

(The following will be used as a guide for the Informational Meetings. Please read this before the meeting)

Pleasant Chapel Disaffiliation Informational Meetings

March 21, 2021 10:45 am

March 24, 2021 6:00 pm

1. WHY WE ARE HERE

- Since 1972, the United Methodist Church has debated issues of church organization and church rules regarding human sexuality. The progressives and conservatives are currently at an impasse. General Conference 2019 was to resolve the decades old issue but failed to do so.
- General Conference 2019 allowed for churches to exit the denomination and pursue other means of ministry. ¶2553 in The Book of Discipline was added for this purpose AND allows for churches to retain their property and assets. The portion of the paragraph Pleasant Chapel is currently considering reads:
 - Because of the current deep conflict within The United Methodist Church around issues of human sexuality, a local church shall have a limited right, under the provisions of this paragraph, to disaffiliate from the denomination for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to
 - the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or
 - the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.
- The process has a window of time and must be completed prior to December 31, 2023.
- 2/3 of the voting members present at the Church Conference on March 28th, 2021 would need to vote in favor of disaffiliation for the action to occur.
- If the church votes to disaffiliate, the Annual Conference will need to approve.¹

¹ Any legislation of the General Conference permitting the “gracious exit” of a local church must require at a minimum that (1) the disaffiliation resolution be approved by a two-thirds majority of the professing members of the local church present and voting at the church conference, (2) the terms and conditions, including effective date, of the agreement between the annual conference and the exiting local church be established by the conference board of trustees in accordance with applicable church law and civil laws, and (3) the disaffiliation agreement be ratified by a simple majority of the members of the annual conference present and voting. When taken together with the consent of the annual conference pursuant to ¶ 2529.1(b)(3), Petition 90066 as amended meets all three requirements and is constitutional and provides a means for the disaffiliation of a local church. (Judicial Council Decision No. 1379)

- The fundamental question voters need to determine is
 - **“How can Pleasant Chapel be the most effective church in glorifying God, in providing the means to connect people to God, and serving people in the love of Christ?”**²
 - If Pleasant Chapel can be most effective remaining in the United Methodist Denomination, then a vote of “NO” should be cast on March 28th, 2021.
 - If Pleasant Chapel can be most effective by severing the relationship with the United Methodist Denomination, then a vote of “YES” should be cast on March 28th, 2021.
- The church vote will be solely decision to disaffiliate. The church will not be voting on joining another denomination. If the church votes to disaffiliate, it will become an *independent* church which will require steps for re-organization. Clearly there will be a significant amount of work to be done to function independently.³ This work will need to be done by the Executive and Administrative Boards, the pastor, and other members of the congregation. Church affiliation may occur at a later time if Pleasant Chapel would decide to connect with a denomination that was in line with the theological understandings of this church as well as be beneficial to the overall ministry of Pleasant Chapel (perhaps a new United Methodist Denomination).

2. DETAILS OF PROCESS OF EXITING

- The Church Conference on March 28th, 2021 will be conducted by the District Superintendent (David Neckers) and the Director of Church Administration and Finance for the INUMC (Ian Hall).
- The announcement for the meeting must be in writing at least 10 days before the conference in a letter, email, or in the bulletin.
 - Pleasant Chapel has announced this meeting in the bulletin each Sunday since February 7, 2021
 - The intention of disaffiliating was in each *Traveler* newsletter since September, 2020. The March 28th, 2021 Church Conference was announced in the February and March 2021 newsletters.
 - Each voting member was sent a letter describing the process, the dates of the informational meetings and the date for the March 28th, 2021 Church Conference meeting for the vote. This letter was sent on November 2, 2020 and again in February of 2021.
 - From the Disaffiliation agreement: [the] agreement must be consistent with the following provisions:
 - a) Standard Terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement. The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation

² This question needs careful consideration and prayer. It is important that each voting member respect highly their responsibility to God and to this church.

³ There will need to be a high level of commitment from many congregants to make this transition successful.

Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth The General Council on Finance and Administration shall develop a standard form for Disaffiliation Agreements under this paragraph to protect The United Methodist Church as set forth in ¶ 807.9. The agreement shall include a recognition of the validity and applicability of ¶ 2501, notwithstanding the release of property therefrom. Annual conferences may develop additional standard terms that are not inconsistent with the standard form of this paragraph.

b) Apportionments. **The local church shall pay any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months prior to disaffiliation, as well as an additional 12 months of apportionments.**

c) Property. A disaffiliating local church shall have the right to retain its real and personal, tangible and intangible property. All transfers of property shall be made prior to disaffiliation. All costs for transfer of title or other legal work shall be borne by the disaffiliating local church.

d) Pension Liabilities. **The local church shall contribute withdrawal liability in an amount equal to its pro rata share of any aggregate unfunded pension obligations to the annual conference. The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall determine the aggregate funding obligations of the annual conference using market factors similar to a commercial annuity provider, from which the annual conference will determine the local church's share.**

e) Other Liabilities. The local church shall satisfy all other debts, loans, and liabilities, or assign and transfer them to its new entity, prior to disaffiliation.

