



WHY HAS ASBURY DECIDED TO PURSUE DISAFFILIATION FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH?

- There are irreconcilable theological differences between Asbury and the structure of the UMC. Within the UMC, we see a denomination becoming increasingly accepting of clergy, including bishops, who denigrate the authority of Scripture and deny the Divinity and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, along with many other key tenets of the faith. Understandably, these theological disagreements have led to tremendous decline and dysfunction in our denomination.
- The UMC has become ungovernable. The Book of Discipline is the United Methodist covenant that describes the theology and beliefs of the denomination. Our congregation has long been committed to supporting the doctrine, governance and practices as described in the Book of Discipline and remains so to this day. Unfortunately many clergy and pastors throughout the denomination not only disagree with some of the principles and theology of The United Methodist Church, they have acted openly and directly against those principles. Though there are processes for accountability within The Book of Discipline, there have been few, if any, consequences for breaching the covenants. The result is that our denomination has not been governed according to the mutual covenant that binds us.
- The UMC has departed from its own mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It has become more focused on revising historic Christian teachings and pursuing social justice issues without preaching a Gospel that says we are all sinners and in need of the grace of Jesus Christ in our life.
- The divisiveness is only getting stronger. The General Conference of the UMC has not been able to address this conflict. The longer we wait, the more we will be inviting the denominational division to splinter Asbury.
- Traditional United Methodist Churches in many parts of our country are being targeted by punitive bishops and conference leadership. While we do not expect Bishop Nunn to act in this manner, when he retires it is very likely we would get a much more progressive Bishop. We believe it is our fiduciary responsibility to separate from the UMC to protect the assets and interests of our church.

WHY IS ASBURY PURSUING DISAFFILIATION NOW?

- Lay leadership has spent a significant amount of time debating this over the past year. Our primary reasons for choosing to leave now are as follows:
- We believe it is important that Pastor Tom serve as the senior pastor when we start this transition. Most of the hard work involved with disaffiliation has already taken place, and most of the rest of the work before us will be completed before Pastor Tom retires. We believe taking this action now sets up our new senior pastor for the most success.
- Plus, we are tired and weary of waiting on General Conference. Everyone hoped the matter would be settled in St. Louis in 2019 at General Conference. Then we hoped it would all be solved in May of 2020 at General Conference. The May 2020 General Conference has now been postponed all the way to Summer of 2024! Unless a church takes the legal steps, as we have, it cannot leave until General Conference happens and the Protocol or something like it is adopted. There is very little guarantee that anything will be solved when the next General Conference takes place. Once General Conference does happen, there are many questions about if the Protocol will pass and yet even more questions about whether the Judicial Council will uphold the Protocol if it passes. Being proactive is our best response at this point.
- Our governance has done the necessary work to protect our assets. Since that work is now complete, we believe disaffiliation is the next strategic step.

WHY WERE SOME OF THESE CHANGES MADE WITHOUT A CHURCHWIDE VOTE?

- The governance of Asbury prayed over and heavily vetted these decisions. For us to fully protect all of Asbury's assets and make the necessary changes to our articles of incorporation, deeds, etc., we had to do it quietly and confidentially. Had we called a churchwide meeting to take a vote, the conference could have attempted to interrupt the process, punish our pastors, and even shut the church down, which has happened in multiple conferences across the country. Although we would not expect hostile action from the Oklahoma Annual Conference, we thought it best not to take the risk. On advice from our attorney, we decided not to share what has been done until we took every legal step possible to fully protect ourselves.
- While a churchwide vote was not taken to make some of the legal changes, we are taking a churchwide vote beginning March 6. All members can vote between March 6-13 to affirm the decision to pursue disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church and the Oklahoma Annual Conference. **All members of Asbury can cast their vote at asburytulsa.org/vote.**

WILL WE RETAIN OUR BUILDINGS/CAMPUS AND PROPERTY?

- Yes, Asbury will retain our church buildings. Our Board of Trustees and Administrative Council have taken legal action to protect our property and assets in advance of our announcement to pursue disaffiliation.

WILL CHURCH STAFF BE IMPACTED BY THE DISAFFILIATION?

