

Questions from Tucker First for consideration by presenters

I. **The process of disaffiliation. What the Book of Discipline says in ¶2553.**

1. Is the UMC splitting at this time? Does voting begin with our Church Council? Are we given a date for a church wide meeting of all our members by the District Superintendent? A super majority (2/3rds) must vote to disaffiliate for the disaffiliation to be allowed. Right?
2. What is the timeline for this process to unfold? Is it December 31 of this year? March 31<sup>st</sup> of next year? When can we have a Church Conference with every member getting a vote?
3. Some people think that our Church Council that must make the decision and ask the DS for a Church Conference. That's included in ¶248. But also, the pastor can ask for a Church Conference and a petition signed by 10% of the members can ask for a Church Conference? When ¶2553 references ¶248, then these other avenues to a Church Conference are allowed. Correct?
4. ¶ 2553 says all professing members present at the Church Conference can vote. What is the definition of a "professing member?"
5. We understand that it will cost Tucker First about \$170,000 to disaffiliate. From the newspapers, Mt. Bethel paid \$13 million. Why? Please help us understand what is going on? Please explain the calculation of our exit fee.
6. What is the Trust Clause that is waived by ¶2553? Why did John Wesley set up a Trust Clause?
7. About real estate and all our assets, is it true that this is the only time in the 200-year history of our denomination where a congregation like ours here at Tucker can own, that is hold the title to this property, property we have bought, maintained, and loved for one hundred years can be fully ours?
8. Dr. Thomas, the district rules you sent to our churches, say that there can be no "secret" meetings. The *Discipline* requires "open" announced meetings of church and charge conferences and subunits of the congregation. But are you trying to say that meetings in our houses and restaurants are prohibited unless you as the District Superintendent are notified, and all are invited to an "open" meeting?
9. Is there any rule that prevents a local church from forming a study committee to ensure the education of its members and bring reports to its Administrative Council, including a motion to request a Church Conference to vote on matters of affiliation and disaffiliation?
10. Do you have any suggestion about how we can ensure that such a study committee is fair, balanced, and acting equitably?
11. Has the Bishop, or the bishop's cabinet of Superintendents, imposed rules that prevent or discourage clergy, active or retired, from meeting with us in response to requests for information and education on disaffiliation? Are we allowed to talk with clergy or laity who have already disaffiliated?
12. Rev Thomas, you are an endorsed candidate for election as a Bishop in 2024. If elected and assigned to an episcopal area, such as North Georgia, will you allow congregations in your episcopal area, such as Tucker, to exit with our property after the terms allowed in ¶2553 expire on December 31, 2023?

