



Note about how to use the script with the slide presentation: this script and the accompanying powerpoint were created to be as user friendly as possible. Each slide is numbered with the corresponding section of the script in red. An explanation of each slide can be found in bullet points with subcategories in bold.

1. “Information About the Current Landscape and Options for the Future”

- Recently, Bishop Mueller held in-person district meetings with clergy and Zoom district meetings with lay leadership from each congregation. This presentation will share the same information in an abbreviated fashion about what is going on in the United Methodist Church, how we got here, options for the future and how he intends to lead the Arkansas Conference in the coming months.

2. How the UMC Arrived at the Point We Now Find Ourselves

- **1972 General Conference:** The first statement regarding homosexuality was published in *The Book of Discipline*.
- **2016 General Conference:** Legislation was enacted assigning the Council of Bishops the responsibility to find a solution for our denomination that has been deeply divided on matters of human sexuality.
- **2016: The Commission on the Way Forward Appointed:** This diverse and representative group was created by the Council of Bishops to assist it in leading the denomination forward. It offered the Council of Bishops three options: The One Church Plan, The Connectional Conference Plan and The Traditional Plan. The Council endorsed the One Church Plan, but also offered the other two options for consideration by a special called session of the General Conference. The Council of Bishops also asked the Judicial Council to undertake a constitutional review of the proposed plans.
- **2019 Called Session of General Conference:** The “Traditional Plan” was enacted by a 53% - 47% margin. Additional legislation was adopted allowing those to disaffiliate and depart who could not remain for reasons of conscience.
- **January 2020: “The Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation” Unveiled** This plan, agreed to by a theologically diverse group of 9 bishops, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and conservative Renewal Group leaders, proposed allowing churches desiring to do so to separate in an easy and orderly manner. The Protocol assumed that the remaining the United Methodist Church would become more inclusive of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Support for the Protocol was offered from across the theological spectrum and convention wisdom held that the 2020 General Conference would enact it. However, COVID-19 overwhelmed the world beginning in March 2020 and General Conference 2020 was postponed.
- **February 2022:** The rescheduled 2020 General Conference set to begin August 29, 2022 was canceled and the Global Methodist Church announced it would form on May 1, 2022.
- **2024 General Conference** is the next scheduled meeting of the General Conference



3. What This Means for Right Now

- 2016 *BOD* (as amended in 2019) is still authoritative
- 'The Protocol' is aspirational
- The Bishops' Narrative & #BeUMC are aspirational, not operational
- No decision is required by any church. Only those congregations interested in leaving have to decide what action to take next.

4. The Most Current Information Regarding Available Options

5. Remain in UMC

- This is the default option. No one has to do anything! The rumor that there is a May 1st required deadline for churches to have to vote to stay or leave is only a rumor. This is the default position and will be what the majority of congregations will decide to do. Moderate and traditional congregations, in addition to centrist and progressive congregations, will be included in this group.

6. Wait to Decide

- Wait for the outcome of the 2024 General Conference and see what the emerging shape of the United Methodist Church and the Global Methodist Church will be. There is no need to rush, especially for traditional congregations, since the 2016 Book of Discipline is authoritative.

7. Use ¶2553 in the *Book of Discipline* to Disaffiliate

- This option was adopted at 2019 General Conference
- Since it expires December 31, 2023, the process must be completed by then.
- It was originally intended for more 'Progressive Churches', but recent Judicial Council decisions broaden the application so it is now available to any church who wishes to pursue it.
- Requirements - as adopted in 2021 by the ARUMC 'Principles Regarding Local Church Requests for Disaffiliation'
 1. A congregation's Church Council or leadership team must agree to pursue this option followed by:
 2. A three month discernment process for the church which, at the end of those three months, will require a 2/3 vote by the church.
 3. The local church must be up-to-date on its past 12 months tithe
 4. Full payment of the estimated upcoming 12 months tithe
 5. Repayment of certain grants received in the last 10 years - benevolent grants are not included in this requirement.
 6. Full payment of the local church's share of the conference's unfunded liability.Note: there currently is exploration taking place about whether a less expensive option might be available for churches leaving. Updated information concerning this will be shared as appropriate.



7. \$5,000 in legal costs - estimated
8. After all requirements have been met, a simple majority vote by the Annual Conference.
9. After all requirements of the disaffiliation process have been completed, a quick claim deed will be issued to the church without the Trust Clause in it.

