, we must acknowledge that written words are only as strong as those who own the right to enforce them or change them. The best mitigation against Oakdale going astray in the future will be maintaining a healthy congregation that shares their faith and listens and lives in obedience to God's direction.

Missions

QUESTION: The missionary personnel currently supported by Oakdale - are they 1) under the UMC umbrella, and 2) how would they be affected if Oakdale becomes a non-denominational church?

ANSWER: The missions currently supported by Oakdale Church are NOT under the umbrella of the UMC. Therefore, Oakdale's choices in our support for missions are already independent of the UMC, and our decision on whether or not to disaffiliate from the UMC will have no impact on our currently-supported missions. In fact, if we disaffiliate from the UMC, we would likely be able to increase our support for missions work of our choosing due to no longer having the requirement to support the UMC.

Pastors and Staff

QUESTION: Will guidelines be established for replacing the Pastor?

ANSWER: While the denominational appointment process is well known, Oakdale has historically had, and has utilized, a competitive hiring process, in lieu of the appointment process. Additionally, even pastors associated with denominations can often take competitive placement roles. The Board believes that the competitive placement process allows Oakdale to find and hire the best pastors and staff to partner with Oakdale in carrying out God's plan for our church.

QUESTION: The direction of a non-denominational church (Christ-led) is something I've thought about for Oakdale for some time now, especially since the church started using Oakdale Church without Methodist in the title. I'm concerned as to Pastor Kevin's thought on that. I definitely do not want to lose Kevin as our pastor of Oakdale Church.

ANSWER: Pastor Kevin, as well as Oakdale staff, have voiced support for the Board's recommendation. That said, this decision rests with the Congregation, and we are excited to walk with you on this journey to determine the future of Oakdale.

QUESTION: If we choose non-denominational, what happens to our Pastor's retirement package through the Methodist conference?

ANSWER: For Pastor Kevin Baker, his pension is already vested and would not be impacted. For future Pastors, Oakdale would fund a competitive retirement package as part of their compensation (as Oakdale already does for most of our staff).

QUESTION: How have the staff been kept informed or has the staff been asked for their opinions?

ANSWER: Oakdale's staff and the Board have been on this journey at the same time in somewhat parallel meetings. The Board, during a time of retreat and planning, began to discern God's leading toward becoming a non-denominational church and then informed the staff shortly before the congregation. The staff and the Board are united in helping Oakdale Church move forward in obedience to the leading of God. The staff have had ample opportunities to share their opinions and thoughts with one another and the Board. Each staff person who is also a member of Oakdale Church will have a vote just like other members in directing the church's next steps.

Information on the United Methodist Church

QUESTION: I'm a new member. I'm not familiar with the corporate level of the United Methodist denomination. Where can I find out how it's run and how the new changes being discussed by members and the Board will institute a positive change. Not to misunderstand change can be positive. I need to understand that is not ONLY financial and how the vision benefits the kingdom of God.

ANSWER: Information about the United Methodist denomination including Oakdale's immediate headquarters (the Baltimore-Washington Conference), the trust clause and section 2553 can be found at the UMC and BWC websites, <https://www.umc.org/en> and <https://www.bwcmc.org/>, respectively.

Board Composition

QUESTION: Why is there no one over 65 on the Board? We need representation from those who have put in decades of service to making this church grow.

ANSWER: Membership on the Oakdale Unified Governance Board is open to all Oakdale members. An open call for Board member nominations has been offered annually for the past three years. Every member who serves on the Board is expected to serve on behalf of all Oakdale members, focused on Oakdale's mission, and not representing any specific or set of specific membership demographics.

Communications

QUESTION: Is there a way to relay information to congregants that don't have internet access or even use email?

ANSWER: There are efforts ongoing to share information with congregants that cannot access the information through their computers. For more information, please contact Leslie Myers through the church office.

QUESTION: Will the Town Hall meetings be on live video for those who have longer commutes or just prefer to attend online?