## II. Finance, Property and Values. The costs and benefits of ¶2553 disaffiliation. .

1. About the costs to disaffiliate...we understand that the North Georgia Annual Conference, Bishop Sue, has computed a \$170,000 charge for Tucker to disaffiliate, giving us ownership and freedom from centralized control. Today we are paying the Annual Conference about \$85,000/year in apportionments. That would stop, so we would recover the \$170,000 in about two years. Is it reasonable to think in those terms?
2. We have 4.5 acres here with a reasonable value of perhaps \$2.9 million. There is a mortgage of about \$400,000. Is it fair to think that a cost to disaffiliate of about \$200,000 is a good real estate transaction?
3. If we become an independent congregation with ownership of this property, our members are still members, right? Every member is still a member, just a member of a "new" Tucker Methodist Church. We are still together unless some just want to leave. But we have always been free to leave or stay for whatever reason. It has always been that way, hasn't it?
4. If we own the property, does that mean we have to pay the insurance and taxes on the property, the maintenance and repairs and utilities? Has the Conference been paying any of this? What about the mortgage, about \$400,000? Who pays that now and who will pay it if we disaffiliate?
5. Upon disaffiliation, we are no longer a part of the clergy appointment process. We have two appointed clergy here, Gerald Varner and Anne Cumings. What happens to them? Will we have any continuing responsibility for their salaries, housing allowance, and benefits.
6. Is it true that after disaffiliation the members here at Tucker have full responsibility for making our staffing, hiring, compensation and benefit decisions? Haven't we already been paying these costs and doing much of this? For example, we hire Chris Moss and Mimi Sanders and Tom Moore separate from any relationship with the North Georgia Conference. That is right, isn't it?
7. Upon disaffiliation at this time, we gain ownership of the building and land. But we must give up all use of "United Methodist," the Cross and Flame insignia, including the hymnals. Is that right?
8. If Tucker First disaffiliates, there will be separation costs for which there is currently no reserve fund. If the answer to this problem is "borrow the money," will banks be open to loaning money to a new church entity that doesn't have a budget or a proven track record of giving with the remaining congregation? What happens in the case of a vote to disaffiliate if the church cannot pay the agreed amount of money to the Annual Conference by the deadline established in ¶2553?
9. Members of TFUMC have pledged to support the United Methodist Church. If the church votes to disaffiliate and join the Global Methodist Church or be an independent congregation, membership in the "new" church would mean disavowing the pledge to the UMC. Membership can, of course, be transferred to a different UMC congregation, but being a United Methodist in the GMC or an independent church is not possible unless one chooses to remain a visitor or guest and not a member. Please comment on this so that the members of the congregation understand what disaffiliation means to them personally.
10. How does the North Georgia Conference justify holding tens of millions of dollars in unrestricted funds, far in excess of its necessary operating budget while still coercing local churches like TFUMC to send apportionments which they don't have?
11. We pay money to the North Georgia Conference to disaffiliate. And the North Georgia Conference gets the money from selling the property of closed churches. There have been about sixty-five of those in the past five years. Our neighboring congregations as in Clarkston and on Lawrenceville Rd. (with 5.5 acres) may close as they 'age out.' The Conference's financial statements now report \$96 million in Net Assets with \$125 million of investments which is unprecedented financial strength. In thinking about the future for the UMC, do you envision using

these extraordinary funds to correct the historical inconsistencies, the access or lack thereof, to financial resources suffered by a few.

### **III. Doing Theology. What does the bible say about marriage?**

1. Matthew 19: Jesus referred to Genesis 3, saying, "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning, "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? In the ensuing discussion, Jesus again said, "From the beginning..." Aren't these words of Jesus sufficient evidence to justify the Church, the Body of Christ in this world, blessing a marriage only when it is a heterosexual marriage, that is, one man and one woman?
2. God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them... Doesn't that include LGBTQIA+ persons? That is, don't gay men and women have an inborn attraction to people of the same sex, just as heterosexuals have an inborn attraction to the opposite sex? If sexual orientation exists from birth, should gay people be expected to live without the support of a loving partner?
3. In Matthew 19, Jesus lifted marriage up so strongly that his disciples said "...it is better not to marry. But Jesus said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs ..." Jesus then gives three examples of eunuchs including those who are celibate for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Wasn't Jesus an example of a celibate man? Can't people find the power to say no to their sexual desires, and to sin in all its forms, through the infilling of the Holy Spirit?
4. In Matthew 22, Jesus answered questions from the Sadducees. "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they (men and women) neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven." Doesn't this point us to an eternity in heaven where we are all eunuchs?
5. Please explain the potentially expanded definition of marriage and any new lines. Will we begin to say that marriage is simply between two "people" or, one man and another man, woman or another woman, etc.? Are there any exclusions?
6. Is monogamy still central to an expanded definition of marriage? For example, we have two male friends who are legally married and husbands. They recently introduced a third man into their relationship, and he lives with them. Is this acceptable and would the church allow this third man to marry as well? What about casual, one-time sexual encounters (i.e., the Club Scene?)

### **IV. Doing Theology. What does the bible say about homosexual practices?**

1. The bible guides its readers on the ethical behavior of God's people. From the ten commandments in Exodus, to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, to the letters of Paul, the epistles of James, Peter and Jude, and the final chapters of Revelation, there are lists of virtues and vices. Homosexual behavior is included on the sin-lists. Yet, in 2019, both our Bishop Sue and Rev. Dr. Byron Thomas signed/endorsed a full page in our newspapers apologizing for harm done to the gay community when our General Conference again affirmed the ethical behaviors that the bible expects of us today, behaviors expected of God's people for thousands of years. Can you offer any evidence that the UMC will flourish if we take behavior included on the sin-lists in the bible and declare that behavior to be a virtue by blessing those behaviors in the ordination of our clergy and permitting gay marriages at our altars?
2. Did Jesus or John Wesley condemn homosexuals? Also, scientific observations of birds, mammals, and insects find more than 1,500 examples of same-sex behavior. Isn't the refusal

to marry or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals a cultural concept rather than a religious concept?