8. Possible Future Option: Use ¶2548.2 to Transfer

- ¶2548.2 *“With the consent of the presiding bishop and of a majority of the district superintendents and of the district board of church location and building and at the request of the charge conference or of a meeting of the membership of the local church, where required by local law, and in accordance with said law, the annual conference may instruct and direct the board of trustees of a local church to deed church property to one of the other denominations represented in the Pan-Methodist Commission or to another evangelical denomination under an allocation, exchange of property, or comity agreement, provided that such agreement shall have been committed to writing and signed and approved by the duly qualified and authorized representatives of both parties concerned.” -Book of Discipline*
- The Annual Conference appears to be the entity that decides how to implement this provision of the *Book of Discipline*.
- Legislation has been submitted to the 2022 Arkansas Annual Conference proposing principles for this possible option.
- This option remains controversial and may be subject to legal challenges.

9. Possible Future Option: Annual Conference Can Vote to Leave the Denomination

- The ability to use this option awaits a declaratory decision by the Judicial Council.
- There will be no legislation regarding this option at the 2022 Arkansas Annual Conference

10. Bishop Mueller’s Leadership Principles

- First, we will **embrace a heart of peace** and treat each other with the grace and respect that sisters and brothers in Christ owe each other.
 - i. People are watching as we go through this painful season. What will they conclude about Jesus as they watch how we treat each other in his name? Assume the best intentions of others; avoiding the temptation of attacking those ‘on the other side’ and respecting the decisions congregations and individuals make about their futures. Bishop Mueller certainly expects you to state why you love the UMC and want to stay or explain why you feel compelled for reasons of conscience to leave. He is comfortable with people providing information about the new denomination if asked. But he expects two things: First, you will not make statements in public, in the media or on social media that make it harder for your colleagues and United Methodists throughout our state. Second, you will refrain from all attempts to recruit individuals and congregations to leave or remain.



Bishop Mueller is certain this will probably be our greatest challenge; he also has faith that we will succeed.

- Second, we will **graciously allow congregations to land where they may thrive, while protecting the appropriate interests of the UMC.**
 - i. For most this will mean remaining in the Arkansas Conference of The United Methodist Church. This is true even for a number of 'traditional' or 'moderate' churches because they love their congregation and their denomination. For some, it will lead to a departure - either to become independent or join another denomination.
 - ii. To clarify, Bishop Mueller's overriding goal is to have as many local congregations as possible thriving in making disciples of Jesus Christ and simply thinks that means helping those, who feel compelled for reasons of conscience to depart, to be able to do so in the Spirit of Christian love. He also believes this means that all congregations, that remain in the United Methodist Church, feel fully included and respected.
 - iii. The validity of the Trust Clause (which goes back hundreds of years) will be defended, unfunded pension liability will be safeguarded in order to protect the promises made to pastors who have faithfully served, and those who do not wish to follow their church if it separates will receive support and care in order to find a new United Methodist church home or begin a new United Methodist congregation.
 - iv. The Arkansas Conference will not do this in an adversarial or punitive way. It simply is a given as we move ahead.
- Third, we will **guarantee a fair process for congregations discerning whether to leave.**
 - i. The district superintendents will ensure that both the local church discernment process outlined in the Arkansas Conference "Principles Regarding Local Church Requests for Disaffiliation" and the steps following a congregation's vote is fully, transparently and fairly implemented.
 - ii. They will be present for at least the first congregational meeting in the discernment process and make sure that all voices have the opportunity to speak and all questions are answered. This means those who want their church to remain a United Methodist Church will have the opportunity to speak, as well as those who wish to leave.
 - iii. In all cases, the intent is to ensure that it's the church's - and not the pastor's - decision whether to stay or leave if a congregation decides to enter the discernment process.
 - iv. Bishop Mueller will guarantee that all subsequent steps are honored as outlined in the principles adopted last year at Annual Conference.
- Fourth, we will **keep the focus on what matters most:** seeking to grow as many vital local congregations as possible by keeping the focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped and sent to transform lives, communities and the world.



- i. Too often, the United Methodist Church has fallen into the trap of thinking that what matters most is which side wins the votes at the General Conference. It has not been healthy for our churches, our mission or those Jesus calls us to serve.
 - ii. The Cabinet and Bishop Mueller will strive not only to keep this in front of us, we will continue to offer opportunities to support local churches in carrying out Jesus' work right in the middle of all the turmoil we are experiencing.
- Fifth, we will **provide updates and transparent information** on a regular basis. In the meantime, contact your district superintendent or Bishop Mueller if you have any questions or concerns.
 - i. Both laity and clergy are a bit anxious and uncertain, as well as have questions about how all of this will work and what it means for you and your congregation.
- **Prayer** will be at the heart of all Bishop Mueller does in the coming months as we travel this journey that will sometimes be painful and always be challenging. But so will something else. It is Bishop Mueller's fervent belief that the Holy Spirit is present in the midst of all of our chaos, anger, sin and differences and will miraculously take it and use it for good. He has no idea what that will look like. But he doesn't have to. And neither do you. We simply need to keep listening and, then, be willing to respond.
 - i. We have a wonderful opportunity to show the difference Jesus makes in the most real and difficult times in life - let's embrace this moment!.