- The Director of Church Administration and Finance has determined that the cost for Pleasant Chapel is **\$55,242.00**

○ Unpaid Apportionments	\$ 5,332.00
○ Additional 12 months apportionments	\$ 7,071.00
○ Unfunded Pension obligations (retired pastors)	\$37,316.00
○ Retiree Health Insurance	<u>\$ 5,523.00</u>
	\$55,242.00

- Notes about the payout
 - \$12,403.00 (\$5,332.00 + \$7071.00) would be paid regardless. Pleasant Chapel would pay the apportionments if the church remained in the denomination. Therefore, **\$42,839.00** (\$55,242.00 - \$12,403.00) is a more accurate amount the church would pay to disaffiliate.
 - One of the advantages of disaffiliation is retaining the assets of the church
 - The financial assets from the 2019 audit = \$ 199,322.34
 - The church building is insured for greater than \$1,000,000.00

3. TO REMAIN IN THE UNITED METHODIST DENOMINATION (A VOTE “NO” TO DISAFFILIATE)

Pros

- The *networking* of the UMC provides PC with optimal benefits
 - Connectionalism is the principle that local churches in the UMC do not stand alone but are connected together. United Methodist churches are part of a larger organizational and governing structure consisting of districts, annual conferences, and the General Conference.
 - There is a rich diversity in the UMC which stretches PC into the world. Our congregation is somewhat homogenized in that most are of similar socio/economical state, race, values, etc.
 - The denomination allows for the church to participate globally providing opportunities to interact and minister with people all over the world allowing for outside connection to the greater body of believers.
 - There are growth opportunities within the network of the UMC - lay leadership, lay speakers, tracks for ministry, etc.
 - Mission networking – Small churches like PC have opportunities to do things and to be part of things that are much bigger than the individual church. PC’s resources when shared with other UM churches, combine to become powerful and effective missional programs.
 - Global outreach – Local ministry is important. Global participation is facilitated through the network of the denomination and allows for all churches to reach more people to become disciples of Jesus.
 - The church doesn't have to search for and hire a pastor (or other resources) on its own.
 - Pastors are appointed by the Bishop. From Superintendent Neckers : “Pastor turnover is quick and runs relatively smoothly. This may not sound like much, but churches who call/hire their pastor are without a pastor for many months. (My sister’s church has been without a pastor for two years. This is the second time this has occurred in the last ten years.)”
- There is an *accountability structure* built into the UMC.
 - The organizational procedures for the local church are determined. The *Book of Discipline* contains the beliefs, rules, guidelines, and procedures for the local church to *do* church.
 - There are checks and balances within the structures of the UMC that protect against rouge pastors or rouge groups of people within the church to potentially damage the church or its mission.
 - From Superintendent Neckers : “When issues with a pastor or a/an congregante(s) does occur, there is the Conference Superintendent to bring into the situation to resolve the issues and remove the pastor if necessary. (There was a church in the NE

District that decided to become independent, hired a pastor, and then they could not get rid of the pastor.)”

- Without this broader structure, the church can become isolationistic – solely focused on self and the small community of local attenders. Affiliation helps the church to maintain the balance of diversity and unity.
- There is a *brand* about being UMC.
 - There is an assumed perception about what the church believes and how it operates. People can more quickly understand what this church is about and how it operates because it is one of many UM Churches
 - There appears to be a progressive trajectory of the UMC which may reach more people in our church’s radius
 - The UMC maintains the heritage of the church
 - Wesleyan theology
 - A liturgical worship styles
 - An emphasis on the creeds
 - Affiliation helps the local church remember the one-ness of the body of Christ. PC is an integral part of a larger body of believers in the UMC as well as the universal church throughout the world.

Cons

- The UMC seems to be indicating it is deviating from long held traditional truths. The general trajectory of the UMC is away from traditional or conservative worldviews contrary to Pleasant Chapel’s congregation and community.
- It appears the UMC is diminishing the authority of Scripture.
- The UMC’s decades long debate over human sexuality has polarized the church rendering it impotent. Both sides are missing the mark. Progressives offer little or no boundaries on sexual practice while conservatives singularly target homosexual sex rather than promote what is deemed good and right regarding sexual expression. What results is a church who is perceived as either judgmental or uncaring toward specific people or approving of things that God said not to approve of. (There is a better way!) The church simply should promote “celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in a heterosexual marriage” (BOD ¶ 2702.1).
- There is a *brand* about being UMC. There is an assumed perception about what the church believes and how it operates. Currently the brand is a liability for the church because of its brokenness and inability to reconcile its differences.
- The United Methodist Church stretches throughout the world incorporating many cultures. To manage such a large denomination requires a “bigness” about much of the church. The result is that the church has become too big to be most effective.
- Remaining in the UMC leaves the property and assets in trust with the denomination. For local congregants to make financial investment in capital projects introduces a risk. If the denomination makes decisions that are not in line with the theology of the local

body, a break then would be a loss in any of those investments made by the congregation. It simply is difficult to invest in an unstable church.