- In the short term, our pastoral staff will continue to serve as ordained elders and deacons of the UMC until disaffiliation is completed. Upon completion of disaffiliation, our clergy will be asked to surrender their credentials as UMC clergy, and they will seek licensing and credentials either through a new denomination or through another licensing organization. This move does not negatively impact our pastors' pensions. Everything they have saved and accrued in the UMC pension plan (managed by Wespeth) is fully secure regardless of disaffiliation. Upon disaffiliation, our pastors may be on the same retirement and health plan as our lay staff. This will be more financially beneficial for our clergy and for our church. Non-clergy staff will not be impacted.

DO OUR PASTORS SUPPORT THIS DECISION?

- Yes, every one of our pastors supports this decision and believe it is in Asbury's best interests.

WILL THE PASTORAL OR GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP CHANGE?

- Asbury's disaffiliation will not result in leadership changes. Our entire staff, including all pastors, will remain in place, as will our lay-led governance committees. Nothing will change about how our church is led and governed.

VIEW OUR ASBURY LAY LEADERSHIP: asburytulsa.org/layleadership

WHAT DOES THE PROCESS OF DISAFFILIATION LOOK LIKE?

- Disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church is both a legal and ecclesiastical process. Legally, Asbury is already incorporated as an independent church in the state of Oklahoma. We have adopted bylaws, a statement of faith and other documents to ensure our legal standing as an independent church. Simply put, we are legally no longer a United Methodist Church.
- We will now begin to work with the Oklahoma Annual Conference to work through the ecclesiastical process of disaffiliation. In this process, we will pursue mediation so that both Asbury and the Oklahoma Annual Conference can be satisfied with our outcomes. Our goal is an amicable resolution. We are working to avoid litigation and to do our part in working for peace as we disaffiliate. In 2021 alone, our attorney helped 54 churches leave the UMC, and none have gone to litigation.

VIEW OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH: asburytulsa.org/statementoffaith

VIEW OUR CHURCH BYLAWS: asburytulsa.org/bylaws

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST US TO LEAVE?

- We do not know yet. The Conference will provide us a number, and we are hopeful to resolve this matter amicably. Once we have an accurate view of the disaffiliation fee, we will let you know, and leadership will determine the best course of action for Asbury. We have no debt and are in a very healthy financial situation.

ARE THERE ANY LEGAL REPERCUSSIONS WE MAY SUFFER AS A RESULT OF DISAFFILIATION?

- That possibility does exist; however, our attorney successfully helped 54 United Methodist Churches leave the denomination in 2021 without the necessity of litigation. We feel confident in our current legal position. Once a settlement is reached with the conference, there will be nothing they can do to pursue any kind of legal action against us.

WHEN WILL THE SEPARATION BE OFFICIAL?

- As of March 6, 2022, Asbury will no longer participate in the United Methodist Church. During the months after this announcement, we have instructed our attorney to negotiate a settlement with the Oklahoma Annual Conference Board of Trustees. Upon agreement of a settlement and a vote of the Oklahoma Annual Conference, the separation will be finalized. This process could take anywhere from 2-12 months. We will provide more information as we move through the process.

WHAT CHANGES CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE DURING AND AFTER THE DISAFFILIATION?

- The official church name will change to Asbury Church, however we will continue to call ourselves “Asbury.” We will stay focused on our mission of Helping Others Follow Jesus. This will not change how we do worship, how we do discipleship, how we do missions and outreach or the leadership structure for how we are governed. Asbury will continue to be Asbury!

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MANY OF OUR ALREADY ESTABLISHED CONNECTIONS LIKE RESTORE HOPE, ESTONIA MINISTRIES, TRINITY WOODS, ETC.

- We now have full autonomy in choosing who and what we will support with our missional dollars, time and resources. Historically, the Oklahoma Annual Conference has always told us what missional entities we must support with our apportionments, but many of those are not aligned with our mission or theology. We intend to maintain all our current missional relationships and will continue to vet them how we always have: by asking the question “do they have fiscal accountability, and are they Helping Others Follow Jesus?”

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR CONNECTIONS WITH THE WESLEYAN COVENANT ASSOCIATION AND THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH?

- Throughout this entire process, we have maintained a close relationship and stayed in conversation with leaders of these organizations. We will continue to stay in conversation and provide financial support while we wait to see what their next steps are and how we might partner with them.

WILL ASBURY AFFILIATE WITH ANOTHER DENOMINATION?