#### **V. Doing Theology. What does the bible say about love and obedience?**

1. In Matthew 22, Jesus identified the greatest and first commandment, to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And a second commandment like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Shouldn't we include LGBTQIA+ persons as neighbors, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and love them?
2. Jesus connected love and obedience many times including in John 14 and John 15. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments...whoever does not love me does not keep my words. Jesus connects love, obedience, and bearing fruit. Go bear fruit that will last. Jesus teaches us about warfare between kingdoms and prays that God's kingdom will come to earth, and for our deliverance from evil. Jesus' obedience overcomes sin. Isn't it foolish to suggest Jesus expects the Church, his image bearer on earth, to embrace and accept sin and call it love? How can a denomination flourish in God's kingdom if it promotes disobedience and labels it love?
3. God is love. God is also creator, savior, redeemer, and judge. God is the one who ensures justice prevails at the end of time. Isn't love a wholesome embrace of all God is?

#### **VI. Doing Theology. What role has Christian Conferencing and voting in these matters?**

1. The leaders of Tucker First have no obligation to ask the District Superintendent to set a date for a Church Conference. The unity of Tucker First and the unity of the Body of Christ is best protected by not voting. Do you agree that a meeting to vote will damage our sense of being one in Christ and create division where there is no division?
2. For over 120 years the people of Tucker who call themselves Methodists have worshipped, prayed, praised, celebrated, mourned, and served together. There has never been a time when everyone in the congregation agreed on everything, but the members faithfully followed what they believed to be God's plan for the church. Now, in this time of division, we are being called on to choose sides rather than to continue to serve faithfully in spite of our differences. By choosing sides, we are setting the church up for conflict and division that may be irreconcilable. "Disagreement is inevitable; division is a choice." What are the benefits of having a church conference to vote on disaffiliation from the UMC if it is clear that such a vote will not result in disaffiliation? How would you suggest that a church move forward after such a vote is taken and the decision is made to remain in the UMC?
3. Christian Conferencing shapes disciples, allows honest discussion. As people of God, Methodists are called to participate in Christian conference — one of John Wesley's means of grace. Along with searching the Scriptures, fasting, prayer and Communion, Wesley taught that Christian conference is a practice that helps people experience God's grace. Wesley expected Christian conference to shape people's lives. Christian conference is "honest, direct, piercing conversation with other Christians intended to help the participants grow in holiness." Aren't these meetings a tool God uses to do something for us and in us?
4. We here at Tucker are a Charge or Church Conference. We exist in an Annual Conference, in a Jurisdictional Conference and in a world-wide General Conference. Debate and voting, that is Christian Conferencing, have been an integral part of Methodism for 250 years. The Wesleyan understanding holds that you absolutely must say what you mean, and say what needs to be said, and only asks that it be said out of a motivation of love and to better love those who are engaged in conversation. Why now do fears arise and suggest we shut down

Christian Conferencing? The *Discipline* allows it. Can we not trust God to be involved and help members of either persuasion to grow in Christ's image just as we have for 250 years?

