

FRIDAY, July 1, 2022 – Email from D.S. Jon Strother

Dear Friends:

Disaffiliation Clarification

It has recently come to our attention that there may be some misunderstanding, around some of the facets of the recent Disaffiliation Agreement adopted by our annual conference. Most congregations are choosing to remain in the continuing United Methodist Church, seeking to continue our missional focus of making disciples of Jesus Christ, and serving all of our neighbors with Christ-like compassion. The vast majority of congregations who are remaining in the continuing United Methodist Church have no need to suspend that missional focus in order to engage in congregational votes which affirm their denominational identity.

A United Methodist congregation is already a part of large, multi-national family network which spans the globe. Our unity is not determined by a congregational vote, but rests in Jesus Christ, Who has claimed and commissioned us in our baptism. In our membership vows we acknowledge Christ's claim upon us, and vow to "faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness."

Some of our congregations may choose to "disaffiliate." These congregations will be guided by the process outlined in The Disaffiliation Agreement. The process found there is fully embraced by our Conference Trustees and reminds us that churches who are discerning their future in the UMC actually have until Dec 31, 2023 - **NOT 2022** to disaffiliate under Par. 2553. As many have noted, the Church's current teaching around human sexuality has not changed. General Conference will include this in their processes of discernment in 2024.

The bishop who is serving us at this time has certainly been gracious in his guidance to all. But as noted in Paragraph 2553, the bishop is not tasked with setting the process and terms. His role, in these matters, is to ensure that the annual conference follows the guidelines set forth in the agreement and The Book of Discipline.

The Disaffiliation Agreement has been available to the annual conference since May 17. The link to this information follows:

<https://nccumc.org/disaffiliation/>

Regardless of who our bishop may be in the future, the terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement cannot be changed, even if there is a change in episcopal leadership.

Our deep desire is for all of our congregations to continue working together in ways which point the world to Jesus. I give thanks for the many ways God's Spirit is strengthening the bonds of love among us, and how, even in our differences, God is calling us to oneness in Christ. The biblical witness is abundantly full of signposts pointing towards unity. We hear it in Jesus' priestly prayer in John 17, but also in many other passages, such as: 1 Corinthians 1:10, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Acts 4:32, Galatians 3:28, John 13:35, Romans 10:19, Psalm 133:1, Ephesians 4:3, and Matthew 23:8. Each of these passages offer us glimpses into God's heart.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our waiting is never to retreat from responsibility, but to listen to the Lord of The Church, and in listening to Christ, to learn, again, the gift of listening to one another, even when our views and perspectives may differ. In his book, *Unafraid and Unashamed*, Wil Cantrell offers us words to ponder while we wait and take time to prayerfully discern.

“The masses of people in our world who do not know Jesus Christ are not concerned with the internal squabbles of United Methodism. They are keenly concerned with finding a life full of hope, grace, and meaning. The millions of people in our world who are battling the demons of disease, addiction, isolation, and extreme poverty are not waiting for a perfectly organized denomination to reach them. They are waiting for local Christians in local churches to love them. May we, the people called United Methodists, recommit ourselves now and in the future to share Christ with our local communities, working together whenever possible to offer Christ’s miraculous saving presence to our broken and hurting world.”

Grace and Peace,

Jon

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