- The short answer is that we do not know where or when we might affiliate with another denomination. Asbury has always been a connectional church, and we intend to remain that way. Recently, our sole focus has been to protect the ministry, assets and essence of Asbury and to prepare us for disaffiliation. Our attention will now turn toward discerning the best place for us to affiliate. Our new senior pastor will lead us in this discernment process.
- The Global Methodist Church (GMC) has been an attractive option for us, but at this time they have not officially launched, so we cannot join. On March 3, the GMC officially announced that they will launch and begin accepting members in May 2022. We are pleased that this gives us an option to look at. We believe it's most prudent to finalize the disaffiliation process and then spend time in discernment before deciding. Currently, it appears we will have a season of being an independent church, but our desire is not to remain permanently independent. Asbury will continue to be a church with traditions and roots in the Wesleyan and Methodist faith. We have adopted bylaws to guide how we operate and a statement of faith to guide our theological practices during this interim season.

IS THE NEW SENIOR PASTOR FULLY SUPPORTIVE OF THIS DECISION?

- YES! While he was not consulted during the process, he was made aware as he came to the end of our interview process. He is very excited to be stepping into a church that is clear in its identity and ready to be separated from the UMC. He understands that part of his role will be helping us discern our next steps when it comes to affiliating with a new denomination.

HOW WILL THE NEW CHURCH BE FINANCED NOW AND IN THE FUTURE?

- Asbury has always been and will continue to be financed by our church body's contributions to the general operating budget. In 2022, the Annual Conference asked us to pay \$686,000 in apportionments. We receive no financial assistance from the UMC and see little evidence of our apportionments fulfilling our mission. We will continue to support some of the entities that our apportionments support (such as Circle of Care and Restore Hope), but we will redirect many of our apportionments to missions and ministries that are more aligned with us. Additionally, we anticipate a significant cost savings on our pastors' retirement and health costs while also being able to provide them better health and retirement benefits since we will no longer be obligated to use the conference health and retirement plans.

WILL MY TITHES AND OFFERINGS BE GOING TO ASBURY UMC OR ASBURY CHURCH?

- Tithes and offerings labeled "Asbury UMC" or "Asbury United Methodist Church" will be deposited in the church's regular checking account and utilized for the ongoing needs of Asbury Church. After a recommendation from our finance committee and approval from Administrative Council, the "Asbury Church Tithes and Offerings Reserve Trust" was created. This is a separate legal entity designed for the sole purpose of supporting the ministry of Asbury Church, while protecting it from the UMC denomination. This trust includes our senior pastor, executive pastor and CFO as board members. Other board members include Asbury members Asa Adamson (Chair), Matthew Payne, Jeff Wilkie and Janell Carter.
- Tithes and offerings labeled "Asbury Church Reserve Trust" will be deposited in the Asbury Church Reserve Trust and be held separately until the church needs the funds to continue operations. At any time, this trust can grant money over to Asbury Church. Once the disaffiliation process is complete, this trust will dissolve, and all funds will be given to Asbury Church. All gifts to the Asbury Church Reserve Trust are fully tax deductible. Only general operating budget donations will be accepted by the Asbury Church Reserve Trust. Any designated gifts can be made out to "Asbury Church." If you have questions, please contact our CFO, Andrea Shafer, 918.392.1136.

I PUT ASBURY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN MY WILL. CAN I CHANGE THAT NOW?

- Thank you! Your generosity is greatly appreciated. Now is the best time to change the name of your beneficiary in your will or trust. The church's legal name is Asbury Church, Inc. Our tax identification number remains the same and should be included in all wills and trusts: 73-0728230. If you have questions, please contact our CFO, Andrea Shafer, 918.392.1136.

HOW DO I TRANSFER MY MEMBERSHIP FROM THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH TO OUR NEW CHURCH?

- You will not need to take any action for your membership to transfer to Asbury Church. If you are currently a member of Asbury UMC, that membership will automatically transfer to Asbury Church. While we certainly hope it is not the case, if you decide to no longer remain with Asbury, please contact one of the pastors.

DURING THIS TIME, WHAT CAN AN ASBURY CONGREGANT DO?

- Please pray for our church, pray for our leadership and pray for our conference leadership. Please keep a calm non-anxious presence and know that God is in control and God will continue to provide for Asbury as He always has. Please set up a meeting with one of our pastors if you have questions and concerns. Please continue to serve your church with your prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.
- We understand this is a lot of information and if you would like more details or if you still have questions, please submit them on our website at asburytulsa.org/disaffiliation.

To learn more about the deep division in the United Methodist Church, read:

A Fight for the Faith Delivered Once for All written by an active UMC Bishop

A Strange Split in the UMC written by historian Carl Trueman