- Because of the declining financial health of the United Methodist Church, there is an increased risk for smaller churches to be closed for the purpose of using the assets of the local church, selling the property, selling the parsonage, endowments, etc. for the purpose of replenishing the financial deficiencies within the conference.⁴

4. TO EXIT THE UNITED METHODIST DENOMINATION (A VOTE “YES” TO DISAFFILIATE)

Pros

- Re-branding Pleasant Chapel can serve as a stimulus for growth. Those who currently attend will have more opportunity to become more involved and deepen their faith. The surrounding community will see Pleasant Chapel’s reboot and reinvent their church, and then hopefully attract people to the church.⁵
- Pleasant Chapel has been a church longer than the UMC has been a denomination. The traditions, beliefs, and theology are rooted in the United Brethren Church, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and Wesleyan theology. Disaffiliation allows for these beliefs to be maintained.
- Retaining the property and assets give the congregation local control and an increased confidence in financially giving towards future capital projects
- Disaffiliation provides the local congregation more control in the process of hiring a new pastor. Traditionally, the Bishop assigns a pastor to the local church with little involvement from the local congregation.

Cons

- There will be a considerable amount of work to become independent.
 - Statement of belief
 - Guidelines/Bylaws
 - Accountability structures
- The Trust Clause safeguards that the church property be used, kept, and maintained as a place of divine worship of the United Methodist ministry and members of The United Methodist Church

⁴ Dalton & Tomich, PLC is a legal firm assisting churches disaffiliate.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KK8XUenUNJE&t=5s>

⁵ This may be the most important point in this whole process. Pleasant Chapel has been a small family church providing a comfortable and familiar space for people to come. That should not change. However there is a big addition that is necessary. What is needed is a rejuvenated passion for the real purpose of the church – to connect people with God and provide a place where they can grow and serve in His kingdom. Especially now as we come out of COVID, people need Him more than ever. It is imperative that this church become more deliberate about doing what church should be doing and doing it with a great amount of passion and urgency.

- This generation of Pleasant Chapel is breaking from the generations of people before them who contributed to the church with the purpose and hope that the church continues to be United Methodist in its future.

5. Question / Comments From Congregation (please use a microphone)

6. Q/A

- QUESTION: What if there is a new Methodist Denomination that is a fit for Pleasant Chapel?
 - Nothing like this will be determined until it is decided at a General Conference. However, there is some momentum regarding a new denomination and some language that has been published regarding churches moving to a new Methodist Denomination:
 - What happens to the property, assets, and liabilities of local churches or conferences which choose to affiliate with a new Methodist denomination pursuant to the Protocol? **A local church that affiliates with a Methodist denomination pursuant to the Protocol other than the post-separation United Methodist Church retains its assets and liabilities. The Annual Conference to which the local church belongs at the time of its separation will not exercise its trust clause and shall release such a local church from the provisions of any and all trust clauses.** Such a local church, prior to its separation, shall be expected to maintain its connectional responsibilities through the date of separation. At separation, such a local church shall not be required to pay any sums to the Annual Conference other than previously documented loans from the Annual Conference which shall be paid according to the terms of such loans. Should a local church (or its successor) that separates subsequently close, or a Methodist denomination with which it affiliates cease to exist, the property of such a local church will be subject to a lien in favor of Wespeth on its assets in the amount of that local church's then proportionate share of future unfunded pension liabilities. **Local churches which opt to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church and not become part of a Methodist denomination pursuant to the Protocol must comply with ¶ 2553 of the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. Property, assets, and liabilities of Annual, Jurisdictional, and Central Conferences are retained by those entities regardless of any affiliation decision that each makes under the Protocol.**

- <https://wesleyancovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Mediation-Process-Frequently-Asked-Questions-FINAL1.pdf>
 - However, there would no doubt be apportionments/tithing requirements to a new Methodist denomination. In a short time, the financial cost to disaffiliate would be exceeded by the continued cost in a new denominational affiliation through their tithing requirement.
- QUESTION: If we do not have a Bishop assigning pastors to the local church, how do we go about acquiring new pastors?
 - Pleasant Chapel would be required to seek new pastors in a similar manner that other independent, non-denominational churches do. A search committee would be formed to advertise for the new position and use the many resources available to screen and interview potential candidates.
- QUESTION: What is the status of the pastor? What will happen with him if the church disaffiliates?
 - Many pastors in the UMC are itinerate. They travel from church to church at the discretion of the Bishop. There is little say from a local congregation regarding the pastor. Joel is not in the itinerate group. He is a Licensed Local Pastor currently assigned to Pleasant Chapel. While Pleasant Chapel is with the UMC, Joel cannot be forced to another church, but he could be removed and replaced with another pastor. If the church disaffiliates, a pastor will need to be selected by the local church.
- QUESTION: What about bylaws and a constitution and statement of belief etc. if the church exits the UMC?
 - Those pieces will have to be developed. All of it does not have to be developed at one time. The church does not need to reinvent the wheel either. Much of this has been done by other similar churches that PC can glean from. And there is time to do this. The exit process will take months.