## Questions about the UMC of the future, the post-separation UMC

1. Conservative churches (and their related voting power in the UMC) have begun to exit our denomination. Thus, there is now a real possibility that the *Discipline* will change in 2024 to reflect an unbiblical and unorthodox position. It is almost inconceivable that a new progressive delegation will approve any kind of "grace filled" exit plan. The future may hold endless fights over the Trust Clause in conferences across the country. So, is this not the only time available to us, really, to get simple title of our own property here in Tucker? If not now, can you guarantee that we will ever have another chance?
2. What is expected to happen at the next General Conference in 2024, and beyond?
3. Will the UMC of the future drop all prohibitions related to sexual practices?
4. Will a future General Conference require clergy and clergy candidates to agree to offer same-sex weddings as a condition of candidacy, status, or appointment?
5. Would you say that disobedience of the *Discipline* is accelerating? Why will the disobedience decrease or increase in the future?
6. Congregations pay money to the North Georgia Conference to disaffiliate. And the North Georgia Conference gets the money from selling the property of closed congregations. There have been about sixty-five of those sales in the past five years. The Conference's financial statements now report \$96 million in Net Assets with \$125 million of investments, giving unprecedented financial strength to North Georgia Annual Conference. In thinking about the future for the UMC, do you envision using these extraordinary funds to correct the historical inconsistencies, the access or lack thereof, to financial resources suffered by a few.
7. To what do you attribute the demonstrable decline in ALL mainline denominations that have changed their orthodox doctrine to allow homosexual / trans-gender / non-binary ministers, bishops and marriage?
8. UMC's own statistics reveal that membership growth in the UMC is almost exclusively among traditional / orthodox UMC churches. Would abandonment of the current Discipline's prohibitions on LGBTQIA+ pastors / marriage increase our membership and thus make us more effective in spreading the message of Christ's salvation?
9. Many "progressives" in our church say they will respect orthodox views once the church changes its current policies. Does that mean the local church can decide to not have gay marriage, not have Sunday School lessons on gender issues and to respect parents' wishes on what is taught to their children in Sunday School, church choirs, youth programs?
10. The WCA/GMC continues to speculate what the "new UMC" will look like with no authority since there will be no changes prior to the 2024 General Conference. This is misinformation that misleads questioning church members. What is the best way to address this misinformation and make sure that people understand that the UMC is not changing its constitution, doctrinal standards, or core theology?

## General questions

1. Why would a church choose to leave The United Methodist Church?
2. Why isn't the Book of Discipline followed by all congregations? Why isn't "abortion" and "gun control" and "climate change" discussed by the UMC?
3. Why would a church not consider disaffiliation?
4. Will the Bishop and Cabinet uphold the Book of Discipline?
5. What is my role in the future of the UMC?
6. What is some good news about The United Methodist Church?
7. What are some trusted sources for accurate information on the UMC?
8. Why has the UMC lost the trust of its congregations?

9. What do we gain and what do we lose if we remain United Methodist?
10. What do we gain and what do we lose if we disaffiliate?
11. What is the biggest misconception progressives have about traditionalists?  
What is the biggest misconception traditionalists have about progressives?
12. What advice would you offer for households/families which are divided and people within the same home are angry with each other about issues of human sexuality?
13. How does a congregation keep a few “Loud/verbal” individuals from pushing through a vote when it is not the general consensus of the membership?
14. Is it true that the North Georgia Conference of about seven hundred congregations elected 75% traditional laity delegates to the General Conference? What does that tell you about the laity voting at our Annual Conference in Athens? Are there more traditional laity than progressives?
15. What does the Pew Research Study tell you about people’s preferences? Aren’t traditionalists the largest group, 45%, with centrists/moderates being 28%?
16. Mr. Parr, the WCA’s statement about Human Dignity reads, “We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual or group are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of the WCA.” Are you aware of any of your members expressing hateful attitudes directed towards the bishop and leadership of the North Georgia Conference. If so, have those individuals been repudiated?

#### VII. **Questions about UMCs Legislative History on Ordination and Marriage**

1. Isn’t it true that our *Book of Discipline* was originally written without specifying any restrictions on marriage or ordination of homosexual persons? Was it just assumed that the biblical restrictions as understood at that time applied?
2. When did the BOD begin to be changed to add LBGTQIA+ language? How are these changes accomplished? What was the justification for these changes?
3. The Book of Discipline has always required high standards for ordained clergy and specified the process for education, training and reviewing candidates for ordination. Candidates pledge themselves to high moral standards. Is this still the case?
4. When and why was the BOD amended to prohibit clergy from performing same-sex marriages and to prevent local UMC churches from being used for such weddings?
5. Is it correct that 1) transgender persons may serve as UMC ministers and 2) other LBGTQIA+ persons who take a vow of chastity may also serve as UMC ministers? How does this differ from the vows that straight ministers take?
6. Dr. Thomas, will you please speak to the ordination process for Jay Burns-Horton. He posted on social media that he is acknowledge by the Central South District Committee on Ordained Ministry as a candidate for ministry. This was after he posted pictures of his same-sex wedding at Glenn Memorial UMC. Our *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 304, says “self-avowed practicing gay people are not to be certified as candidates...” Is this disobedience to our rules in the *Discipline*? Who is or should be enforcing the *Discipline* in this matter? Will you please explain?