ANSWER: Yes, the Town Hall meetings will be live-streamed on April 24 (1pm) and May 15 (12:30pm).

Voting Process

QUESTION: Does the two-thirds vote required to leave the denomination mean two-thirds of all church members or two-thirds of those that show up to vote? Assuming it's all members, how will the non-votes be counted? Regarding the order of the vote, will we first vote on leaving the UMC and if that passes have a second vote on GMC vs. non-denominational or will our vote be to pick one of the three options? What accommodations will or can be made for members of Oakdale who, because of ill health, travel, or business are unable to vote in person?

ANSWER: Our voting process is dictated by the UMC Book of Discipline and additional guidelines for disaffiliation provided by our Conference, and a two-thirds majority vote is required to support disaffiliation. If that majority is not reached, Oakdale Church will remain a United Methodist Church. While anyone is welcome to attend the meeting where the vote will be held, only official members of Oakdale Church can vote, and all members must vote in person with a photo ID. The two-thirds majority

would be assessed by the total number of votes at the official in-person vote, and not all members of the church regardless of whether or not they voted. This vote will be for disaffiliation only. For direction of the church if it disaffiliates, the Board will be working with the congregation throughout to determine a clear pathway from God. Importantly, we plan to give everyone at least two months' notice before the date of the vote, and we plan to take an early "straw poll" - or unofficial survey, at least once or twice as we move through this process so we can assess whether and where both Oakdale members and non-members need additional information to inform their perspectives on disaffiliation. The first straw poll will be held the first two weeks of June and will be online and open to anyone who wishes to participate.

Other

QUESTION: What will be the cost for malpractice/ criminal behavior insurances or protections? Will there be policies in place to address illegal/criminal behavior of staff or volunteer leaders?

ANSWER: It is important to acknowledge that neither the UMC nor the BWC provides insurance coverage for these types of risks. Nevertheless, the Oakdale Church Board has always been and remains highly attentive to risk management for the church. We have insurance policies in place, which we review biannually to ensure appropriate types (e.g., sexual misconduct, injuries on church property, etc.) and levels of coverage are included. We also are also highly attentive to the [Safe Sanctuaries](#) program which, while originated by the UMC, is being continued by Oakdale to ensure the fullest protections we can for some of these concerns. We will continue regular reviews to identify and act on the need for any additional coverages.

QUESTION: Will Oakdale be taking down the cross like other nondenominational churches?

ANSWER: As a non-denominational church, Oakdale would not be affiliated with a specific denomination, but would at its core be a Christian church. Our core beliefs would be based upon the centrality of Jesus Christ and his saving work done for us through his cross. The cross is a symbol of that belief in Jesus Christ and would not be removed.

Additional info from the April 24 Town Hall:

QUESTION: *Are the decisionmakers to be trusted with transparency? Where are the financial statements to be found and what about the Clarksburg church plant decision in the past, which didn't appear to allow for the congregation to participate in that decision?*

ANSWER: *The Board and staff always want to be transparent with issues affecting the congregation. Financial statement information is available through the Board meeting minutes through Touchpoint. To access the Board Minutes, visit the Resources tab on the MyOakdale database (Touchpoint). Visit my.oakdale.church and login using your email or user name and password. Go to your profile page. Underneath your contact information, you will find several tabs/rectangles (Personal, Involvement, Profile, Giving, Communications...) the last one is Resources. Click it. The Board minutes will be listed as links to PDF documents in descending order with the most recent at the top. You can also get directly to the resources tab by visiting: <https://my.oakdale.church/person2/0#tab-resources>. For the concern about the planting of a Clarksburg campus extending from Oakdale, it is unfortunate that there was a perception that this was brought forth without the congregation. In reality, it was a decision that was directed by the Baltimore Washington Conference leadership (both the location and the effort to plant a satellite campus at all), and Oakdale leadership at the time felt it best to support the Conference, so felt that it was not something that we could not decline.*